

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**GOING NATIVE:
COLONIAL CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN
CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD CINEMA**

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A DISSERTATION IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENTS OF
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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

MASTER OF ARTS

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Through the study of three successful features – Kevin Costner’s *Dances With Wolves*, Edward Zwick’s *The Last Samurai* and James Cameron’s *Avatar* – this dissertation aims to show how Hollywood continues to disseminate components of colonial and American imperialistic discourse in many of its most popular and peer-recognised features. Chapter 1 analyses some considerations of colonialism, Orientalism and imperialism in selected literature and highlights instances of these theories in selected Hollywood features. Chapter 2 will investigate and comparatively analyse the three films chosen and make arguments for the role of Jake Sully, Nathan Algren and John Dunbar as the superior novelistic hero and the Na’vi, the samurai and Sioux Indians as the noble but inferior Other. It is put forward that the function of the Other exists to support and accentuate the experience of ‘adventure’ for the hero who, it is argued, also acts as an avatar for the “liberal position” (Zizek 2009) audience, embodying a desire for a disassociation from the perceived corruption of the imperialist/capitalist system by ‘going native.’ In consideration of this, the dissertation concludes that although elements of the way in which colonialist and imperialist discourse has been disseminated in contemporary Hollywood has changed over the years; upon the evidence of the analysis of these three features, the justification of those models and the perceived superiority of them remains central to the portrayal of Self/Otherness in Hollywood.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRELIMINARY REMARKS

*Films are expressions of colonial and imperialist cultures in which allegories of contemporary politics are subconsciously portrayed.*¹

Hollywood, the home of U.S. mass-produced cinema, has a profound influence on not only North American and European audiences but also on spectators the world over; in 2010, there were 534 features produced in Hollywood that went on to gross a combined total of more than \$10.1 billion worldwide.² But it can be put forward from the outset that Hollywood is about more than film; it is one element of an over-arching image of capitalist Americana, and one that has partly reflected the wants, needs and anxieties of American society for over 100 years. Belton also believes that Hollywood is more than just a set of films; it is a ‘coherent and consistent set of aesthetic and stylistic conventions that audiences readily understand.’³ Indeed, in further consideration of Belton, Hill (2000), Winn (2007) and Walters (2008),⁴ it seems clear that the assessment has a solid foundation and furthermore, the socio-political link between Hollywood and American society appears undeniable. Hollywood’s capacity to disseminate ideas, political agendas and discourse to large audiences has seen the content of the films it produces come under much scrutiny in scholarly work, particularly in the field of postcolonial theory wherein analyses of leading Hollywood

¹ Bernstein and Studlar (1997:p5)

² IMDb (2011:np)

³ 2005:p.xxvi

⁴ Who all discuss the relationship between Hollywood film and the societal political and social allegories that have been disseminated therein.

features have exposed deep-seated instances of colonialist and imperialist models still being disseminated and in many cases, justified to worldwide audiences. As a visual medium, cinema's invention at the height of colonialism at the end of the 19th century meant it inevitably became an influential vehicle through which the cultures under the control of colonialism were documented. Through 'Eurocentric ⁵ lenses,' the representations of those people who lived under colonialism: the Other or subaltern,⁶ came to unconsciously reflect a subjective imagination of - rather than the reality of - colonial space.⁷ Edward Said defined this constructed image of representations within the world 'beyond' the United States and Europe in his often-cited 1978 book of the same name - *Orientalism*, as:

*...almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences...the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.*⁸

This dissertation aims to continue the search for further evidence of colonial and imperial images in imaginary constructed space through the examination of three high-profile, Oscar-nominated/winning features: Kevin Costner's Native Indian-themed Western *Dances With Wolves* (1990), Edward Zwick's samurai drama *The Last Samurai* (2003) and James Cameron's sci-fi epic *Avatar* (2009). These films, as high grossing, peer-recognised features, were chosen precisely because of their popularity and to highlight the fact that many of the stereotypical and sometimes explicitly

⁵ Shohat and Stam (1994)

⁶ Bhabha (1994:p66)

⁷ Kaplan (1997:pp.61-62)

⁸ Said (1979:p2)

prejudiced disseminations of the ‘non-Western’ world in film, often pass uncriticised and even praised from ‘respectable’ institutions and individuals within the industry and media.

The dissertation begins, after the clarification of its method and objectives, by discussing some considerations of colonialism, Orientalism and imperialism in selected films (1.3) and reflecting on comments, analysis and opinions on the subject by commentators in the field. The section also focuses on Hollywood film and traces a linear history of Otherness representation, linking it to three loose epistemes in which the Other has appeared in evolving forms related to social and political contexts at the time. In the film analysis section (2.0), the investigation takes a direct comparative approach by firstly (2.2) discussing the depiction of each film’s American protagonist as the novelistic hero⁹ in need of emancipation and argue that in order for their emancipation, the discursive paradigms of Zizek’s “liberal position”¹⁰ necessitate the act of ‘going native’ in order to disassociate the Self from the perceived corruption of contemporary (Western) capitalism. The section will also highlight how the novelistic hero retains a privileged status amongst the inferior Other through allusions to his sense of destiny disseminated through specific acts of heroism to the audience. In 2.3, the paper will focus on the Sioux Indians, the samurai and the Na’vi in their fixed position of Otherness vis-à-vis Rousseau’s noble savage in each film and show how the protagonist plays their role in ensuring the Others romanticised position within the noble savage paradigm remains unbroken. Samurai warrior Katsumoto will be discussed

⁹ Said (1994:p71). See 2.2 for a definition of the term.

¹⁰ See Methodology (1.2: page 6)

in his role as a martyr for ‘primitivism’¹¹ as well as the way in which *Dances With Wolves* director Kevin Costner in particular attempts to divert the audience’s attention away from the real-life fate of the Sioux Indians so as to maintain the story of the film in a romanticised noble savage discourse. In 2.4, other examples of colonial and imperial discourse in all three films considered relevant to the objectives of the dissertation will be identified and analysed including the dissemination of colonial space, particularly in *The Last Samurai* as well as the over-arching environmental themes evident in each feature. The dissertation will conclude that although elements of the way in which colonialist and imperialist discourse has been disseminated in contemporary Hollywood cinema has changed over the years; upon the evidence of the analysis of these three features at least, the justification of those models and the perceived superiority of them remains central to the portrayal of Self/Otherness representation in Hollywood.

¹¹ See Thomas (2005:p454)

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The dissertation's theoretical underpin is founded on Foucault's notion of discourse (1969, 2002) and its function in 'constructing a topic, defining it and producing objects of knowledge'¹² as well as the application of the postcolonial theory of Shohat and Stam on *Eurocentrism* (1994), Said's *Orientalism* and Fanon (1963, 1986) and Bhabha's (1994) notion of *Otherness*, to portrayals of imperialist (Said 1994) and colonialist (Shohat and Stam 2003) subtext in film. Through reflection of the above works, amongst others on film (Belton 2005, Burnstein and Studlar 1997, Hill 2000) and Globalisation (Zizek 1989, Hess 2007, Krishna 2008), this dissertation will attempt to:

- Identify and analyse instances of colonial and imperial imagery in each film.
- Link the paradigms identified in each film together in order to build an argument for the continued dissemination of colonial and imperial imagery in contemporary Hollywood cinema.
- Attempt to show how the approach to which the superiority of the imperial model is portrayed has changed due to the increased awareness of the way the legacy of colonialism has been perceived by those involved with it.
- Show how the representation of the 'noble savage' in the three films and misappropriation of capitalism and corporatism is used to absolve the "liberal position" from their involvement in the colonial process.

¹² Hall (2001:p71)

Central to the argument and justification of the objectives of this paper is the concept of the “liberal position” introduced by Slavoj Zizek¹³ as: ‘the classic self-congratulatory ideology of the beneficiaries of colonial expropriation who once blithely identified their private profit with the advance of civilisation and now find it happily coincides with salvation of planetary ecology,’¹⁴ this derives from the idea of “fetishism” as the ‘binary opposition of self-identification and the classic strategy of demystifying the symptom or distancing oneself from it.’¹⁵ Taking this idea, this dissertation then links it to the noble savage discourse of Jean-Jacques Rousseau¹⁶ wherein it is argued that in this current episteme, there exists a manifestation of a romanticised desire for a return to a traditional, pre-industrial way of life in ‘the West’ which, in Zizek’s opinion, has come to represent ‘the embodiment of the lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth.’¹⁷ The ‘unbearable truth’ that Zizek discusses is the indirect involvement of the “liberal position” (coded as US or Western collective thought) in the continued imperialist or neo-colonial agenda of US and European governments and organisations in the exploitation of the rest of the world because of societal mass-demand for fossil fuels, economic expansion and military occupation which is required for the civilians of those institutions to sustain high standards of living. Additionally it grants the elites of those institutions the justification to continually propagate a superior position in world affairs while at the same time ensuring ‘third world’ nations remain static in their dependency on ‘First World’ establishments. Zizek also writes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) that the “liberal position” ‘know very well how things are but the act as

¹³ Zizek (2009:pp. 65-69)

¹⁴ Rieder (2011:p47)

¹⁵ Zizek (2009:p65)

¹⁶ See Cranston (1991) and Ellingson (2001)

¹⁷ Zizek (2009:p65)

if they do not' so as to 'disavow any fetishistic belief in "the system" (i.e. imperialism/neo-colonialism) but continue to draw energy or profit from it.'¹⁸ This dissertation intends to argue that the "fetishes" of the "liberal position" have manifested themselves, at least partially in film, in the representation of the novelistic hero and the noble savage who in particular, symbolise an idealised image constructed to fight the perceived corruption of the capitalist and imperialist model and embody a fetishistic desire for a return to a non-industrial society.

¹⁸ Zizek (1989:p32)

1.3 SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF POSTCOLONIALISM, IMPERIALISM AND OTHERNESS IN FILM

Since the introduction of the founding works by Fanon (1963, 1986), Memmi (1965) Césaire (1972), and Said (1978), postcolonial theory has been the subject of much discussion by scholarly commentators. The use of neo-colonialist discourse by governments, multi-national institutions and political writers in the West has led many to conclude that colonialism is still very much an aspect of international relations; Thomas believes that the ‘persistence of neo-colonial domination in international and interethnic relations is undeniable. Frequent military assaults against third world states or groups within them or acts that aim to preserve spheres of influence show colonialism is still with us.’¹⁹ Pointing to major military incursions in the Middle East over the last 20 or so years, the strength of evidence regarding this appears to be strong and originally derives from what Shohat and Stam believe is a ‘Eurocentric discourse’ that ‘projects a linear (Plato-to-NATO) historical trajectory from Classical Greece to Imperial Rome and to the metropolitan cultures of Europe and the US.’²⁰ Within this concept, they suppose Eurocentrism expects that ‘vast regions of the world are thought to be unable to speak for themselves, “experts” explain why the West should intervene in their politics,’²¹ the formation of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank after World War II are relevant examples of US/Europe founded organisations that, it could be argued, maintain the neo-colonial construct of superiority over the world’s ‘poorer’ nations. The propagation

¹⁹ 1996:p1

²⁰ 2003:p8

²¹ 2003:p5

of this superiority is disseminated through a number of mediums; ‘literature was undoubtedly an important contact zone.’²² The ‘discovery’ of ‘the Orient’ by Marco Polo and the ‘New World’ by explorers such as *Las Casas* and Christopher Columbus laid the foundations for the way in which Europe came to ‘know’ the Other, this is evident particularly in Columbus’ writings who, on arrival to the Caribbean - inspired by the travel journals of Marco Polo – appeared to write idealised accounts of his encounters with the ‘native’ population within a pre-supposed narrative construct of his own imagination.²³ In support of this, Loomba also states that 15th and 16th century visits to Asia, America and Africa were not the first encounters between Europe and the Other but the writings of this period mark a new way in the thinking about the people there.²⁴ This inauthentic construction of the non-European world came to be reproduced over again throughout the following centuries in art - notably Ernst (1854-1920) and Fromentin (1820-1876²⁵) - and literature, with famous examples including *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe 1719) and Chetwood’s *The Voyage* (1769). The discursive construct of the ‘New World’ or ‘Orient’ became inextricably linked to the appropriation of colonial power and it is argued, manifested itself in a number of binary relations wherein - it is claimed by a number of postcolonial critics - at the end of one pole lay the European: masculine, superior, controlled, innovative and advancing; and on the other end the Other: feminine, inferior, instinctual, stagnating and static. Dirlik declares that the Other ‘was reduced to an essence without history’²⁶ in the eyes of colonial observers and

²² Loomba (1998:p70)

²³ See Chapter 1 in Desai, G, and Nair, S (eds.)(2005), *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford International Publishers.

²⁴ 1998:p57

²⁵ Tiana (2000:np)

²⁶ 1997:p56

found itself ‘a constitution of the [Western] Self.’²⁷ Said believes that the Other to Europe’s Self is the Orient²⁸ which, even in postcolonial times, still ‘comprises a set of loose “realities” reinforced in political speeches, newspaper accounts, television shows and films’²⁹ wherein Moore-Gilbert states that ‘the Orient is still tacitly seen as being irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt. It contributes to the construction of a “saturating hegemonic system” designed, consciously or unconsciously, to dominate, restructure and have authority over the Orient.’³⁰ Furthermore, the “post” in postcolonialism represents the continued relevance of its impact after de-colonisation³¹ and the rise of the United States as the world’s dominant economic power after WWII arguably saw it continue where ‘conventional’ colonialism left off; Shohat and Stam state that colonialist discourse and Euro-Americancentric discourse are intimately intertwined, with the latter embedding, taking for granted and ‘normalising’ the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism.³² It is argued by Shohat and Stam, Dirlik and Curran (2006) that neo-colonialism relies on other, less explicit means to subjugate and maintain superiority over the former colonies, namely through the use of capitalist institutions to protect the commercial interests of a privileged wealthy elite; but also the proliferation of Orientalist, colonialist and imperialist discourse in the fields of politics, literature and of course, film.

