Hollywood's Other America: Neoliberalism, US Hegemony, and the Construction of an Imaginative Geography of the Americas in Contemporary US Film

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To the memory of my late father, friend, and mentor William E Smith
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the production of Latin America as a space in Hollywood films in the context of neoliberal hegemony and the shifting power relations of late capitalist globalization. Drawing on Edward Said’s notion of ‘imaginative geographies’ I examine the way in which Hollywood representations of Latin America have constructed a spatio-temporal imaginative geography of the Americas that structures US knowledge of Latin America, arguing that these representations form part of a neocolonial discourse that legitimates neoliberal economic expansion and direct US military or political intervention in Latin America. In contemporary US film, this geographic imaginary is produced through representations of Latin America as an undeveloped and primitive, alternatively utopian or dystopian, space. In this way, these films also tend to reproduce the Enlightenment ideology of history as a progressive, ordered whole – albeit in a new postmodern form that constructs a split-temporality in which history has ended for the West while the rest of the world is conceived of as still existing in the linear, progressive time of Enlightenment historical rationality – and spatialize this linear temporality, creating the US as the telos of historical development and Latin America as existing in a state of stunted development in a pre-modern historical era.
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Introduction
The recent passage of SB 1070 in Arizona\(^1\), and the popular support behind it, bespeaks significantly more than a realization of the urgent need for immigration reform, the line most often reiterated by the news media. In particular, the rhetoric of supporters of the act, and more generally of individuals and groups in support of more restrictive immigration policies and border enforcement, helps to illuminate a particular understanding that structures the debate on immigration. This rhetoric has effectively constructed undocumented immigrants as illegal invaders, a framing that invokes a vast array of stereotypes and popular images. These images and stereotypes, I would suggest, are not those confined to immigrants, those individuals who cross the US/Mexico border, but are rooted in the imagining of the space beyond that border from which these individuals come. This space, in turn, is not limited to Mexico but encompasses the whole of Latin America. In this context, popular support behind SB 1070 can be understood as emerging from a broad intertextual and interdiscursive network of images that has structured US imagining of the geographic region that has come to be known as ‘Latin America’ (itself, as we will later see, a Eurocentric construction). This imagining, of course, is in no way coincidental or innocent. Rather, it is implicitly linked to specific political interests, namely those of the United States in maintaining its hegemony in the Americas and in promoting the hemispheric and global spread of unregulated free market capitalism.

Another example will assist in highlighting the political interests involved in constructing this network of images. The image of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez in US political and media discourse has become that of a leader who is at once a power-
hungry, ruthless dictator who brutally represses the Venezuelan people and a laughably idiotic and backwards buffoon with delusions of grandeur. The caricaturing of Chávez in this way has obvious benefits for US economic power. Chávez, through nationalizing major industries and erecting protective trade barriers, has effectively closed off to US capital what would otherwise be an extremely lucrative market. Perhaps even more importantly, Chávez’s actions present a barrier to the expansive process of neoliberalization that the US has been actively promoting in Latin America since the early 1970s. The caricature of Chávez circulating in media and political discourse, however, is not spontaneously imagined and instrumentally deployed by politicians and corporate news organizations. As Stuart Hall reminds us, such discourses “do not constitute a closed system” but instead “draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, ‘definitions of the situation’ from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part” (509). Thus, the media’s image of Chávez can be understood as constructed out of a vast repository of images and figures associated with Latin America. Not only is this image already apparent in those of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in Andy García’s film The Lost City (2004) (to give just one of the most recent examples) or in the numerous fictional Latin American strongmen of espionage literature or Hollywood film, but it is more broadly the product of an imagining of Latin America that views the region alternately as an endless source of imminent threats to the US or as a hopelessly backward and undeveloped region in dire need of US intervention to bestow on it the gifts of modernization. This same network of images has been operating actively, as we will see, since long before the current era, but its circulation has
intensified significantly with the inception of US-led neoliberalization in Latin America, producing caricatures of leftist leaders like Chávez and Evo Morales, legitimating US military action in Latin America, and providing ideological justification for the expansion of US capital into the region. This popular imagining in the US of Latin America is, I will suggest, the product of a neocolonial discourse on Latin America, and in particular the representation of Latin America in Hollywood films, that has emerged out of a complex web of national, regional and global power structures and historical developments.