²⁷ 1997:p59

²⁸ 1978:p2

²⁹ Nadel (1997:p185)

³⁰ 2000:p4

³¹ Krishna (2005:p66)

³² 1994:p2

The powerful influence that film holds in controlling and manipulating discourse cannot be denied. Indeed, it is a significant medium that, through both conscious and subconscious illustrations, the images portrayed can be used to continuously appropriate, necessitate or subjugate the ideals of imperial agendas. Hollywood cinema is the vehicle through which Shohat and Stam believe exist ‘visualist inclinations of Western anthropological discourse that prepare the way for the cinematographic representation of other territories and cultures.’³³ These inclinations are also ‘subjective interpretations’ that were already ‘deeply embedded in colonialist discourses.’³⁴ For its ability to relay these representations to mass audiences, cinema became ‘an epistemological mediator between the cultural space of the Western spectator and that of the cultures represented on the screen.’³⁵ As discussed, Belton believes that Hollywood represents more than a mere symbolic home to the American film industry; it is a ‘consistent and coherent set of aesthetic and stylistic conventions that audiences readily understand.’³⁶ Within these ‘conventions’ lay Hollywood’s influential dissemination of *Otherness*³⁷ whose paradigm of representation fits within three chronologically identifiable discursive epistemes that, although not completely rigid, abridge the ideas discussed in the postcolonial theories of (1) Edward Said on *Orientalism* (1978), (2) Said again (1994) and Krishna (2005) on Imperialism, and (3) Primitivism (as discussed by Thomas and Rossetti³⁸).

³³ 1994:p106

³⁴ 1994:p104

³⁵ 1994:p93

³⁶ 2005:p.xxxvi

³⁷ See Fanon (1963:p170), Bhabha (1994:p66)

³⁸ Thomas (2005:p454), Rossetti (2005:p143)

From the turn of the 20th century, at the height of European colonialism until the end of World War II, Hollywood produced a great number of features set in Africa and the Middle East that upon close inspection, equate to the theoretical paradigms of Said's Orientalism theory (1978) and signal the first of the three chronological epistemes of Otherness representation as described above. In his theory, Said prefers to convict Orientalism to the former Western European colonial nations; going on to say that 'Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East.'³⁹ It can be argued that certain dichotomies relating to the Orient may be received differently in the USA than in Europe but a closer analysis of a number of early Hollywood features reveals a number of films that embrace all the distinguishing features of Said's idea. Gasnier's silent movie *Kismet* (1920), adapted from the 1911 play of the same name, Walsh's *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924) and Badger's *She's a Sheik* (1927) are notable examples of early silent movies that depict images of the Middle East in its fundamental Orientalist form; for example *The Thief of Baghdad* features flying carpets, magic rope and 'treacherous Arabs' that (American) lead character Douglas Fairbanks - playing the Arab thief - has to save Princess (American actress) Julianne Johnson from. John Rawlin's Oscar-nominated classic *Arabian Nights* released in 1942, quickly followed by Lubin's *White Savage* (1943) and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944) show an enthusiastic demand for Orientalist-themed cinema in the US into the early 1940s, a period in which Burnstein and Studlar⁴⁰ believe that Hollywood filmmakers fully exploited the strength of US audience's fascination with the Orient and although there is no explanation for

³⁹ 1978:p1

⁴⁰ 1997:p3

the root of this fascination, Kaplan hypothesises that the fervent public interest in the exotic imagery of films of that period was a manipulation tool that took attention away from the United State's economic problems.⁴¹ The fascination with screen images of the Orient continued into the 1950s and 1960s with Lander's *Jungle Jim in the Forbidden Land* (1952) and Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963) noteworthy successful examples. The imagery is in these films too, distinctly Orientalist a la Said, particularly Elizabeth Taylor's exotic appearance as the Pharaoh Queen and the mutant giants of the jungle in *Forbidden Land* supports Said's idea concerning the Orient as land of 'exotic beings' and 'remarkable experiences.'⁴² Orientalist landscapes remain prevalent in Hollywood adventure films; notably the *Indiana Jones* series (Spielberg 1981, 1984, 1989, 2008),⁴³ Teague's *The Jewel in the Nile* (1984), Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) and Verbinski's *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003). But with the rise of the USA to global superpower status after World War II, a change in the discursive representation of the Other could be observed in Hollywood films circa 1960. 'Imperialist imagery was reactivated for the ideological purposes of the warrior'⁴⁴ and subject matter regarding the Other – which until the 1960s was largely confined to romance drama – became much more militaristic. Imperialist discourse is noticeable as early as Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Little* (1956) but in the 1970s, as the USA entered its 15th year of war in Vietnam and was also still involved in a continuing ideological 'Cold War' with the Communist World, action and military movies depicting conflict with the Other as well as the suggestion of the dissemination of American-centric ideologies became a mass-

⁴¹ 1997:p68

⁴² 1979:p2

⁴³ Shohat and Stam discuss the *Indiana Jones* film series and how the images and landscapes presented in them are 'synopsized as theme park clichés drawn from an Orientalist repertoire. India is all dreamy spirituality and Shanghai is all gongs and rickshaws' (1994:p124).

⁴⁴ Shohat and Stam (1994:p125)

distributed genre in Hollywood. Vietnam provided the backdrop for a number of these stories, Langford⁴⁵ places Vietnam-related Hollywood films into two categories; the first one he terms ‘distance military films’ – prominent examples including *Deer Hunter* (1978), *Coming Home* (1978) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) - wherein the audience watch the film from the ‘comfort’ of the USA and the second; ‘Non-self preserving distance’ film’s like *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Platoon* (1986) where the audience experience the first hand ‘realities’ of films set on location in Vietnam. There are contrasting discussions on whether these stories are anti or pro imperialist but regardless, the storylines of these and many similar are chiefly centered primarily on the issues and events concerning the American characters; the Others – in the above cases the Vietnamese – played their role as violent, irrational, mostly non-speaking Others contrary to the multi-dimensional American characters, Thomas further discussed this and believes that the ‘Vietnam experience has been revealed cinematically as a debased madness from which nationalist truths of emancipation and military honour had been evacuated,’⁴⁶ indeed, in consideration of Colonel Kurtz, chief antagonist in *Apocalypse Now*, who overwhelmed by the violence and lack of humanism he sees in Vietnam, goes renegade and ultimately commands his own force of loyal Cambodian soldiers deep in the jungle. This could be considered evidence of the ‘debased madness’ that Thomas communicates. Less obvious in their military-imperialist discursive constructs but nonetheless prominently relevant is George Lucas’ 1977 classic *Star Wars*, the *Rambo* series (1982, 1985, 1988)⁴⁷ and *Top Gun* (1988); more recently Roland Emmerich’s

⁴⁵ 2005:p106

⁴⁶ 1996:p181

⁴⁷ Interestingly, a message presented to viewers at the end of *Rambo III* dedicates the film to “The Brave Mujahadeen Fighters of Afghanistan” in honour of their resistance fight against the Soviet government (Macdonald 1988).

Independence Day (1996) also, which rather explicitly promoted imperialist/nationalist discourse in portraying the USA as the nation that outwits the invading aliens and shows the rest of the world how to do so.

The late 1980s saw the emergence of what Thomas describes as “Primitivist” cinema, described as ‘the attribution of an exemplary status to simple or archaic ways of life that revalues its rudimentary character as something to be upheld.’⁴⁸ Primitivist cinema manifested itself as the result of a ‘series of projects of colonialism that incorporated representations, narratives and practical efforts that were best understood as strategic reformulations and revaluations of prior discourses,’⁴⁹ these reformulations revolved around a change in the function of the way the Other reflected the wants, needs and anxieties of the Self. Whereas in past Hollywood features, the Other tended to be depicted in conventional dichotomies of irrationality and inferiority; a growing resentment in ‘Western thought’ concerning ‘the environment, or crime, or the crumbling away of traditional values or the rewards and security [capitalism] has promised its dutiful workers and citizens but has not delivered to them’⁵⁰ saw the way of life of the Other romanticised and commodified in Hollywood as a “fetish”⁵¹ for watching audiences. Additionally, past Others - previously played by American actors in early Orientalist films or featured either with non-speaking or minimal roles, were now portrayed as (more) multi-layered characters for the purposes of encapsulating “liberal position” ideas of non-industrial desire. Primitivism in film is evident as early

⁴⁸ 2005:p451

⁴⁹ 1996:p171

⁵⁰ Rieder (2011:p46)

⁵¹ Zizek (2009:p65)

as the 9-time Academy Award-winning⁵² *Lawrence of Arabia* (Lean 1962), and later in John Boorman's *The Emerald Forest* (1985), Joffe's *The Mission* (1986), Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995) and of course, *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *Avatar* (2009). These films in particular, romanticised 'native' cultures and appeared to denounce the excesses, lifestyles, moral codes and imperialistic practices of US capitalism. The obvious critical and box office successes of these films can be said to demonstrate the attractiveness of primitivist discourse amongst US audiences, hence the genres continued production and positive reception since the 1980s. In order to analyse this further, it is now relevant to begin the in-depth analysis of the three chosen films for this study to examine how far this apparent 'denunciation' of Western social and economic models is disseminated.

⁵² Hitchie (2012:np)

2.0 FILM ANALYSIS

2.1 PRELIMINARY REMARKS CONCERNING THE FILMS

Dances With Wolves, released on 8th February 1991 in the UK, is a seven-time Academy award-winning Western drama film directed by and starring Kevin Costner as a Union Army Lieutenant who travels alone to a deserted outpost on the American frontier and becomes involved with a tribe of Sioux Indians. The film was an enormous success, taking \$424 million at the box office⁵³ and saw Costner notably take an Academy Award for Best Director (1991).⁵⁴ *Dances With Wolves* was lauded for its ‘unprecedented sympathetic treatment of Native Indians’⁵⁵ and the decision to cast the roles of the Sioux and Pawnee Indian characters to Native Indian actors. Champagne believes that such was the awareness raised by the film that since its release, many more features with Native Indian themes have received [US] nationwide recognition,⁵⁶ with prominent examples that include Apted’s *Thunderheart* (1992), Obomsawin’s *Kahnesatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993⁵⁷) and Hill’s *Geronimo: An American Legend* (2003), Champagne’s assertion may have substance but the nature of their portrayal, arguably more important, still remains up for debate. Shohat and Stam seem though, to agree with Thomas’ assessment concerning a transformation in the cinematic representation of Native Indians, in particular with regards to linguistic propagation and Costner’s decision to portray the Pawnee and the Sioux in the film speaking Lakota,

⁵³ IMDb (2012:np)

⁵⁴ Costner, has described the film in interview as his ‘love letter’ to the past (Castillo 2003:p74).

⁵⁵ Thomas (2005:p454)

⁵⁶ 1999:p167

⁵⁷ Leuthold (1999:p203)

believing that *Dances With Wolves* ‘triggers hope for a sea change’ in that aspect by signaling a move away from monolingualistic tendencies of earlier portrayals of ‘natives’ in colonial and Native Indian cinema.⁵⁸ With regards to commercial review, Ebert describes the film as a ‘personal triumph’ for Costner, particularly in regards to his confident directing, he also states that the film is ‘in a sense, a sentimentalist fantasy, a what-if movie that imagines a world in which whites were genuinely interested in learning about a native culture that lived more closely in harmony with the natural world than any other before or since.’⁵⁹ Canby on the other hand, found the film ‘in acute need of sharpening up’ and one which ‘touches both on man alone in nature and on the 19th-century white man’s assuming his burden among the less privileged’⁶⁰ and concurred with Sequoya, who in her review rather more explicitly declares that ‘the “authentic” Native Indian is a figment of Hollywood imagination.’⁶¹ Chee takes a rather binaristic-romantic approach to her critique and finds *Dances With Wolves* to be a film of contrasts, portraying ‘the damaging influences of white settlement against the beauty of the landscape, the battle between the white abuse of natural resources and the Sioux living within them, the extreme violence of war against the gentleness of Sioux love.’⁶² Thomas asserts that ‘*Dances* refrains from presenting the inauthentic Indian but accords with familiar primitivist logic in displacing the negative attributes of savagery onto another tribal population – the Pawnee.’⁶³ Baird further discusses the Sioux in relation

⁵⁸ 1994:p192

⁵⁹ 1990:np

⁶⁰ 1990:np

⁶¹ 2005:p290

⁶² 2003:np

⁶³ 1996:p179

to neocolonialist discourse and believes that it is ‘...in the Indian that we find an idea suggestive of our mourning for a pre-industrial Eden.’⁶⁴

Although not to the extent of *Dances With Wolves*’ critical success, Edward Zwick’s *The Last Samurai* (2003) was nevertheless an extremely popular commercial feature, receiving four Oscar nominations and taking over \$455 million worldwide since its release.⁶⁵ The film was individually significant for actor Ken Watanabe, who became the first Japanese performer for nearly forty years to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor in his role as samurai *Katsumoto*. *The Last Samurai* was well received particularly in Japan by the public and critics alike, Chi puts this down to a ‘mixture of pride, flattery and sentiment that seems to have aroused many Japanese to watch the film,’ with the story focusing on a time when the country ‘began shredding its feudal traditions and started to open up to Western technological advancement’⁶⁶ Chi’s comment perhaps highlights similarities in Japan to US society’s desire to return to an idealised, pre-industrial past epoch that might afford the Japanese public the comforts of a nostalgic past amidst the uncertainties of continuing economic stagnation, although that matter is perhaps best approached in-depth in a separate paper. Katsuta enjoyed the film and believes that director Edward Zwick portrays ‘a good understanding of *bushido* and the samurai’s code of honour through an accurate illustration of the sombre atmosphere of the samurai village at the time.’⁶⁷ In the USA, box office takings were initially not as good as in Japan but critics were, for the most part, positive about the film; Lawrence praised the performances of Watanabe and in

⁶⁴ 1998:p156

⁶⁵ Vissers (2012:np)

⁶⁶ 2004:np

⁶⁷ 2004:np

particular Cruise, whom he commends for the ‘subordination of himself to the role of Nathan Algren’ and taking the lead role in a film ‘that takes a swipe at American imperialism.’⁶⁸ Lazenby, although complementary in his opinion of Watanabe’s performance, disagrees with Lawrence and is critical of Cruise for his ‘transparent emoting’ as well as also disparaging Edward Zwick for focusing too much on the story of Algren’s redemption rather than the socio-political issues of Meiji Japan.⁶⁹ Huggins interestingly identifies some aspects of colonial discourse at work in the movie in his analysis: ‘*The Last Samurai* does the classic Hollywood disservice to the culture it sets out to glamourise, primarily because it feels like Tom Cruise, is converting the samurai to his code, not the other way around. [Cruise] appears the enlightened one in the midst of a rabble of samurai who do little more than grunt and look fierce.’⁷⁰ Maver discusses the ‘marketability of the Other’ in the case of *The Last Samurai*, wherein ‘Western enthusiasm over a foreign Other produces only a feigned Otherness, Algren seeks the Other in order to psychologically find and position himself.’⁷¹

Released nationwide in the United Kingdom on 17th December 2009⁷² James Cameron’s *Avatar* is both the most expensive movie ever made - with a budget of \$237 million⁷³ - and also the highest grossing picture of all time with box office sales of \$2.8 billion worldwide.⁷⁴ The film was nominated for nine Academy Awards and won three: for Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Visual Effects. It was - and still

⁶⁸ 2004:np

⁶⁹ 2004:np

⁷⁰ 2003:np

⁷¹ 2006:p2

⁷² IMDb (2009:np)

⁷³ Pattern (2009:np)

⁷⁴ Box Office Mojo (2011:np)

is - a commercial success with two sequels currently being produced that are set for release in December 2014 and 2015 respectively.⁷⁵ *Avatar* is unprecedented and unrivalled in its use of CGI, 75% of the film is computer generated and the movie's setting: the fictional, Amazonian moon of Pandora impressed all critics for its imagination and attention to detail. Cohen, writing for the New York Times, states that *Avatar* 'is firmly in the anti-imperialist canon, a 22nd century version of India vs. the Raj, or Latin America vs. United Fruit.'⁷⁶ Indeed, the film's anti-imperialist themes have been enthusiastically voiced in the mass media; Gardiner calls it 'the most expensive peace of anti-American propaganda ever made' and a 'political work of art with a strong... anti-Western message.'⁷⁷ Davison agrees and terms the film 'what we might call counter-cultural, it draws our attentions to the fundamental role of corporations in the destruction of the ecology'⁷⁸ While claims of anti-corporate symbolism have strong arguments in some quarters, scratching the surface of all three films the argument becomes more complicated and one can see that each feature is anything but 'anti-American' with the presence of imperialist discourse underlying throughout.

⁷⁵ McClintock (2010:np)

⁷⁶ 2009:A22

⁷⁷ 2009:np

⁷⁸ 2010:p14

2.2 SULLY, ALGREN AND DUNBAR AS NOVELSITIC HEROES

The disassociation of the “novelistic hero” from the ‘flaws of modernity and white society’⁷⁹ is the running theme throughout all three films, as is the apparent rejection by the protagonists of US imperial and Western capitalist models. Edward Said, in discussion of Western literature, highlights the function of lead characters in their superior position over the Other as seen in these three films:

*The novelistic hero...exhibits the restlessness energy of the enterprising bourgeoisie, they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go and what they can become. The novel ends...with the protagonists’ accession to stability...in the form of confirmed identity.*⁸⁰

The paradigm of the novelistic hero is easily interchangeable with term ‘Hollywood hero’ as the two emanate from the same colonialist discursive roots. The novelistic hero is an individual who occupies a privileged position as the rational, enterprising protagonist whose adventure and identity confirmation occurs in the presence and often at the expense of an inferior Other who simultaneously exists to affirm the hero vis-à-vis the Self’s privileged superiority. At the beginning of each film Sully, Algren and Dunbar, as military men, represent mediums through which the hegemonic agendas of the capitalism are implemented. But instead of justifying and further endorsing those models, they begin each film dealing with personal issues of guilt (Algren), worthlessness (Sully) and the loss of quality of life through amputation (Dunbar) as a

⁷⁹ Thomas (2005:p457)

⁸⁰ 1994:p71

result of their experiences at the forefront of imperial expansion. Their encounter with the inferior Other sees each character act as an avatar for the “liberal position” in bringing the ‘going native fetish’⁸¹ to the audience. The ‘adventure’ lays not in the encounter or ‘acceptance’ of the hero by the Other but in the self affirmation of their disconnection from the industrial/capitalist US and the realisation of extraordinary self-potential. John Dunbar, the protagonist in *Dances With Wolves*, arrives at the Fort Sedgewick outpost at his own request ‘to see the frontier before it’s gone’⁸² after displaying an act of heroic individualism on the battlefield. The film begins at some point during the American Civil War; Dunbar first appears to the viewer lying down in a first aid tent where he is about to have his foot amputated after sustaining some form of injury. Rather than have the amputation, he instead commandeers a horse and in an act of bravery typical of Western individualism, he puts his own life at risk by charging the Confederate army front line. This act allows the Union Army the chance to attack and Dunbar escapes unhurt, eventually recovering from his foot injury. Belton discusses individual heroism in Hollywood film and says that it is ‘often represented in war as a form of self-indulgence, thus counterproductive to the accomplishment of the collective goals of the group.’⁸³ In consideration of this, it may be misunderstood that individualism is a negative action but on the contrary, acts of individualism like this one actually serve to distinguish the hero’s destiny and in *Dances With Wolves*, this display of individualism early in the film singles out Dunbar in his role as a superior member of the “liberal position” or “enterprising bourgeoisie” and sets the tone for his eventual emancipation. In addition to this, upon arriving at Fort Sedgewick, Dunbar encounters a

⁸¹ Zizek (2009:p65)

⁸² Costner (1990)

⁸³ 2005:p203

curious wolf that he names “Two Socks.” Two Socks regularly visits the fort and eventually becomes confident enough to approach Dunbar and eat from his hand. In consideration of this and Dunbar’s ability to domesticate the wolf, an interesting link with traditional colonial dichotomies can be observed; the cultivation of native land by the civilised European⁸⁴ was a feature of prominent 18th and 19th century European colonial literature – well known examples include Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island* (1875) – and considering this, in addition to the development of the way that colonial discourse over the last 300 years been disseminated, the propagation of the coloniser’s domestication of native land has also progressed. Shohat believes that the ‘masculinist desire of mastering a new land is deeply linked to colonial history’⁸⁵ and in linking this idea with Said’s novelistic hero theory, it can be argued that Dunbar’s taming of the ‘mythical, wild’ wolf - representing a physical manifestation of the ‘wild, untamed’ space ‘beyond the frontier’ - shows further evidence of the special sense of destiny which is permitted to the novelistic hero vis-à-vis Dunbar in colonial discourse. The rather unusual situation of the wild animal’s interest in Dunbar and his anthropomorphising of the wolf substantiates him in his privileged position as the hero/coloniser. Additionally, unlike Timmons (another American who accompanies Dunbar on his trip to the frontier and is then murdered by ‘savage’ Pawnee Indians), Dunbar encounters the ‘good’ Sioux Indians whose village he eventually decides to visit. Once a rapport is built between the Sioux and Dunbar, his elevation to privileged status begins; firstly with the introduction of the more advanced tools that he has brought from colonised space; i.e. the coffee grinder and tin cups that

⁸⁴ See Rings (2011:p119) for his analysis of the paradigmatic colonial relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday wherein Crusoe acts as a ‘patriarchal protector’ for Friday.

⁸⁵ 1997:p27

the Sioux take back to their village with them and secondly - and more importantly - when he alerts the increasingly hungry Sioux to the buffalo migration passing over the plain. Costner's attempts to use this scene to engender the Sioux to Dunbar, or - it could alternatively further put forward - disseminate his superiority over them to the audience, is elaborated on by Castillo who says: 'We are asked to believe that a highly-skilled, hungry and presumably alert band of Indians would need Dunbar to inform them that a thunderously noisy herd of buffalo was in their neighbourhood.'⁸⁶ After he alerts them to the buffalo's presence, Dunbar goes together with the Sioux to hunt them where the power of the rifle as a symbol of coloniser superiority and technological advancement further affirms his 'champion' status amongst them.⁸⁷ With it, he manages to kill more animals than the Indians put together and also saves the life of young 'Smiles A Lot' from a charging buffalo. His act of emancipation comes during the battle with the Pawnee wherein after the Sioux victory, aided by the weaponry that he has provided, Dunbar contemplates his identity and narrates to the audience:

*I felt a pride I had never felt before; I'd never really known who John Dunbar was. Perhaps the name itself had no meaning. But as I heard my Sioux name being called over and over, I knew for the first time who I really was.*⁸⁸

This moment of liberation for Dunbar confirms his role within the novelistic hero paradigm wherein the 'adventure' that he has been 'permitted' has revealed to him the limits of what he can become and affirmed his real identity as Dances With Wolves, one who has found meaning in his existence as an Indian disassociated from the corruption

⁸⁶ 2003:p68

⁸⁷ Thomas (2005:p456)

⁸⁸ Costner (1990)

and immorality of the imperialist/capitalist US that John Dunbar left behind. This emancipation statement also appeals to the “liberal position” with the idea of disassociation vis-à-vis ‘going native’ to find oneself and emanates from the prominent discursive belief that being closer to nature and distancing oneself from the ‘reality’ of modern (US) society allows for a better contemplation of personal values and virtues and authorises an absolution from the anxiety and guilt of being part of the everyday life of the imperialistic and capitalist system. But as Dunbar leaves the Sioux and assumedly returns to ‘civilisation’ it can be argued that he sacrifices a complete disconnection from industrial society for the greater good of the protection of the Sioux whom he leaves in order to ensure that the Union Army who are looking for him will not capture, and it can be presumed, kill members of the Sioux community of which he belongs. The “liberal position” can be satisfied with this ending though as their paradigms for the affirmation of the Self and (apparent) disappropriation of imperialism and capitalism are fulfilled.

In *The Last Samurai*, it is through Nathan Algren as Said’s novelistic hero again⁸⁹ that the ‘nobility’ of the samurai’s ‘peaceful way of life’ is presented to the audience, and is not, after closer analysis, the other way round. At the beginning of the film, Algren is an alcoholic who, haunted by the memories of his actions massacring ‘innocent’ Native Indians during the Indian Wars, is no longer a soldier but works reenacting scenes from the War for audiences. His life is at a low ebb but his path to emancipation begins when he is offered the chance to go to Japan to train soldiers in the

⁸⁹ 1994:p71

Japanese Imperial Army. The man who offers him this chance, Omura,⁹⁰ is a pro-Western politician who wishes to ‘civilise’ Japan and remove the ‘old ways’ of the Samurai who reject his reform policies and are apparently ‘concerned at the pace the country is modernizing.’⁹¹ Omura’s vision of a modern Japan is contextualised for the audience in a conversation that British interpreter Simon Graham has with Algren:

*The Emperor’s mad for all things Western. Mr Omura is bringing in every Western expert he can get his hands on – lawyers from France, engineers for Germany, architects from Holland and now of course...warriors from America.*⁹²

Nadel elaborates on the supposed need for Europe to ‘civilise’ the East: ‘In the East “mature” political institutions – democracy, the civil service – have yet to come into being, in the East, ignorance and superstition prevail, men lack the vigour and force of Western masculinity.’⁹³ The conversation also highlights how colonial countries ‘use science and technology as a claim of superiority over Eastern nations.’⁹⁴ Indeed, the Euro-Americancentric view disseminated in the scene by Zwick constitutes a traditional imperialist/colonial discursive continuity that underpins *The Last Samurai’s* story. This is most explicit in Algren; his destiny is founded to the audience after his life is spared by samurai master Katsumoto during a battle between the Imperial Army and the samurai in which, upon being surrounded, Katsumoto observes Algren vigorously defending himself with a spear; his heroic potential is portrayed to the audience through

⁹⁰ Whose mimicry of a Western businessman ‘repeats rather than represents’ (Bhabha 1994:p88). His behaviour is that of a typical American 19th century businessman, he drinks port, smokes cigars and most importantly, disregards the conventional ways of doing business in Japan.

⁹¹ Zwick (2003)

⁹² Zwick (2003)

⁹³ 1997:p270

⁹⁴ Krishna (2005:p80)

an extreme camera close-up focus on a tiger image which is attached to the spear - signifying Algren's bravery. This visibly makes an impression on Katsumoto who spares his life despite the fact he has just previously killed his brother-in-law. Algren is taken to the samurai village where he must stay until the winter snows melt the following spring, he spends his first few days exorcising the demons of his participation in Native Indian massacres back in the US and going cold turkey on his alcohol addiction. Once his physical condition improves his road to emancipation continues; Algren begins to train in the sword fighting techniques of the samurai and, as a member of the "enterprising bourgeoisie," like Dunbar hunting buffalo with the Sioux, quickly learns how to effectively execute the fighting techniques of the samurai that have taken a lifetime for the villagers to learn. Indeed, instances of this kind of endeavour and quick learning seen in Hollywood films such as this, *Dances With Wolves* and, as will be demonstrated later, *Avatar*; can be attributed to Western superiority/Otherness inferiority binaries as discussed by Bhabha,⁹⁵ Said⁹⁶ and Horton,⁹⁷ a significant moment in Algren's role as the superior novelistic hero is evident when he draws a duel with Ujio, a samurai who initially hostile towards him, grows to respect Algren for the speed in which he learns to sword fight and the devotion he shows to the samurai's cause.⁹⁸ Algren also quickly learns how to speak Japanese⁹⁹ and apologises to his carer, Taka, in the language for killing her husband for which she forgives him. His acceptance by the samurai is confirmed when he saves Katsumoto's life after cronies sent by Omura attack

⁹⁵ 1994:p66

⁹⁶ 1995:p71

⁹⁷ 2007:p134

⁹⁸ Similar to the initially hostile behaviour of Tsu'tey in *Avatar* and Wind In His Hair in *Dances With Wolves*.

⁹⁹ Again parallels can be instantly drawn with Sully who learns the Na'vi language and Dunbar who quickly learns the Sioux language.

the village. Despite this acceptance, Algren is not ‘assimilated’ and as the novelistic hero, Algren retains the ‘privilege of the coloniser’¹⁰⁰ and in keeping with conventional colonial discourse, quickly takes on a leadership and guidance role for the samurai. Algren directs the battle plan and leads the attack on the Imperial Army at the end of the movie for which he is also given a special sword by Katsumoto inscribed with the message: ‘I belong to the warriors of which the old ways have joined with the new.’¹⁰¹ After the battle in which Katsumoto and all the other samurais have been killed, Algren returns Katsumoto’s sword to the Emperor who, thanks to Algren’s symbolic act, feels compelled to reject the US government’s arms deal (and therefore undoes their attempted hegemonic domination of the country). This, it can be put forward, confirms the Japanese nation to subordination and Otherness in their rejection of modernity. Furthermore, Algren returns to the samurai village alone to begin his romantic relationship with Taka and, possibly take his place as the new village head. The “liberal position” can again observe events comfortably knowing that conventional discursive constructs have not been damaged: the imperialists have got what they deserved for their arrogant bullying of a ‘lesser’ nation but the model of the West as the moderniser, the innovator and the superior remains in place. Furthermore, the death of Katsumoto martyrs the ‘traditional’ way of life of the samurai and signals the inevitable arrival of modernity from the city (Yokohama) to the country (*Yushino*). Also noteworthy is that it is Algren, the representative of the “liberal position,” who heralds the arrival of modernity and triumph of imperialism through the honourable killing of Katsumoto. This not before Katsumoto emancipates Algren by informing him (and the audience):

¹⁰⁰ Thomas (2005:p457)

¹⁰¹ Zwick (2003)

‘You have your honour again’¹⁰² insinuating that this time, Algren’s actions on the battlefield are worthy of a ‘good’ cause in contrast to the merciless killing of the Native Indians he was ‘compelled to do’ in the name of imperial expansion.