This study will explore the spatio-temporal representation of Latin America in Hollywood films in the context of neoliberal hegemony and the shifting power relations of late capitalist globalization. Drawing on Edward Said’s notion of ‘imaginative geographies’ I examine the way in which Hollywood representations of Latin America have constructed a spatio-temporal imaginative geography of the Americas that structures US knowledge of Latin America, arguing that these representations form part of a neocolonial discourse that legitimates neoliberal economic expansion and direct US military or political intervention in Latin America, particularly the series of interventions spanning from the US-supported overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile\(^2\) to the present. This neocolonial discourse, I suggest, is also intimately intertwined with the discourse of nationalism. Thus, the national imagining of the US becomes, within this interdiscursive formation, interlinked with a neocolonial hemispheric (and global) geographic imaginary, and US national identity is, as the shifting power structures of globalization threaten the centrality of the nation state, increasingly constructed in opposition to a Latin American Other. In Hollywood films, this geographic imaginary is produced through
representations of Latin America as an undeveloped and primitive, alternatively utopian or dystopian, space. In this way, these films also tend to reproduce the Enlightenment ideology of history as a progressive, ordered whole – albeit in a new postmodern form that constructs a split-temporality in which history has ended for the West while the rest of the world is conceived of as still existing in the linear, progressive time of Enlightenment historical rationality – and spatialize this linear temporality, creating the US as the telos of historical development and Latin America as existing in a state of stunted development in a pre-modern historical era.

In this study, I aim to make two interventions. The first is in the fields of US and Latin American film studies, in which there has been relatively little attention paid to the representation of Latin America in US film, particularly compared to the volume of work done on the representation of the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Asia. What studies do exist have either focused narrowly on specific historical instances or the representation of particular groups – as in the work of Jean Franco, James Dunkerley, Margarita de Orellana, and Edward Buscombe – or have examined these representations as constituting part of a more expansive Eurocentric discourse, as in the work of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam. The focus of this study will be both wider than the former, as I seek to explore the discursive construction of Latin America as a geographic space within a complex nexus of power relations and historical developments, and narrower than the latter, as I am interested in the historical specificity of the relationship between the US and Latin America in the neoliberal era. The second intervention is within the field of postcolonial studies, where the struggle between Marxism and poststructuralism has too often meant that scholars either focus on the material realities of colonialism at the expense of
discursive processes or attend solely to the discursive processes, neglecting the importance of economic realities. Here, in order to account for the historical complexities that have come to bear on the cinematic texts I analyze, I try to avoid either one of these reductions, instead seeking to explain how the discursive and material realities of (neo)colonialism have interacted and mutually transformed one another in historically particular ways. This endeavor necessitates, and I have tried my best to implement, an approach that is both multiperspectival, synthesizing insights from Marxist theory and more poststructuralist-oriented postcolonial theory, and interdisciplinary, incorporating contributions from film studies, political philosophy, critical geography, postcolonial literary studies, sociology, and anthropology, amongst other fields.

In chapter 1, my interest is in laying out a theoretical framework that will ground the rest of the work. Drawing on an interdisciplinary body of scholarship on both colonialism and late capitalist globalization, I argue that the construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas in contemporary US film must be understood within the context of shifting global power structures and the intensified expansion of global capital through the processes of global neoliberalization. However, rather than suggesting that these material processes somehow determine the discursive construction of Latin America, I maintain that these material and discursive processes are interrelated within what Walter Mignolo terms the ‘logic of coloniality’ and thus that the material and discursive production of Latin America as a geographic space are intricately interconnected. This interconnection, furthermore, is neither stable, nor is it dialectical; rather it is historically contingent. Thus, the construction of an imaginative geography of
the Americas is part of a contingent articulation of diverse political and economic interests and discursive constructs.

In chapters 2 and 3, I turn to an analysis of specific films spanning from the mid-80s to the present that are particularly indicative of cinematic representations of Latin America that have contributed to the construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas and thus have served to legitimate the hemispheric hegemony of the US and the power structures of a global neoliberal order. In chapter 2, I focus on the alternating construction of Latin America as utopia/dystopia in the films *Up* (dirs. Pete Doctor and Bob Peterson, 2009), *The Mission* (dir. Roland Joffe, 1986), *Quantum of Solace* (dir. Marc Foster, 2009), *Apocalypto* (dir. Mel Gibson, 2006) and *Desperado* (dir. Robert Rodriguez, 1995) as well as, more briefly, the significances of these utopian/dystopian images in *Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead* (dir. Sidney Lumet, 2007) and *Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee, 2005). This alternating utopian/dystopian imagining of Latin America can be understood as a product of the ambivalence, the simultaneous embrace and disavowal of the Other, that Homi Bhabha has identified in colonial discourse and that has structured European imagining of Latin America since the Spanish ‘discovery’ of the New World.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the emergence of a split-temporality in films that have, either through historical narrative – as in *Apocalypto* and *The Mission* – or a supernatural disruption of narrative temporality – as in *From Dusk till Dawn* (dir. Robert Rodriguez, 1996) and *The Ruins* (dir. Carter Smith, 2008) – attempted to deal with the threat of a colonial past that recent political and intellectual developments have insisted on the persistence of in the present. These films, in their efforts to reterritorialize a ‘past that is’
into a ‘past that was’, simultaneously insist on reproducing the image of a ‘pre-modern’ Latin America in the present while legitimating past colonization of the region as a force of historical progress. Another product of this split-temporality is a construction of the US/Mexican Border as serving as much as a marker of temporal division as it does one of spatial division. In *All the Pretty Horses* (dir. Billy Bob Thorton, 2000), the border becomes naturalized as a marker of absolute difference and its crossing signifies temporal movement, either backwards to a ‘pre-modern’ past in the original crossing to the South or forward to the ‘end of history’ in the return crossing to the North.

As a short note on the films I have selected to analyze in this work: the films I explore in the following chapters are those that I see as being most exhibitive of the particular tendencies in cinematic representations of Latin America that I have chosen to devote my attention to. The expansive time period that I have taken as my focus and the vast quantity of films produced in this period set (partially or in fully) in Latin America make a comprehensive study impractical if not impossible. However, I have attempted to select films representing as broad of a range of genres as possible in order to illustrate the pervasiveness of the dominant image of Latin America in US films and to show that this imagining cannot be reduced to a function of genre. Nevertheless, there are a few genres – the western (*Desperado, All the Pretty Horses*), the horror film (*From Dusk till Dawn, The Ruins*), and the historical epic (*The Mission, Apocalypto*) – that are more heavily represented here. This is because these genres are particularly well suited to constructing the spatial – in the case of the western – or temporal – in the case of the horror film and historical epic – imagining of Latin America. The spatial imagining of Mexico as frontier in the western has proved particularly potent in constructing the constitutive
binary oppositions (civilization/barbarism, modern/pre-modern, etc.) of the US neocolonial discourse on Latin America, while the temporal dimensions of the horror film and the historical epic, on the other hand, have allowed these films to engage with the colonial past in unique ways and to attempt the reterritorialization of this past I discuss in Chapter 3. All of the films I have chosen, as the title of the study suggests, are US productions (or US/UK co-productions) with the notable exception of *The Mission*, which is technically from the UK, although partially presented by the US-based Warner Bros. However, given the interconnectedness of the North American and British film markets, along with the frequent single-mindedness that characterizes US-British cooperation on matters of foreign policy and support for neoliberal globalization, I find *The Mission* to nevertheless be significant to this study both in terms of its thematic and tropic content and its embeddedness in particular political and economic power.

Finally, I envision this study as part of a political project committed to the contestation of the current global order constituted by neoliberal globalization and the hemispheric and global hegemony of the United States, and to the realization of an alternative future for global development. Thus, my political commitments are strongly aligned with those of the Global Justice movement and motivated by the belief that “another world is possible”⁴. Because of these commitments, my interest in this study is in uncovering the ways in which the dominant ideologies of the current order become inscribed in the cinematic texts that I analyze. Thus, I do not pretend to provide an authoritative or comprehensive reading of these texts (or to suggest that such a reading is even possible). Rather, I offer a reading that is highly situated and contingent, and I certainly do not reject the possibility that there are a range of other potential readings of
these texts. I do not believe, however, that these texts (nor any others for that matter) open themselves up to an unlimited range of potential readings. There are limits, I would argue, placed on potential readings by the encoding of the dominant Eurocentric logic in these films. In fact, the reader will, I believe, be able to glimpse these limits in my own reading.
Chapter 1: The Nation, Neoliberal Globalization, and Imaginative Geographies