Avatar’s protagonist Jake Sully, like Algren and Dunbar, arrives to Pandora with nothing to lose, in need of emancipation and physically scarred by the corrupt, immoral world he left back on 22nd century Earth. He is an ex-marine who, now disabled and unable to walk, maintains the mindset of a soldier and still holds the raw characteristics of the stereotypical novelistic hero. References to his past and character are communicated to the viewer early in the movie; revealing that he became a marine for the ‘hardship’ because he believed he could ‘pass any test a man could pass’ also wishing to find ‘one single thing worth fighting for.’¹⁰³ His ability as an exceptional marine is contextualised to the audience by the character Colonel Quaritch, head of the mercenary army assigned to Pandora, who says: ‘I pulled your record, Corporal. Venezuela - that was some mean bush.’ He here implies that Sully’s abilities as a soldier excelled under the extremely hostile conditions of a fictional imperialistic war with Venezuela. Regardless, Sully’s future role as a hero is being cast through brief allusions to his integrity, bravery and abilities as a soldier. He is certainly unable to currently find anything worth fighting for on a corrupt and morally devoid Earth and he is also unable to engage physically in any kind of “cause” because of his disability. Initially, Sully is depicted struggling to learn the Na’vi language and attempting to learn to ride horse-like creatures¹⁰⁴ much like Algren in his efforts in learning Japanese and

¹⁰² Zwick (2003)

¹⁰³ Cameron (2009)

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix (i) p87

Dunbar comically gesturing when trying to communicate with the Sioux upon his initial meetings with them. But in keeping with colonial/imperial discourse¹⁰⁵ he quickly learns - in the space of three months - how to hunt, fight and move as well as (and then better than) his Omanticaya¹⁰⁶ peers. One of his particular standout skills is that of his ability to fly pterodactyl-like winged creatures named Banshees.¹⁰⁷ After taming his own, Sully exclaims to the viewer: 'I might not be much of a horse guy, but I was born to do this.' His unusually remarkable ability in flying the banshee is where Sully's future heroism lays; later in the movie, after the human attack on the Omanticaya's home, their subsequent displacement and Sully's expulsion from the tribe, he attempts to win back the trust of the Omanticaya by taming another, larger wild flying creature called a 'Toruk.' A creature whose significance Sully's love interest Neytiri exemplifies earlier in the movie; what she says lays the foundation for Sully's future heroism:

*My grandfather's grandfather was Toruk Macto - Rider of Last Shadow.
Toruk chose him. It has only happened five times since the time of the First Songs.
Toruk Macto was mighty - he brought the clans together in a time of great sorrow.
All Na'vi people know this story.*¹⁰⁸

The enormity and potential consequences of Sully's fate is outlined here and his subsequent successful taming of the Toruk is the catalyst for the Omanticaya's revival. Although this act of bravery 'proves' Sully's allegiance to the tribe, the scene has

¹⁰⁵ Shohat and Stam believe that imperialist and Eurocentric *vis-a-vis* imperialist discourse are 'intimately intertwined'. The latter embedding, taking for granted and normalising the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism (1994:p2). Desai and Nair see imperialism as being 'an integral part of the West's economic expansion' and go on to say that it ensures the West's control of that expansion' (2005:p46).

¹⁰⁶ The name of the tribe to which Sully belongs.

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix (ii) p87

¹⁰⁸ Cameron (2009)

uncomfortable imperial associations for Edwards who believes it shows the superior white man ‘buying off a primitive culture with a worthless act, setting up the coloniser as divine.’¹⁰⁹ Further evidence of Edward’s observation can be put forward in the shape of “Ewha,” the deity of Pandora who singles out Sully’s celestial importance earlier in the movie when a number of sacred ‘wood sprites’ land on him to indicate his unique sense of destiny.¹¹⁰ Additionally, it can also be put forward that the impact of the Toruk taming act sees the Na’vi then follow Sully into a war which subsequently kills off rival males and allows him to take his place as the leader of the Omaticaya tribe thereafter. Secondly, it can be said that, Sully - just like Algren and Dunbar – represents an avatar for Zizek’s “liberal position”¹¹¹ wherein the narrative’s ‘evil acts’ are perpetrated by the institutional power structures that command, support and legitimise imperial actions and not the protagonist himself. Sully, Algren and Dunbar, as representatives of the “liberal position” are taken out of these power structures and ‘go native’ so that themselves and the audience - for whom the construct of the “liberal position” discourse is aimed – ‘can afford the rewards of imperialism with none of the guilt’.¹¹² Detaching himself from this, Sully is able to realise who he ‘really is’ and finally finds the ‘one single thing worth fighting for’ in the shape of the Omaticaya tribe’s cause. Sully’s two-part emancipation is achieved firstly spiritually, in his newfound identity as a confirmed member of the tribe and, physically, where at the very end of the movie his mind is transferred from his human body to the Na’vi avatar disassociating himself from, in part, imperialism and capitalism. In the previous scene, after he leads the Na’vi to victory in

¹⁰⁹ 2010:p37

¹¹⁰ See Appendix (iii) p88

¹¹¹ In Rieder; 2011:p47

¹¹² Rieder (2011:p47)

the war against the mining corporation, the Omaticaya recognise Sully's superiority and he becomes the new head of the tribe.

Sully, along with Algren, actually achieves complete disassociation from the perceived corrupt/industrial US societies in question; as well as the added 'satisfaction' of sending the members of that society - the employees of the mining corporation - back to their "dying Earth."¹¹³ Thus, finally attaining some degree of revenge for centuries of colonial suppression, imperial expansion and economic greed. In *The Last Samurai*, Algren achieves self-affirmation when he rejects the option to go back to America and returns to the samurai village to presumably begin his new life with Taka. Also, as discussed, after the battle with the American-led Imperial Army he returns Katsumoto's sword to the emperor who subsequently finally summons the strength to overrule Omura who, throughout the film, has been constantly pressuring him to sign a trade agreement with the US. It can be argued that Algren's act of returning an artefact of 'traditional' Japan to the Emperor and his rejection of the arms agreement condemns the country to romanticised Otherness in the eyes of the audience who perhaps have been watching the film resigned to the fact the Japan will 'modernise.' Additionally, at the very end of *Avatar*, as the human imperialists are personally escorted into the ships which take them back to Earth, Sully is pictured wearing the emblem of the Omaticaya tribe's leader,¹¹⁴ of which it can be argued, that in Sully's accession to leader of the Omaticaya tribe, the Na'vi finally fall under the control of US hegemony under the

¹¹³ Cameron (2009)

¹¹⁴ See Appendix (iv) p88

guise of the rational “liberal position,” not that of the corporate imperialists but still under a form of superior ‘white’ control nonetheless.

To summarise the three characters in their novelistic hero role it can be said that conventional colonial dichotomies remain. Sully, Algren and Dunbar, in their superior role, are beyond what the Others can do and quickly learn to acquire, master and then surpass their abilities and skills. These, as well as the characters moments of destiny, endear each of them to the ‘awed natives’¹¹⁵ who in turn make the ‘white man’ a champion amongst them. In *Avatar*, Sully’s taming of the ‘Toruk’ is his moment, being one of only five Na’vi who have managed to do so in the communicative history of the alien race; for Algren, it is when he saves the life of Katsumoto and Taka’s son in the attack on the village and in *Dances With Wolves* it is Dunbar’s weapons that help the Sioux defeat the Pawnee in battle. In *Avatar* and *The Last Samurai* the ‘hero,’ as a member of the “enterprising bourgeoisie,” explicitly grows to reject capitalist and imperialist values but is inexorably indebted that system for his superiority over the Other nonetheless. Through this superiority, the samurai and the Na’vi, inadvertently fall under the control of a form of US hegemonic domination of which they were trying to resist, the story simultaneously appears to follow conventional colonial discourse in the paradigm of the superior white man educating and having authority over the natives regardless of the fact that neo-colonialism requires that the superiority of the colonial/imperialist model is more carefully and less explicitly disseminated in contemporary features. *Dances With Wolves* is slightly more difficult to summarise in that, instead of the ‘hero’ ascending to the leadership of the Other, Dunbar leaves the

¹¹⁵ Krishna (2008:p89)

Sioux to face their ultimate fate - their future surrender to imperialism, an historical fact that Costner is unable to avoid. In this case, it is the impact that Dunbar has on the Sioux where the presence of colonial superiority can be felt most powerfully; in the weapons he provides and the techniques he teaches them to help catch the buffalo more effectively for example.¹¹⁶ These methods ensure that they are for now, able to 'defend their innocence' from the encroaching modernity. The secondary undertaking for the protagonists in the three films is to defend the 'traditions' of the Other and protect them from assimilation into the capitalist world system of which the audience know the trappings of all too well. Where the indigenised white man learns about this true self in his adventure, the 'acculturated [Other] can only acquire corruption'¹¹⁷ and it is the responsibility of the 'white man' - the assumed civilised and superior Self¹¹⁸ - as an avatar for the "liberal position," in defending the Other's way of life. Indeed, it can be argued that, for the Other stepping into the world of the Self, their wisdom, harmony and other 'innocent' virtues that they possess would be quickly corrupted once faced with the monetary and sexual temptations of the West. In contrast, the 'hero' by 'going native,' retains the superiority of the Self as he is aware of the flaws of Western society and utilises his understanding of that for a more complete experience in his 'going native' adventure. Additionally, with regards to the protagonists names, Sully and Dunbar eventually become 'Toruk Macto' and 'Dances With Wolves' respectively; Baird describes the renaming of a white man with a "natural" name as: the quintessential American myth – the self made man rediscovering his own true self¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ See Appendix (v) p89

¹¹⁷ Thomas (2005:p457)

¹¹⁸ Rings (2011:p123)

¹¹⁹ 1998:p161

and that is, to summarise, regardless of the fate of the Other - the purpose of the three film's narrative from beginning to end.

2.3 THE NA'VI, THE SAMURAI AND THE SIOUX AS THE OTHER

The Na'vi, the Sioux and the samurai all display the conventional attributes of the Other in each film. Their refusal to modernise and reliance on the novelistic hero for his enterprise and guidance ensure all three films again follow traditional colonial discourse in their representation of Otherness inferiority. In his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon wrote: 'The black man is the result of a series of aberrations of affect; he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated.'¹²⁰ He is of course talking here about Otherness, which Bhabha says defines non-European and non-North Americans in a 'paradoxical mode of representation that denotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.'¹²¹ Said believes Otherisation is 'a political vision of reality whose structure promotes a binary opposition between the familiar 'us' and the strange 'them' is crucial to European self-conception.'¹²² It is in fact only in the last 30 years or so in Hollywood films¹²³ that the traditional colonialist view of the 'savage native' has given way to the more "sympathetic" discourse of the 'noble' savage as a 'personification of natural goodness, uncorrupted by the vices of civilisation.'¹²⁴ Thomas, prefers the term 'primitivism' and sees this as a more all-encompassing discourse that 'attributes an exemplary status to simple ways of life and re-values its rudimentary character as something to be upheld.'¹²⁵ It can be argued that this demand for the dissemination of traditionalism in

¹²⁰ 1963:p10

¹²¹ 1994:p66

¹²² In Loomba (1998:p47)

¹²³ See the 'primitivist' films of Boorman (*The Emerald Forest*, 1985), Joffe (*The Mission*, 1986), Mann (*The Last of the Mohicans*, 1992), and Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995).

¹²⁴ Ellingson (2001:p1)

¹²⁵ 2005:p448

Western societal discourse signals a partial recognition of the actions and consequences of white Europe's imperial past or in a different context, the nostalgic desire to escape the trappings of 'globalisation' or consumerism. Ellingson can further contextualise the discourse of the noble savage and how it fits into the paradigmatic desires of self-affirmation for the "liberal position:"

*The noble savage is a seeker of wisdom and truth, warrior in spirit yet still a lover of peace. The noble savage is hope, a dream of something better than what we are forced to be, romantic self-affirmation.*¹²⁶

Loomba, supporting Ellingson, states that 'the construction of the Other binary is crucial for constructing the insider, the Self'¹²⁷ The noble savage, as presented in the three films analysed in this study, appear to exist to absolve the audience from the imperialistic nature of the society in which they live and, as Rieder claims, 'afford them the rewards of imperialism with none of the guilt.'¹²⁸ Throughout *Dances With Wolves*, the ultimate fate of the America's Native Indians and the end of their 'way of life' underlies the narrative, Thomas suggests that the depiction of the Sioux in the film can be best described not as 'here they are' but 'here is their passing'¹²⁹ in that the audience are presented Dunbar's adventure in the knowledge that the forthcoming Indian Wars will ultimately change the way of life of the Sioux forever. Indeed, to support Thomas' assessment, in the film's final scene as Dunbar leaves the Sioux, his departure is clearly an attempt by Costner to draw attention away from the forthcoming Sioux hardship as

¹²⁶ 2001:p331

¹²⁷ 1998:p104

¹²⁸ 2011:p47

¹²⁹ 2005:p456

this, it could be argued, would undermine the film's noble savage paradigm. Their eventual fate is briefly alluded to with a short epilogue:

*Thirteen years later, their homelands destroyed, their buffalo gone, the last band of free Sioux submitted to white authority at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The great horse culture of the plains was gone and the American frontier was soon to pass into history.*¹³⁰

Baird states: 'Even [the film] cannot circumvent the massacre'¹³¹ but with this brief reference to future events, the dignity of the Sioux in the noble savage paradigm remains intact for the audience. Thomas believes the idealisation of the Sioux way of life in the film, i.e. their stagnating Otherness,¹³² entails their 'incompatibility with the encroaching colonial society and makes their elimination inevitable'¹³³ much like the samurai. The Sioux's incompatibility, like the samurai again, lies in their rejection of modernisation and the imperialist model; and because of this they are confined to the discursive limits of Otherness¹³⁴ by Costner. The brevity of the epilogue regarding the fate of the Sioux also appears to spare the audience the reality of the Native Indian's end and can afford the "liberal position," 'the embodiment of the lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth.'¹³⁵ The lie which Costner presents is the insight into the

¹³⁰ Costner (1990)

¹³¹ 1998:p159

¹³² See Memmi (1965:pp.10-18) and Bhabha (1994:p70)

¹³³ 2005:p455

¹³⁴ See Blaut who summarises the Other as follows: 'Europe eternally advances, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: It is a "traditional society." Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical centre and permanent periphery: an inside and an outside. Inside leads, outside lags. Inside innovates, outside imitates (1993:p1: in Rings 2011:p120).

¹³⁵ Zizek (2009:p65)

lives of the “harmonious”¹³⁶ Sioux Indians through the lens of Dunbar’s adventure and the absolution of colonial guilt in the end, not of the Sioux’s story, but in Dunbar’s wherein which the audience can draw a line under this particular narrative before the reality of the situation becomes too explicit and exposes the ‘unbearable truth’ of the Sioux’s end.

The conventional colonial Other¹³⁷ paradigm exists in *Dances* in the form of the Pawnee Indians who are depicted rather explicitly as predictable ‘bloodthirsty savages’ without any kind of humanism in their representation. Unlike the Sioux who have a three-dimensional representation: e.g. family life, depiction of cultural traditions and multi-layered friendships; the Pawnee exist only as a binary opposite to the Sioux, taking up the old-fashioned Hollywood role as the ‘bad-guys.’ Their first act in the film is to ruthlessly kill carriage master Timmons whose crime seems to be that he is a white man, the embodiment of this Pawnee hatred for the white man is the tribe’s warrior leader played by Cherokee actor Wes Studi. The Pawnee are also responsible for the death of the family of Stands With A Fist who, born to white farmers, was taken in by the Sioux after the Pawnee (seemingly without reason or prompt) attacked her family’s farm when she was a young girl and killed her parents. Later in the film, before he follows the Sioux into battle against them, Dunbar further criminalizes the Pawnee as he writes in his diary - which is communicated to the audience through voiceover - that the Pawnee ‘have been very bad’ to the Sioux in the past, dismissing the consideration that he has only heard one side of the story. In consideration of these instances of violence

¹³⁶ To quote Ebert’s review again (1990:np)

¹³⁷ For good examples of the typical colonial savage Other in Hollywood film see Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Cooper and Schoedsack’s *King Kong* (1933) or Marshall’s *Congo* (1996).

and cruelty by the Pawnee, it may be suggested that their function acts to in some way justify the future actions of imperial America in their forceful removal of Native Indian tribes from their land (although that is a whole argument in itself and should perhaps be considered in more depth in a different study). As discussed in 2.1, in the tribal battle against the Pawnee, the Sioux, armed with rifles that Dunbar has provided, easily defeat them. For this they recognise Dunbar as a ‘champion’ for the weapons he has introduced and as a champion he retains the privileged status of the coloniser amongst them, this is highlighted when a group of Sioux risk their lives and that of everyone in their village by attempting to rescue Dunbar from his American captors. Furthermore, as in *The Last Samurai* wherein the US Army is attempting to sell their superior weapons to the Japanese government, American firepower is depicted as an example of Western technological advancement and its superiority as a weapon, it can be argued, is the physical manifestation of imperialist expansion and modernity. The Sioux themselves, in their “stagnating Other”¹³⁸ role, recognise the power of the gun versus the ‘primitive’ bow and arrow. Dunbar substantiates the effectiveness of the rifles he owns when he tells the Indian chief: ‘Guns could make one man like two!’¹³⁹ After their victory in the battle against the Pawnee, the Sioux dance and continually fire shots into the air acknowledging the awesome authority of the rifle. It could be suggested that the audience may interpret this as the beginning of some form of embracing of Western technology for the tribe but Costner uses Dunbar’s voiceover - as the primary medium of communication to the audience - to immediately affirm the Sioux’s unchanging position in the Other role:

¹³⁸ Blaut (1993:p1)

¹³⁹ Costner 1990

*I'd never been in a battle like this one; there was no dark political objective, not a fight for riches or to make men free. It had been fought to preserve the food stores that would see us through the winter, to protect the lives of women and loved ones only a few feet away.*¹⁴⁰

It can be argued here firstly, that the Sioux's narrative function in their paradigm as the noble savage is reinforced in Dunbar's voiceover who absolves them of the iniquitous behaviour the audience has just seen (particularly when the Sioux surround the one remaining Pawnee warrior and all bludgeon him to death with the rifles they have been carrying) and reduces it to that of necessity to retain their 'way of life.' Secondly, and much more importantly; in consideration of the Other as the mirror of the Self,¹⁴¹ it can be put forward that Dunbar believes dark, political objectives are perhaps the only reason that battles or wars take place in his experience and in Costner's experience, the same can be said for contemporary society too. At the time of *Dances With Wolves* release, political tensions regarding the Middle East were high in US governmental circles who were apprehensive regarding the regime of Saddam Hussein and his potential invasion of Kuwait. Indeed, once Iraqi forces did invade Kuwait, the nation itself was portrayed in American media – and also used as justification for invasion - as a kind of poor, defenceless Other¹⁴² that was unable to protect itself from the more powerful Iraqi 'bullies.' In reality, the Bush (Snr.) Administration was more concerned about the allied nation's vast oil reserves that, important to the US economy, would come under Iraqi control if Hussein's invasion was successful. In *The Last Samurai*, the

¹⁴⁰ Costner (1990)

¹⁴¹ See Said (1979:p2) and Blaut (1993:p1)

¹⁴² Chulov (2011:np)

‘dark, political objective’ was the control of the Japanese Emperor by the US via Omura for the purposes of financial and hegemonic domination and in *Avatar* it is of course, the establishment and continuation of the ‘unobtainium’ mining project at any cost, disregarding the environment and biodiversity of Pandora which also perhaps mirrors contemporary mass mining, oil drilling and tree felling projects in Brazil and Ecuador.

Dunbar, in his voice-over narration role, continually ensures and even reminds the audience of the Sioux’s Otherness throughout the film. One particular example lends itself well to this argument:

*I'd never known a people so eager to laugh, so devoted to family, so dedicated to each other. And the only word that came to mind was harmony. It seems every day ends with a miracle here.*¹⁴³

In his comprehensive analysis of *Dances*, Thomas believes that this particular quote ‘reduces the complexities and ambiguities of the Sioux to categorical truths, Dunbar’s voiceover resists the implication that the native community is divided by any inequity.’¹⁴⁴ Of course, this ‘negation of groups of cultures to the image of one single inferior Other’¹⁴⁵ is typical of imperial and colonialist discourse and fits in well with Ellingson’s idea of the noble savage as a ‘dream of something better than what we are forced to be.’¹⁴⁶ The notion of family values and its importance in preserving the perceived ‘traditional’ morals of American society is one that has been constantly

¹⁴³ Costner (1990)

¹⁴⁴ 2005:p455

¹⁴⁵ Rings (2011:p120)

¹⁴⁶ 2001:p332

promoted in conservative media and Republican Party discourse since the 1980s and it seems the subject has found its way to Hollywood projections of the Other as a reflection of the desires of the Self.¹⁴⁷ Of further significance is the fact that Kevin Costner was a public supporter of the Republican Party at the time of *Dances With Wolves*' release.¹⁴⁸ With this evidence, it can be put forward that there may be a direct link between Costner's assumedly conservative views on 'traditional family values' and Dunbar's quote concerning the tranquility of the Sioux's harmonious family life and neighbourly relationships. Furthermore, the average politically non-critical viewer accepts Dunbar's quote as 'truth' because of his voiceover role - the primary functionary medium in which the narrative of the Sioux is delivered.

The Otherness of the samurai in *The Last Samurai* is continuously allegorised with 'the past' and the inevitability of the coming modernity. The group and its way of life represent a kind of 'last stand' against modernity and the ever-expanding imperial presence that seems to be entering Meiji Japan. Firstly, the military might of the US army has been employed by Omura to finally rid Japan of the 'old ways' of the samurai. It is interesting that the portrayal of the ability of the US military to competently oversee the supply, development and leadership of a 'developing' country - *The Last Samurai*'s over-arching story - came at a time when the Bush administration were making formal plans for the handover of 'sovereignty' to the new Iraqi government

¹⁴⁷ See Smith's analysis of Shyer's *Father of the Bride* (1991), Hogan's *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) and Nichols *The Birdcage* (1996), where she discusses the propagation of conservative and liberal attitudes to 'family values' in these films (2002:pp.77-90).

¹⁴⁸ In 1990, Kevin Costner made financial donations to Republican senator Phil Gamm, his political allegiance now lies with the Democratic party to whom he has also given numerous donations (Polity Media 2012:np)

after the initial invasion¹⁴⁹ amidst a general wave of public negativity concerning the genuine reasons for the invasion of Iraq after “intelligence failures” were cited for the non-discovery of weapons of mass destruction. It may be put forward that, in consideration of Hollywood’s history as a medium in endorsing US foreign policy – *Air Force* (Hawks 1943), *Coming Home* (Ashby 1978), *Rambo III* (Macdonald 1988) – the parallels between the images in *The Last Samurai* as the ‘educator’ to a ‘less-developed’ nation and the Iraq handover are not a coincidence. Furthermore, it provides added evidence to the claim that films (particularly those that involve the military) must be taken in context with the political and social situations of their epoch.¹⁵⁰

As discussed above, military firepower is also used to highlight the technological advancement of the West as the innovator of science vs. the East in *The Last Samurai* as it did in *Dances With Wolves*. One particular scene highlights this well when Algren returns to Yokohama after his winter in the samurai village; inside the Imperial Palace - wherein the American generals have been training the Japanese soldiers over the winter in Algren’s absence - Zwick, using the camera to follow Algren as he approaches the edge of a grassy knoll, uses an extreme wide pan shot to accentuate the advancing efficiency of the Imperial Army by capturing the howitzers, canons and the army in column formation in the frame.¹⁵¹ This is in contrast to the disorganisation and inability of the soldiers to follow orders when Algren trains them before his capture. This scene is noteworthy in that it signifies the swift progress Japan has made under the guidance of the American ‘educators’ in a short period of time. Meanwhile, over the winter in the

¹⁴⁹ Chandrasekaran (2004:np)

¹⁵⁰ Bernstein and Studlar state that ‘no form of filmic representation – scholarly, scientific or artistic – is created apart from a political and social context’ (1997:p13).

¹⁵¹ See Appendix (vi) p89

samurai village, it is only Algren who has advanced – learning Japanese and improving his samurai sword fighting skills. The members of the samurai village in their conventional Other role explicitly *refuse* to progress in *The Last Samurai*. Similarities with *Dances With Wolves* and other US/Eurocentric discursive constructs continue in Algren’s dairy voiceover that continually disseminates the Otherness of the samurai to the audience, considering the following quote:

*They are an intriguing people, from the moment they wake they devote themselves to the perfection of whatever they pursue, I have never seen such discipline.*¹⁵²

It can be argued that the perceived flaws in contemporary Western (coded: US) society, such as the lack of ‘honour’ and moral integrity that the unflinching advance of corporatism fails to show in whatever situation that these virtues would require, are being relayed in Algren’s comments here. The negation of the noble savage to a ‘dream of something better than what we are forced to be’¹⁵³ is, as put forward in this dissertation, a reflection of the contemporary discursive wishes of the “liberal position” to return to a pre-industrial state. With this in mind, it can be said that the ‘discipline’ that the inhabitants of the samurai village portray exists as a manifestation of the “liberal position’s” desire to circumvent the issue of the dependency of their economic systems on former colonies for labour or resources because of a perceived sense of ‘laziness’ with regard to a rejection by ‘white-collar’ or ‘middle class’ members of the population to do menial work because of a ‘sense of entitlement’ to wealth and certain

¹⁵² Zwick (2003)

¹⁵³ Ellingson’s (2001:p332) idea again links in well with Zizek’s “liberal position” notion where members ‘disavow any fetishistic belief in ‘the system’ (i.e. imperialism) but continue to draw energy or profit from it (1989:p32).

lifestyles which, it is perceived, Western populations are no longer prepared to ‘work hard’ to achieve. The samurai on the other hand, are prepared to work hard to realise the idealised, harmonious society that the “liberal position” seems to desire so desperately. This example would be considered by Zizek “a fetish” (i.e. that of the non-industrialised, self-sufficient society), of which he describes: ‘Fetishists feel satisfied in their fetishes, they experience no need to be rid of them,’¹⁵⁴ it can therefore be said that the dissemination of the ‘disciplined samurai,’ ‘peaceful Na’vi’ or the noble savage in general as ‘something better than what we are forced to be’ will continue for the foreseeable future to be part of Otherness discourse in Hollywood cinema, existing in a binary “fetish” function for the “liberal position.” Baird believes that the noble savage/traditional savage dichotomy ‘addresses white historical fear and guilt in the same narrative’¹⁵⁵ and in these films that would seem to be case. Of particular interest in consideration of Baird’s comment is samurai master Katsumoto who, as put forward earlier in the paper, embodies a physical resistance to American imperial and capitalist modernity in *The Last Samurai*. He eventually ‘martyrs’ the noble savage’s way of life when he is ‘honourably’ killed by Algren. Bhabha’s discussion of the Other in the *Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1994) wherein which he assumes that the ‘construction of the colonial subject within the discourse demands and an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual,’¹⁵⁶ can help to shed further light on Kastumoto’s role. It can be suggested that his incorruptible, judicious and noble personality as head of the samurai village represents a fetishistic¹⁵⁷ desire of (US) Western society to be ruled by leaders who are generally believed to be everything that Katsumoto is not:

¹⁵⁴ 2009:p68

¹⁵⁵ 1998:p160

¹⁵⁶ 1994:p67

¹⁵⁷ Zizek (2009)

incompetent, self-interested and corrupt. As Katsumoto is the noble savage, it must be stated that he does not function as a reflection of the Self for the “liberal position” - that particular role is of course designated to the novelistic heroes - Katsumoto’s binary opposition within the film is Omura: extremely wealthy, capitalistic and self-interested; he is finally humiliated and exposed for this but ultimately is not killed and his fate is left unknown. Omura’s disgrace is superficial and nothing more than ‘satisfaction’ for the audience; a neo-colonialist construct that ridicules the morals of the imperialist model but stops short of denouncing it. Katsumoto on the other hand, despite his favourable attributes as a person and a leader, rejects the might of the capitalist/imperialist model and his refusal to modernise finally ends in his death. Contemporary Hollywood discursive paradigms wherein the Other is depicted (generally) as ‘noble,’ combined with the fact that the fate of the samurai in chronicled history is widespread knowledge proves a conundrum for Zwick who, as mentioned in discussion of Katsumoto, rather shrewdly romantically ‘martyrs’ the ‘traditional’ way of samurai life while at the same time justifies US imperialism and capitalism as the superior model. The inferior traditionalist model followed by Katsumoto, who is perhaps the embodiment of Zizek’s ‘fetish’ in the film, is ultimately dismissed as evocative but nonetheless defunct in a modernising Japan. Antagonist Omura, who despite his ruthlessness and corrupt accumulation of economic wealth regardless of the impact on his country, survives the battle with the samurai as a hybrid representative of the imperialist/capitalist model that remains intact at the end of the film and is disseminated as the more sophisticated model to follow.