The central project of this study is to interrogate the way in which Latin America has been constructed within a neocolonial and North American geographic imaginary in contemporary US cinema. My interest, then, broadly, is in the production of space as an operation of coloniality and the hemispheric hegemony of the United States. To better understand precisely what it means to speak of Latin America as a produced space, it is helpful to make use of Henri Lefebvre’s triadic conceptualization of space as existing in what he refers to as perceived, conceived, and lived space. Perceived space is space produced through daily or habitual activities, while conceived space refers to the consciously constructed, planned, and administered space of technical planners and engineers. Finally, lived, or representational, space is space mediated through imaginative ‘images and symbols’ (38-39). Understanding Latin America as a space necessitates the consideration of how this space is produced within the nexus of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. Lefebvre’s conceptualization thus helps to illuminate the way in which the space of Latin America is not a one-dimensional space but is rather the product of a complex set of interactions between intentional and unintentional processes and between real and imagined spaces.

In this regard, it is essential to realize that ‘Latin America’ is not a physical location (a place as opposed to a space), a label with a natural correspondence to some pre-existing physical entity. Rather, Latin America is, as Walter Mignolo has eloquently argued, an ‘idea’, a conceptual entity constructed out of the logic of coloniality, imagined from a eurocentric locus of enunciation. Mignolo points out that the ‘idea’ of Latin America depended upon that of ‘Latinidad’, an idea forwarded by French ideologues and
adopted by the Creole-Mestizo/a elite in Latin America (58). Thus, “‘Latin America’ is not so much a subcontinent as it is the political project of Creole-Mestizo/a elites,” one of the consequences of which was that:

it lifted up the population of European descent and erased the Indian and the Afro populations. Latin America was not – therefore – a pre-existing entity where modernity arrived and identity questions emerged. Rather, it was one of the consequences of the remapping of the modern/colonial world prompted by the double and interrelated processes of decolonization in the Americas and emancipation in Europe. (59)

Thus what it is important is not whether representations of Latin America are adequate to some ‘real’ entity called Latin America but rather how the idea of Latin America is constantly reproduced and reinscribed, and the racial power structures implicated in this idea elided, through this representational essentializing and totalizing construction of a space called ‘Latin America’ in the North American geographic imaginary. I do not want to suggest, however, that Latin America is solely a semiotic entity, a discursive construct of a colonial/imperial imaginary. Such an understanding would neglect the importance of perceived and conceived space. Furthermore, it would ignore the significant and dynamic economic and political processes that have shaped the geopolitical power relations of the current neoliberal global order and perpetuated conditions of underdevelopment in Latin America and thus my analysis would risk falling into the trap of privileging the discursive processes and marginalizing the material forces of (neo)colonialism that postcolonial theory much too often falls into. This tendency seems to have existed in postcolonial theory from its beginnings, and in this regard Said’s
**Orientalism**, as one of the seminal works of postcolonial theory, is an excellent example. Even though Said’s analysis of the discursive processes of colonialism and conception of ‘imaginative geography’, both of which I draw on heavily in this work, are brilliant and groundbreaking, he tends to ignore or downplay the material processes of colonialism, particularly the expansion of global capitalism, and its interrelation with discursive processes.

Instead, I want to suggest here that both discursive and material processes are interconnected in the production of Latin America as a geographic space. In understanding the interconnection of material and discursive realities in the logic of (neo)colonialism, it is helpful to draw on Mignolo’s discussion of the ‘logic of coloniality’, the colonial logic that “enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernization, and being good for everyone” (6). Mignolo argues that the logic of coloniality operates “through four wide domains of human experience: (1) the economic: appropriation of land, exploitation of labor, and control of finance; (2) the political: control of authority; (3) the civic: control of gender and sexuality; (4) the epistemic and the subjective/personal: control of knowledge and subjectivity” (11). Mignolo goes on to insist that “each domain is interwoven with the others” and thus it is impossible to understand coloniality without grasping the interrelation of the four domains. We can understand the first three domains (economic, political, and civic) through which, in Mignolo’s analysis, the logic of coloniality operates as referring to the material processes of colonialism – the expansion of global capitalism and consolidation of (neo)colonial power in the political and civic realms. The fourth domain (epistemic and subjective/personal), on the other hand,
designates the discursive processes of colonialism – the construction of Eurocentric knowledge and imaginaries and the production of the subjectivity of the colonized.