In *Avatar*, the ‘noble’ and ‘harmonious’ nature of the Omaticaya tribe is shown through their ability to apparently live peacefully with neighbouring tribes and also, more interestingly, with nature. Their way of life does not apparently affect or degrade the eco-system and environment of Pandora and when they do have to kill, the Na’vi express regret at having to do so and utter words of prayer before ending the lives of their prey. Edwards though, does not fail to observe that the Omaticaya appear to have domesticated some of the ‘animals’ on Pandora and feels that this is perhaps at odds with the portrayal of the harmonious world that director James Cameron attempts to portray.¹⁵⁸ The Na’vi also seem quite willing to engage in mass murder in order to achieve their goals of purging Pandora of the colonisers. Nevertheless, the Na’vi, like the samurai and the Sioux, appear as a manifestation of a romanticised desire for a contemporary US society to return to an idealised, pre-industrial, non-materialistic era (which it can be strongly argued has never existed and is in all possibility, the culmination of centuries of Orientalist-style fabrications created in the Western mind) wherein which past societies were in touch with nature, living in peace and impervious to the stresses of life.¹⁵⁹ They are in binary opposition to the values and agendas of the human mining corporation who it could be said, represent everything wrong with a 21st century post-industrial society that has come to symbolise monetary greed, attachment to material possessions and an over-dependence on fossil fuels. In *Avatar* - through Sully, *The Last Samurai* through Algren and in *Dances With Wolves* through Dunbar, the “liberal position” are able to maintain an awareness of how society ‘should be’ and therefore feel they are absolved of the guilt of participating in imperialism’s practices

¹⁵⁸ 2010:p37

¹⁵⁹ Referring here to the 1950s and 60s

and exploitation. But, such is the strength of imperial corporatism that it controls almost every aspect of modern day life in the US and has ‘trapped’ even the “liberal position,” and for that reason the self-affirmation seen on Hollywood screens in such movies along with perhaps other examples in ‘everyday life’ such as Fairtrade produce and various 3rd world fundraising events such as “Comic Relief” appear to be the limits of what can be afforded. Needless to say, the empathies of the “liberal position” audience lay - like Sully - with the ‘noble’ Na’vi. To substantiate this, Cameron employs the function of characters like helicopter pilot, Trudy Chacon who, despite never meeting with the Na’vi, is appalled at the inhumanities of the mining corporation’s treatment towards them and after the destruction of the Omaticaya’s home she subsequently ‘defects’ from the mining corporation’s mercenary army and fights in the Na’vi’s defence during the final battle.¹⁶⁰ Traditional imperialist dichotomies still remain though and the Na’vi, whilst ‘noble’ are still confined to Otherness and in keeping with conventional discourses cannot show Western society the way to self-affirmation themselves; bound by their paradigmatical constructs, they still hold too many shortcomings. Their resistance to (and lack of) technological advancement, over reliance on an intangible spiritual world and their overall naivety (as shown in their confused response to the human attack on their home) requires that it is up to Sully, not the Na’vi, to bring the “liberal position” back from the place in which it has been lost. The Na’vi’s role in *Avatar* exists only as a symbol of where the “liberal position” wishes to be and in keeping with predictable time-honoured narratives; the Other remains unable to lead the Self to this point itself.

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix (vii) p90

Otherised women also play their role in the overall colonial underpin of each film, as discussed in 2.2, Sully plays his typical colonialist role as the ‘masculine redeemer of the wilderness’¹⁶¹ as does Neytiri, Sully’s love interest, in her subordinate position to him. Interestingly, a break with colonial discourse could be identified in her individualism and the way in which she rejects the ‘traditions’ of the Omaticaya tribe in preference of her relationship with Sully, her proactive approach to defending “Hometree” during the mining corporation’s attack where she herself confronts the enemy and most interestingly kills white, masculine Colonel Quaritch. The “imperial gaze”¹⁶² or “colonialist’s fantasy”- described by Hunter as the ‘repression and regulation of the native woman enacted within the romance narrative’¹⁶³ - is evident in Neytiri. Hunter discusses the colonisers need to ‘civilise and Christianise the native woman’¹⁶⁴ in order to appease ambivalent anxieties concerning masculinity as a key feature of this discourse and, in addition to these three films, a prominent example of this presents itself in Disney’s *Pocahontas* (Gabriel and Goldberg, 1995), in which British settler John Smith falls in love with the “beautiful, innocent” native girl Pocahontas after she saves him from her father’s plan to kill him. Neytiri, firstly in her relative beauty and athletic appearance - of which it could be argued is a reflection of contemporary Western attitudes towards appearance - encapsulates the conventional narrative but secondly, and more interestingly, compared with the Taka in *The Last Samurai* and Stands With A Fist in *Dances With Wolves*, Neytiri is not the traditional ‘passive’ Other in her relationship with Sully. On the contrary, she is able to hunt, fight and as mentioned above, also appears to defy the Omaticaya’s customary traditions on

¹⁶¹ Shohat (1997:p32)

¹⁶² Kaplan (1997:p56)

¹⁶³ 2001:p4

¹⁶⁴ 2001:30

mating in favour of a relationship with Sully. By turning her back on an arranged ‘marriage,’ it can be said that Neytiri displays the kind of feminine individualism that can be linked back to the 1970s US feminist movement as discussed by Kaplan;¹⁶⁵ her position in the conventional “colonialist’s fantasy/male gaze” paradigm is ultimately confirmed in her romance with Sully; his “strong heart”¹⁶⁶ impresses her and Neytiri’s recognition of Sully as the leader of the tribe ultimately affirms her subordination. In *The Last Samurai*, Taka plays a more ‘customary’ role as the ‘veiled woman’ who ‘mirrors the mystery of the Orient’¹⁶⁷ particularly in her ultra-feminine conservatism and passive behaviour towards Algren; her fetishisation within the “imperial gaze”¹⁶⁸ is portrayed at first through numerous point-of-view shots where Algren continually observes her only from half-closed sliding doors before Zwick eventually ‘reveals’ her figure as Algren himself ‘penetrates’ the culture of the village.¹⁶⁹ Her function as the colonialist’s fantasy¹⁷⁰ is completed when, as mentioned, Algren returns to the village at the end of the film to assumedly begin a relationship with her. The situation in *Dances With Wolves* is more interesting; Costner’s decision to cast the character of Stands With A Fist as an adopted white woman makes an analysis of her function within colonial discourse more difficult. Despite initially being scared of and nervous around Dunbar, the two eventually fall in love and marry, the colonialist’s fantasy paradigm is fulfilled when Dunbar takes her away with him at end of the movie but the fact that Stands With A Fist is not a conventional ‘native’ reflects, in the view of this paper, the conservative

¹⁶⁵ 1997:p.xvii

¹⁶⁶ Cameron (2009)

¹⁶⁷ Shohat (1997:p32)

¹⁶⁸ Kaplan (1997:p56)

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix (viii) p90

¹⁷⁰ Hunter (2001:p4)

political opinions of Costner as discussed in 2.2.¹⁷¹ It can be suggested that Costner's inclination to write in *Stands With A Fist* as white character is more an indication of personal preference than any kind of break with Otherness representation. The marriage of two white individuals rather than that of an interracial marriage of which it could be claimed, may undermine conservative opinions of the US right, and sits far more comfortably with the more conservative movie going audience of Republican USA.

¹⁷¹ As discussed in 2.2, Kevin Costner was a supporter of the Republican Party and in 1990; made financial donations to Republican senator Phil Gamm.

2.4 CONSIDERATIONS OF OTHER THEMES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE COLONIAL UNDERPIN OF THE FILMS

There are a number of other varying factors that contribute to the overall colonial/imperial discursive constructs in all three films. The images in which the viewers of *The Last Samurai* are presented with of the port city of Yokohama, the principle urban space in the film, and the old *Yushino* prefecture wherein Katsumoto's countryside village is located,¹⁷² fit neatly into typical postcolonial theoretical portrayals of spatial boundaries. Indeed, in relation to binary dichotomies of space,¹⁷³ the impressive scenic backdrop of *Yushino* prefecture in *The Last Samurai* appears to illustrate 'modern Western society's craving for non-industrial authenticity'¹⁷⁴ as well as the more conventional "land of adventure" paradigm, typical in Western literature and film, of which George Orwell discusses:

*[In these novels] adventures only happen at the ends of the earth, in tropical forests, in Arctic wastes, in African deserts...everywhere, in fact, except the places where things really do happen.*¹⁷⁵

Orwell's assertion can be supported in consideration of similar contemporary Hollywood features such as *Congo* (1996), *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Verbinski 2003) and the *Indiana Jones* series (Spielberg 1981, 1984, 1989, 2008) wherein the backdrop to these adventures is 'the Amazon,' the 'deepest African jungle' or the 'ends of the

¹⁷² The film was shot almost entirely in New Zealand except for some close up street shots of Yokohama that were filmed in California, USA. Views of Mt. Fuji were superimposed CGI.

¹⁷³ Said (1994:p61)

¹⁷⁴ Thomas (2005:p461)

¹⁷⁵ Gollancz (1940:np)

Earth.’ In *Avatar*, exoticism is the over-arching theme of Pandora whose comparisons with the Brazilian Amazon or the Congo Rainforest are wholly apparent and presumably not coincidental.¹⁷⁶ In *Dances with Wolves*, the vast, empty terrain of South Dakota is continually presented in extreme wide panoramic shots to highlight the contrast between present-day USA – perceivably dominated by industrialised cityscapes or farmed countryside - and the untouched, untamed, natural environments that existed “beyond” the frontier at the time of the American Civil War.¹⁷⁷ In *The Last Samurai*, upon his capture by the Katsumoto’s samurai clan, Algren’s departure from “coloniser/colonised”¹⁷⁸ space is disseminated to the audience by a number of overlapping panoramic scenes of the clan slowly moving through the *Yushino* countryside on horseback; the distance they have travelled is signified by Mount Fuji moving further into the horizon as the shot changes. It signals Algren’s entry into the “land of his adventure” to the audience. It may be argued that for the novelistic hero’s emancipation, a complete removal from both “coloniser” and “colonised” space is required; moving into “colonised” space alone cannot be considered an adequate discursive detachment from the familiarity of the Self’s space, particularly for the “liberal position” and their desire for non-industrial authenticity. Complete removal from that space vis-à-vis Yokohama to a third space (a.k.a. the land of adventure: *Yushino*) ties in well with the novelistic hero notion who, in leaving colonial space is ‘permitted’ the adventure which ultimately leads to his emancipation. In *Avatar*, Sully rejects the coloniser space of the industrial mining base for the Na’vi’s ‘hometree’ in order to realise himself and in *Dances With Wolves*, Dunbar moves beyond the solitary

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix (ix) p91

¹⁷⁷ See Appendix (x) p91

¹⁷⁸ See Memmi (1965:pp.10-18)

outpost of Fort Sedgewick into the ‘third space’ of ‘untamed America, beyond the frontier.’ In Yokohama, the base from which ‘civilised, modern’ Japan is being constructed, exists Memmi’s “colonised/coloniser” binary of which Bhabha’s elaborates: ‘the strategic function [of colonial discourse] is the creation of a space for a “subject people” through the production of knowledges.’¹⁷⁹ Said also discusses a similar binary notion that he terms “metropolitan space” and “colonial space.” Metropolitan space is occupied by the colonisers and is denoted by what Said describes as ‘socially desirable, empowered space.’¹⁸⁰ Colonial space, of course, belongs to the subaltern or Other. The manifestations of the two different kinds of space can be both physical and mental; physical in relation to the ‘civilised’ order of metropolitan space which is always in binary opposition with the disorder and decay of colonial space; and mental in the spaces that exist in the psychological constructs and attitudes of the people involved in the colonial or imperial process. In Yokohama scenes in *The Last Samurai*, metropolitan or colonised space belongs mentally, to the “white experts...hired to train the army”¹⁸¹ in the form of characters Colonel Bagely, Sergeant Gant, Algren himself, British interpreter Simon Graham and the hybridised Omura. Physical metropolitan space is disseminated in the Imperial Palace where the Emperor, explicitly under the control of the US imperialist agenda vis-à-vis Omura, resides. Physical colonial space is firstly, filled by generic crowds of Others, who exist as an important necessity in structuring Orientalist or colonialist spatial narratives,¹⁸² and secondly by a ‘spatial structure indicative of decay and a descent into urban squalor that is contrasted with the

¹⁷⁹ 1994:p70

¹⁸⁰ 1994:p61

¹⁸¹ Zwick (2003)

¹⁸² For good examples of generic crowds of Otherness see Lean’s *A Passage to India* (1984), Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) and Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

orderly and rational form of European/North American cities.’¹⁸³ The spatial binary discourse in *The Last Samurai* is primarily exposed upon Algren’s arrival to Yokohama when he steps off the ship and is greeted by Graham; the generic crowd of Others blend into the background and almost become part of it as interpreter Simon Graham greets Algren.¹⁸⁴ Next, as they travel in a pulled-rickshaw through the city’s busy streets, the polarity of colonised Yokohama compared with familiar metropolitan space (of the coloniser) is accentuated through the dissemination of ‘exotic’ Japan; shots of Geisha, street vendors and the ‘Oriental’ architecture of the nearby houses.¹⁸⁵ In fact, Yokohama itself appears to be one of the first locations in Japan in which the spatial binary appears to have materialised; confirming the advent of US imperialism, as Graham informs:

*Twenty years ago this was a just a sleepy little town...in fact the ancient and the modern are at war with the soul of Japan.*¹⁸⁶

It can be argued that the “modern” refers to the US and European colonisers and their establishment of Bhabha’s discourse¹⁸⁷ and the “ancient” are those who are waiting to be ‘civilised.’ Interestingly though, in *The Last Samurai* there exists a group of willing ‘natives’ who appear to comfortably embrace the coloniser’s ‘civilising’ agenda, the samurai on the other hand, in their paradigm as noble savage Others, of course reject this. In *Avatar*, coloniser space manifests itself in the images of the mining corporation’s base. Although (ultra)-modern and ordered, it has prevailing industrial and military overtones; smoke emanates from giant chimneys and industrial machines

¹⁸³ Horton (2007:p134)

¹⁸⁴ See Appendix (xi) p92

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix (xii) p92

¹⁸⁶ Zwick (2003)

¹⁸⁷ 1994:p70

mine the landscape; this compared with the thriving, lush colourful images in which Pandora is illustrated. In consideration of the base as a imagined space of the future with regards to Yokohama, Yushino and Union-controlled America (in *Dances*) as deceptions of an idealised past, it could be said that it represents an anxiety with regards to the negative potential of global capitalism; this future society although technologically advanced (to be expected as it is a representation of the Western Self's technological superiority), it has become too reliant on industrialisation and fossil fuel mining at the cost of environmental degradation. Outside the base exists Zizek's "fetish" – where the "liberal position's" desire for a non-industrial, unpolluted environment undamaged by industrial practice, lays.

Parker Selfridge, head of administration for the mining corporation on Pandora in *Avatar*, is partly responsible for the destruction of colonised land. Selfridge shows displays of humanity but is persistently under pressure from the faceless authoritative corporate shareholders back on Earth to continue aggressively mining the planet for "unobtainium" at any cost. This is portrayed to the audience through the line: 'Killing the indigenous looks bad, but there's one thing shareholders hate more than bad press and that's a bad quarterly statement.' The line shows a keen rejection of capitalist ideologies from Cameron and the reaction that the line supposes from the audience also signifies a desire to align *Avatar* with 'liberal positional' views. Selfridge has a keen interest in golf and seems more concerned with improving his swing than resolving the 'humanitarian' issues on Pandora. What makes this character particularly interesting in consideration of this analysis compared with the many characters throughout all three films is that it appears he has *consciously* chosen to subscribe to imperialist/capitalist

discourse and uses this to justify his role in the continuation of the mining project on the planet. A good example presents itself when he is trying to be dissuaded from authorising the attack on the Omaticaya's home and he exclaims: 'They're fly-bitten savages who live in a tree! Look around...I see a lot of trees, they can move!'¹⁸⁸ The attitude is in contrast to the previous scene where he is shown slumped in his office chair looking reflectively at a lump of "unobtainium," which appears to indicate that there is some humanity left in him but the corporate culture which now rules this future society has become too powerful, leaving him with no choice but to go ahead with the attack. His love of golf and ideological allegiance to imperialism and capitalism seem to be more of a distraction and diversion to his own inner guilt at having to authorise the deaths of the Na'vi. Societal self-reflection is evident in Selfridge as the scene alludes to a contemporary world system that is losing its humanity and prioritises capitalist gain over humanitarian issues; the mining corporation back on Earth (who are not depicted in the movie) seem to be more concerned with their profits than the death of thousands of Na'vi and are seemingly able to sanction such a massacre without society on Earth either (1) caring; because they too have lost their humanity and possibly consider the utilisation of the resource for their daily lives on Earth more important; or (2) are unable to protest the attack because their apathetic indifference during the initial rise of these conglomerate corporations (possibly beginning in the 21st century present) has left them powerless and unable to stop them in this future. Whatever the scenario, in contrast to the idea that US contemporary society has morally lost it's way, considering the case of Selfridge, it seems to point to a scenario where, although currently dominant, there may be still some time for a "liberal position"-led society to prevent corporate capitalism

¹⁸⁸ Cameron (2009)

from becoming too powerful, the West now finds itself at a crossroads in terms of which road to go down: humanism or capitalism; a chance to stop future situations of this type from becoming beyond societal control completely. The recent occupy protests around the world and perhaps more significantly, a change in the attitude of media attention towards a more negative portrayal of wealthy and elite individuals and organisations could be cited as possible examples of mass-society in the West attempting to take back some measure of control from corporatism.

Allegories to the environmental destruction that capitalism brings is a prominent theme in each film, the samurai, the Na'vi and the Sioux in binary opposition to consumerist/capitalist society are of course, able to sustain self-efficiency in their manipulation of their respective eco-systems and are completely absolved of any kind of responsibility from localised environmental damage. In *Dances With Wolves* and *The Last Samurai*, the looming impact of environmental damage from the expansion of US imperialism is represented carefully so that the audience can be certain of the polluting Self/non-polluting Other binary. A good example involves the buffalo in *Dances* where, after Dunbar alerts the Sioux to their presence on the plain, he goes together with them the following day but find the carcasses of the skinned animals strewn across the plain in between whisky bottles with wagon tracks leading away from the scene and into the distance,¹⁸⁹ Dunbar narrates to the audience as the camera pans the despondent faces of the Sioux:

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix (xiii) p93

Who would do such a thing? The field was proof that it was a people without value or soul, with no regard for Sioux rites. The wagon tracks leading away left no doubt and my heart sank as I knew it could only be white hunters. Voices that had been joyous were now as silent as the dead buffalo left to rot in this valley, killed only for their tongues and the price of their hides.¹⁹⁰

Costner here and throughout the film (even as he hunts with the Sioux and kills buffalo himself) conveniently absolves the Sioux from any cruel motive in their hunting of the buffalo and attributes and more darker motivation of ruthless monetary gain to the white hunters who seemingly have no consciousness in their slaughter of the animal. For added effect, Costner includes a shot of a recently orphaned calf hopelessly tending to its dead mother.¹⁹¹ The empty whisky bottles also further criminalize ‘white society’ for its decadence and disrespect for the environment, Baird¹⁹² concurs with the statement also.¹⁹³ The scene is undoubtedly an allegory of contemporary environmental damage caused by industrial excess, of particular significance is *Dances With Wolves* release only six years after the discovery of major ozone layer depletion over Antarctica and the southern hemisphere¹⁹⁴ partially caused by excessive use of the man-made chemical compound ‘chlorofluorocarbon’ (CFC). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s in media scientists and academics were debating the level of impact that industrialisation was noticeably beginning to have on the Earth’s environments and deliberations on these arguments greatly impacted discursive thought on environmental awareness culminating

¹⁹⁰ Costner (1990)

¹⁹¹ See Appendix (xiv) p93

¹⁹² 1998:p164

¹⁹³ Baird also discusses the same scene in his analysis of the film. See Baird, Robert (1998), *Going Indian: Dances With Wolves*. In: Rollins and O’Connor, *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, pp.154-164.

¹⁹⁴ Gutierrez (2012:np)

in the signing of the Kyoto agreement in 1997 by many of the world's countries except the USA and a few others.¹⁹⁵ In *Avatar*, environmentalism is a major theme that runs throughout the movie. In contrast to *Dances* and *The Last Samurai* set in the late 19th century, *Avatar* is set in the 22nd century and as a sci-fi film, acts 'as a negotiation of the extreme anxieties induced by human-created technologies that increasingly threaten to exceed or even supercede human control.'¹⁹⁶ In the future that Cameron presents, humans are in control of technology but seem to have lost control of the power of corporatism, which has in response to human demand for unobtainium seemingly replaced the nation state as a principle form of authority. On Earth, respect for the environment has also seems to have been lost, emphasized when Sully, in prayer, communicates to "Ewha": '...the world we come from, there's no green there. They killed their mother and they're gonna do the same here.'¹⁹⁷ Cameron also recognises anxieties of the "liberal position" regarding the role of capitalism and the effect that mass-production and consumption has on the environment; he partly manifests Pandora and the Na'vi as the "fetish"¹⁹⁸ to which the audience are able to articulate their anxieties. For example, in their pre-industrial state, the Na'vi way of life does not affect or degrade the eco-system and environment of Pandora and when they do have to kill wildlife, the Na'vi express regret at having to do so and utter words of prayer before ending the lives of their prey. This, like the Sioux in *Dances*, absolves them of the immorality of arbitrary killing in the eyes of the audience. They also do not engage in mass or inane killing of wildlife, this is in contrast to what the mining corporation

¹⁹⁵ See Hess (2007:pp.87-122) and Curran (2006:pp.105-126) for discussions and arguments on the impact of human industrialisation on the environment.

¹⁹⁶ Langford (2005:p195)

¹⁹⁷ Cameron (2009)

¹⁹⁸ Zizek (2009:p65)

appear to be prepared to do without guilt in pursuit of economic gain, as do the whisky-drinking buffalo killers in *Dances* and the expansionist Americans in *The Last Samurai*. Indeed, degradation of the environment because of human development and institutional greed are recurring themes in *Avatar* director James Cameron's films; the development of the Skynet computer system by US military which subsequently becomes self-aware and manipulates a nuclear war in the *Terminator* films (1984, 1991) and the murder cover-ups by the LAPD in Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995)¹⁹⁹ are prominent examples. Indeed Hamaker, in discussion of *Avatar*'s corporate and military message, links the movie to current US occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan and says that 'Cameron cribs terminology from the ongoing war on terrorism and puts it in the mouths of the film's villains ... as they "fight terror with terror." Cameron's sympathies, and the movie's, clearly are with the Na'vi - and against the military and corporate men.'²⁰⁰ Cameron himself has supported Hamaker's assessment in an interview with industry magazine *The Wrap* wherein he stated his personal opposition to American incursions in Iraq and Afghanistan and explained that his opposition is disseminated in *Avatar*: '[It's] very much a political film...this movie reflects that we are living through war. There are boots on the ground, troops who I personally believe were sent there under false pretenses, so I hope this will be part of opening our eyes.'²⁰¹ Edward Zwick is also a prominent Hollywood director whose films have tended to focus on the ambiguity of authority and, more interestingly, the romanticisation of Otherness, in particular *Blood Diamond* (2006) in its depiction of Orientalised 'Africa' and the corrupt European diamond buyers in London and *Defiance* (2008), wherein the Other role is taken by the

¹⁹⁹ *Strange Days* was written by Cameron

²⁰⁰ 2009:np

²⁰¹ Lang (2010:np)

Polish Jewish population who are hunted by the ruthless Nazis. The novelistic hero²⁰² also appears in many of his films, Zwick has commented on this and states that their role in his features ‘speaks to the human potential in all of us. I’m not interested in supermen; I’m interested in ordinary men.’²⁰³ In consideration of this, familiar colonialist discourse can be observed in a number of Zwick’s films wherein which ordinary heroes tend to liberate or free the Other; in *Blood Diamond* it is through white African Danny Archer that Solomon Vandy’s family is saved, in *Glory* (1989), Robert Gould Shaw liberates the African slaves and in *Defiance* the lead character ‘Tuvia,’ is played by non-Jewish British actor Daniel Craig who defends ‘his people’ from the Nazis.

The setting of the films is important in the over-arching discursive underpin of each feature and the way in which filmic backgrounds are presented in their Otherness has changed under neo-colonialism. In consideration of the history of representations of the ‘East’ and ‘lands of adventure’ wherein Other landscapes were spaces to be avoided, now they symbolise spaces in which selected individuals (the novelistic hero) go to ‘escape’ the trappings of ‘modern life.’ It can be put forward that Pandora, Yokohama, Yushino prefecture and the land beyond the frontier in *Dances With Wolves* exist in the land of adventure paradigm suggested by George Orwell as discussed above;²⁰⁴ their primary function is to discursively distance themselves from familiar urban landscapes of the industrial West and consequently sustain and support their contrasting

²⁰² IMDb (2012:np)

²⁰³ Wertz (2009:np)

²⁰⁴ Gollancz (1940:np)

‘exoticism.’²⁰⁵ The novelistic hero is then further venerated because of his ability to firstly survive, tame and finally achieve emancipation in these environments. The protagonists of all three films initially struggle to utilise and understand their terrain but quickly adapt and learn how to physically and mentally exploit it. A good example of this in particular is the speed in which Sully learns to manoeuvre himself around the Na’vi’s space “hometree.” As stated, despite their eventual apparent explicit rejection of the ideals of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist models through their embracing of the ‘going native’ paradigm, Sully, Algren and Dunbar all begin each of their stories as ‘cogs in the wheel’ so to speak, of those models. Among other disseminating factors such as guilt with regards to past actions, superior intelligence and a sense of destiny; the role of ‘one-dimensional, exaggerated renditions’²⁰⁶ of racist military white hate figures serves to further distance Sully, Algren and Dunbar from any responsibility for their actions in supporting the agendas of the models they belong(ed) to. Rieder discusses the role of Colonel Quaritch as well as Koobus Venter in *District Nine* (Blomkamp 2009) and the parodic portrayal of Adolf Hitler in *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino 2009) and the way that the ‘functionality of these characters overrides considerations of realistic or plausible representation’²⁰⁷ so as they exist as a symbol of hatred for audiences or a ‘scapegoat’ for the brutal acts of capitalism and colonialism. The purpose of Colonel Bagely who ‘did what he had to do’ on the battlefield with Algren in *The Last Samurai* and ‘has no remorse’ for it²⁰⁸ and Spivey in *Dances With Wolves* who bears an irrational hatred towards Indians and Dunbar too for his loyalty to them, can be added to the same functionary list as Quaritch, Venter and Hitler who Rieder further

²⁰⁵ Nadel (1997:p184)

²⁰⁶ Rieder (2011:p46)

²⁰⁷ 2011:p46

²⁰⁸ Zwick (2003)

hypothesizes are a 'repetitive attraction' for aggrieved audiences who ostracise these one-dimensional characters and their all consuming hatred for the Other. This 'draws upon a deep reservoir of popular resentment - whether about the environment, or crime, or the crumbling away of traditional values or the rewards and security (Western) society has promised its dutiful workers and citizens but has not delivered to them.'²⁰⁹ Indeed, this paper would concur with the statement and the previous point concerning their existence as a "fetish" for audiences in constructing a 'scapegoat' for colonialism and also (again in support of Zizek) as a convenient manifestation of blame so the viewer can continue enjoying 'the rewards of colonialism without the guilt.'²¹⁰ Colonel Quaritch is perhaps the most one-dimensional of white antagonists in each of the three films, he is the paradigmatic imperialist: ultra-masculine and militaristic, he appears to see the annihilation of the Na'vi as his primary mission on Pandora. His extreme, imperialist ideologies can be summarised when he says: 'Out beyond that fence every living thing that crawls, flies or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes...'²¹¹, he here consciously uses the Self/Other binary to divide a physical line between the [Self] humans and [the Other] Pandora. His psychotic hatred of the Na'vi is never clearly explained but what is obvious is that he is the most extreme embodiment of Rieder's 'scapegoat' idea amongst the three in each film. Such is his determination to exterminate the Na'vi he exclaims: 'It ain't over while I'm breathing!' before Neytiri kills him with an arrow at the climax of *Avatar*. Evidence of change in colonial discourse is evident here in Colonel Quaritch whose behaviour in *Avatar* would have been acceptable in past colonial cinema and perhaps even a reflection of the Self at the

²⁰⁹ 2011:p46

²¹⁰ In Rieder 2011:p47

²¹¹ Cameron (2009)

turn of the 20th century, but has become now unconscionable in the gaze of the “liberal position” whose colonial guilt is now being ‘exorcised’ to some degree, at least in contemporary film, by characters like Quaritch, Spivey and Bagely in their role as ‘scapegoats’ for colonialism and capitalism. It could be put forward that the role of these kinds of characters exists to deplore the brutal and ruthless acts of a colonial past/imperialist presence to a particular point but (further supporting Zizek’s notion of the “liberal position”) not beyond a level where US hegemony and imperialism itself is called into question.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Despite the critical and commercial successes of *Avatar*, *The Last Samurai* and *Dances With Wolves*, the imperialistic subtext and paradigmatic models therein maintain a continuation of colonial discourse from a post-colonial studies perspective. Examples shown in the dissertation from each film and the supporting arguments help provide clear linkages to ideas in post-colonial theory and help to realise the objectives set out in 1.2. Particularly prominent to this dissertation's objective justification is Žižek's idea of the "liberal position" (2009), a discursive construct that can be best described as an expression of a Euro-American society 'in search for its moral self' and one that holds ambivalent feelings towards the capitalist system to which it belongs. This ambivalence has manifested itself in various forms, one of which appears to be the way in which Hollywood tacitly disseminates the discursive dominance of imperialist and colonialist models in its films. The novelistic hero exists to affirm the Self in part by disconnecting himself from capitalist societies and absolving feelings of colonial guilt in the "lands of adventure"²¹² by 'going native.' The three 'heroes' begin each film of no use to the imperial mechanism they came from; Sully is disabled, Algren is an alcoholic and Dunbar is about to have his leg amputated but all are eventually able to 'bring the "liberal position" back' from where it has been lost by (temporarily) halting the expansion of imperialism and capitalism and leaving those people and lands untouched for a little while longer from the corruption, environmental devastation and immorality that capitalism brings with it. Viewing this with satisfaction, the "liberal position" are

²¹² Orwell in Gollancz (1940:np)

on the other hand, all too aware that the unflinching advance of the superior model of capitalism is continually claiming these native spaces. This in turn denotes the ‘going native’ paradigm a “fetish” in Zizek’s (and this dissertation’s) judgement.²¹³ Central to the “fetish” idea in this dissertation is the noble savage, represented by the Na’vi, the samurai and the Sioux Indians who embody ‘modern Western society’s craving for non-industrial authenticity.’²¹⁴ Despite the harmonious existence that the three groups have, they still hold a subordinate position in relation to the superior West. The appearance and actions of the groups as discussed in 2.3 also confirm their Otherness and evidence of ‘traditional’ colonialist imagery can be seen in the depiction of the collective Na’vi who appear as ‘classic native savages’ like those seen in colonial era art and literature. Arguments can also be made regarding all three film’s anti-colonial, anti-corporate and anti-globalisation themes and there is some evidence to make a substantial argument for each at face value, but a closer look reveals neo-colonialist discourse and a justification of the imperial and capitalist models at work. The deep-rooted, subconscious strength of colonial discourse supported by contemporary political narratives place each film within familiar colonialist/imperialist paradigms. The Others exist as a manifestation of “liberal position” desires to live more idealised ‘simpler’ ways of life that, it appears, have now been lost in the relentless race for material and monetary wealth. Much is to be learnt from their ways of life and values but the Others will not advance the cause themselves; in time-honoured narratives it is a product of the familiar capitalist and imperialist system a.k.a. Sully, Algren and Dunbar who are the individuals that lead (US) society back to the principled base from which it has strayed so far. It is important

²¹³ 2009:p65

²¹⁴ Thomas (2005:p461)

to dismiss romantic notions of returning to a pure or fixed origin before one is even able to begin to alter the course of the Self, never mind the continued stereotypical representation of the Other and until that time, in Hollywood at least, ‘the dynamics and asymmetrics of global power remain will continue to remain recognizably imperialist.’²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Thomas (2005:p454)

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5.0 APPENDICES

Appendix (i): Sully's 'novelistic hero' role sees an initial inability to ride these creatures quickly overcome as he learns to supercede the Omaticaya's skills.



Appendix (ii): Sully riding his 'Banshee.'



Appendix (iii): Sully's almost biblical destiny is pointed out to the audience as the sacred 'woodsprites' land on him to indicate his superiority over the Na'vi.



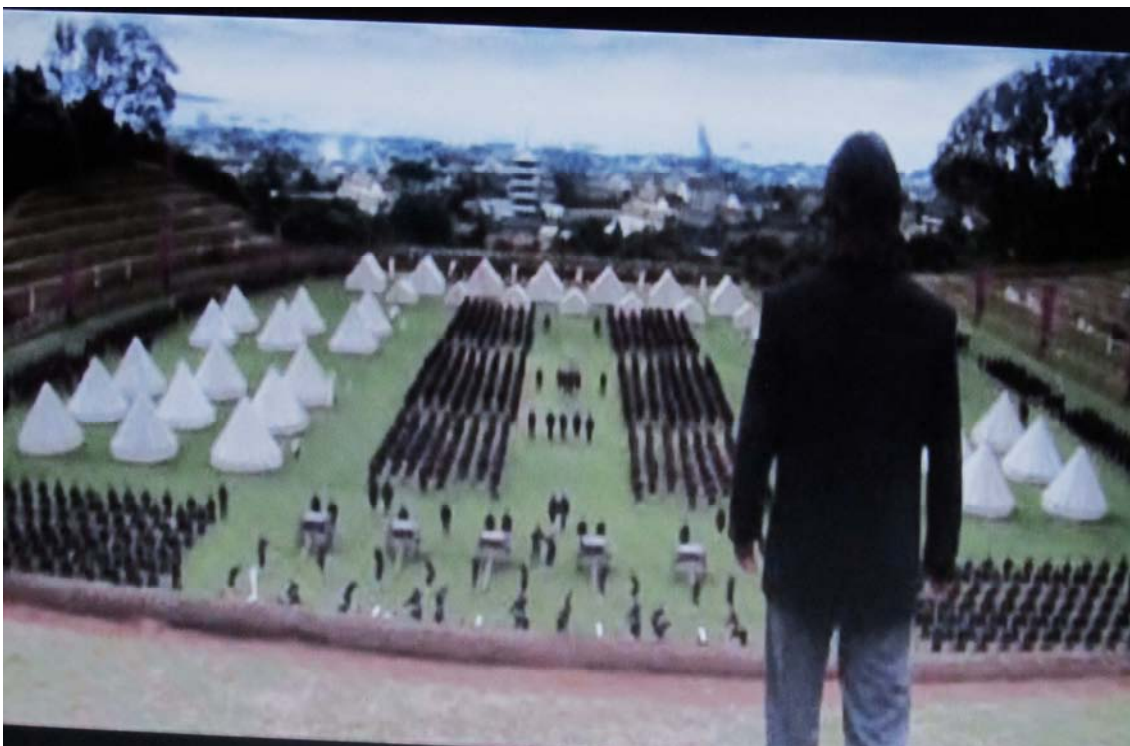
Appendix (iv): Sully bears the emblem of the Omaticaya tribe's leader as he personally sees off the imperialists in an act of 'colonial revenge.'



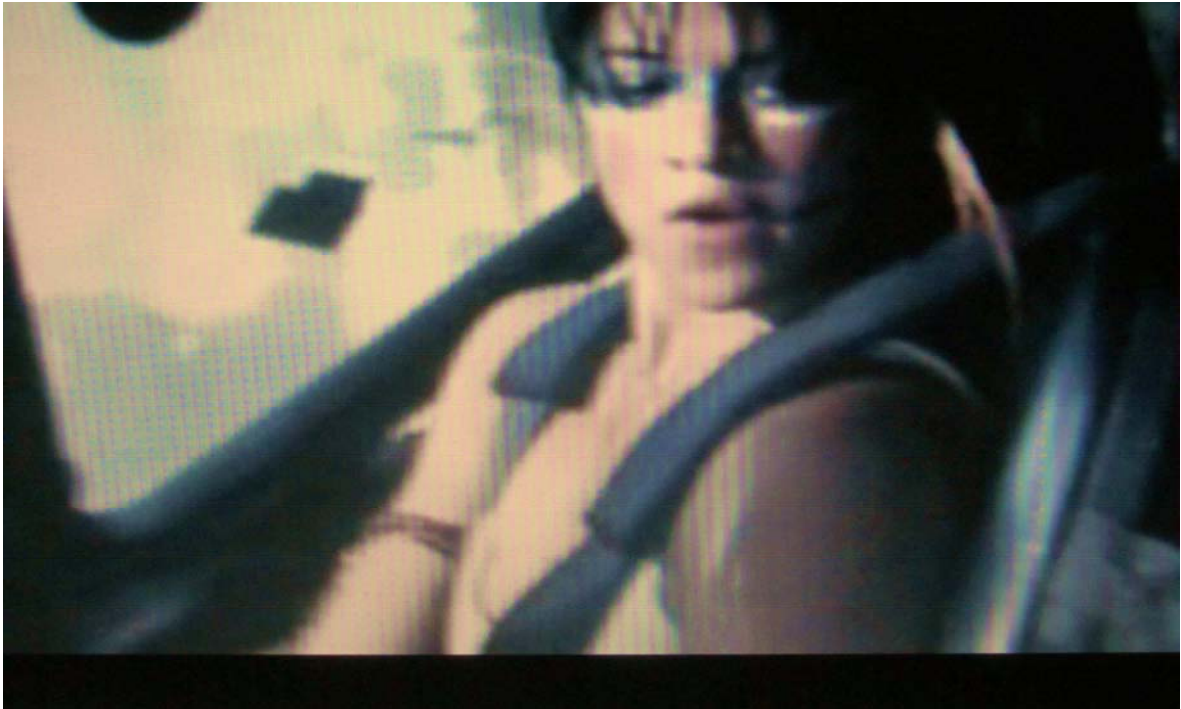
Appendix (v): The Sioux Indians following the superior Dunbar's techniques in hunting the buffalo.



Appendix (vi): Director Edward Zwick using an extreme pan wide shot to highlight the advancing efficiency of the Imperial Army under American guidance.



Appendix (vii): Trudy Chacon in Omanticaya war paint siding with the Na'vi.



Appendix (viii): Taka is slowly revealed to the audience as Algren ‘penetrates’ the samurai village.



Appendix (ix): Pandora's comparisons with an idealised' image of the Amazon.



Appendix (x): The untouched nature of pre-colonial USA.



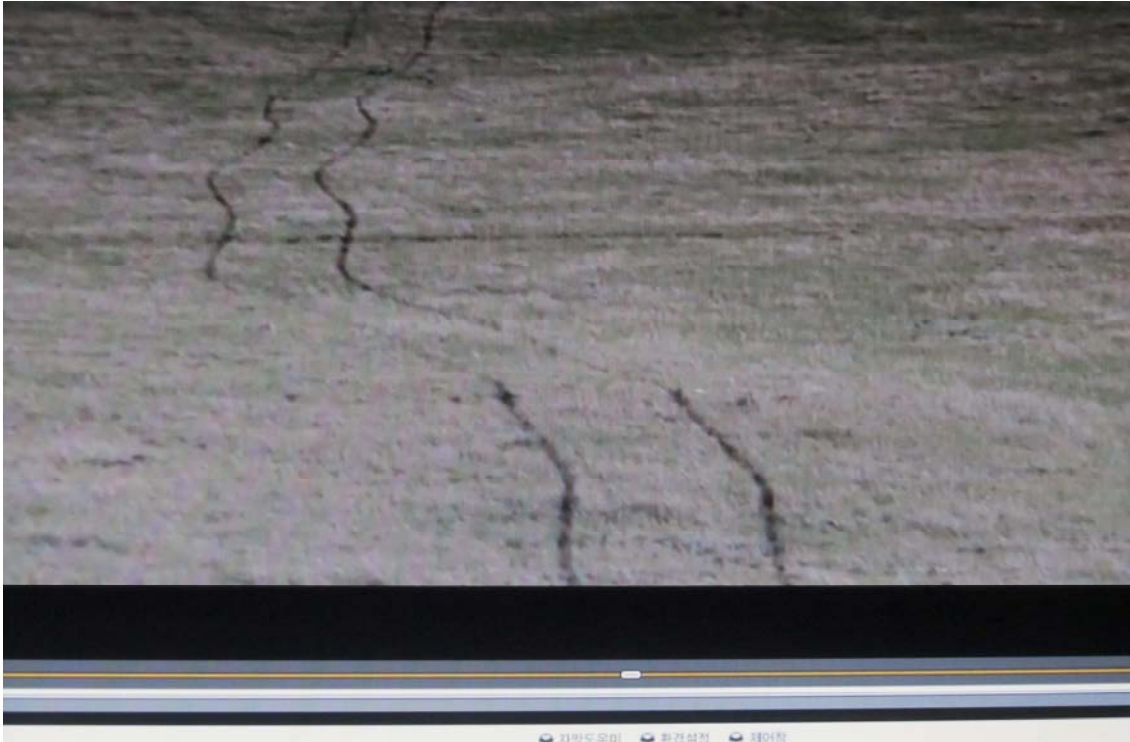
Appendix (xi): The Others of Fukuoka blend generically into the background as Graham greets Algren.



Appendix (xii): Orientalised, exotic Japan in *The Last Samurai*.



Appendix (xiii): Wagon tracks signifying imperial blame to the audience for the slaughter of ‘innocent’ buffalo.



Appendix (xiv): The orphaned baby buffalo that Costner has chosen to place in the scene to further criminalize imperialism’s immoral and inhuman nature.