Conceptualizing these four domains as interwoven within the logic of coloniality thus forces us to understand the material and discursive processes of colonialism as intricately interconnected in ways that refuse the reduction of (neo)colonialism to one or the other realm. It is beyond the scope of this work to attempt to draw out all of the complex interrelations between the material and discursive realms in the production of Latin America. It will have to suffice here to identify the two most obvious and basic interrelations that are also central to my argument regarding the role of contemporary cinematic representations in the construction of Latin America. First, the discursive construction of Latin America has served, and continues to serve, to legitimate Western intervention and global capitalist expansion through the processes of neoliberalization.

Second, the material processes of global capitalism and the mechanisms of uneven geographic development that, as David Harvey notes, are constitutive of neoliberalism⁶, reproduce the economic and political power relationships that allow the West, and particularly the US, to maintain the privileged locus of enunciation from which it can ‘speak about’ Latin America. Note that I do not suggest these two interrelations exist in a dialectical relationship. While the two are of course intricately connected in the system of coloniality and US (and neoliberal) hegemony, their relationship is too complex and shifts too substantially across different historical moments to be reduced to a dialectical process. To broaden this assertion, then, it would likewise be extremely problematic to posit the relationship between material and discursive processes in general as constituting some kind of dialectic of (neo)colonialism. Rather, these linkages must be understood as
contingent articulations within particular historico-structural formations, a point to which
will we return later in this chapter. First, however, it is necessary to briefly trace the
material processes of global capital expansion responsible for the conditions of uneven
geographical development that have marked the material production of Latin America.

Global Capitalism and the Material Production of Latin America

While it has become popular to speak of the ‘globalization’ of capital as a relatively new
phenomenon, it is essential to understand that capitalism has always been to some extent
global. While advances in communication and transportation technologies in recent years
have dramatically sped the collapse of barriers to the free movement of capital, global
capitalism is a much older phenomenon. Furthermore, the development of global
capitalism cannot be understood independently of the historical development of
colonialism. Rather, as Aníbal Quijano argues, the development of global capitalism and
its constitutive power structures was in fact inaugurated by Spanish colonization of the
Americas. Quijano explains:

Insofar as that structure of control of labor, resources, and products consisted of
the joint articulation of all the respective historically known forms, a global model
of control of work was established with a capitalist character as well. Thus
emerged a new, original, and singular structure of relations of production in the
historical experience of the world: world capitalism. (184)

For Quijano, the constitution of a system of global capitalism consisted in the articulation
of all historical forms of labor and production in the pursuit of capital in the world market
(183-84). Thus, global capitalism from its inception as a hegemonic world system
involved mechanisms of uneven geographic development made possible by colonial
power structures, since the perpetuation of pre-capitalist forms of labor, in particular feudalism and slavery, in the periphery were necessary for the accumulation of capital and development of a modern wage-labor market in the center. Such an understanding of the historical development of global capitalism runs counter to the Enlightenment historical logic that conceives of time as a progressive, ordered whole and the conceptualization, shared by such radically different thinkers as Adam Smith and Karl Marx, of the development of capitalism as a stage in a one-directional and sequential development. Against this dominant logic, Quijano insists, “historical change cannot be linear, one-directional, sequential, or total. The system, or the specific pattern of structural articulation, could be dismantled; however, each one or some of its elements can and will have to be rearticulated in some other structural model” (202).

If we cannot, as Quijano suggests, conceive of the transition to modernity/colonialism as a linear development, then the transition from modernity/colonialism to the current neoliberal global order (what might be termed postmodernity/neoliberalism) also must be understood in terms of the rearticulation of previously existing elements in a new structural model (though within, as we will see, a less fundamental structural change). In particular, the system of global capitalism inaugurated by colonization of the Americas can be seen as persisting as the hegemonic system ordering global society in the present.

It is, I would suggest, most useful to conceive of the historico-structural change that constitutes the transition from modernity to postmodernity, or colonialism to neocolonialism/neoliberalism, as a continuation (and intensification) of global capitalist expansion (the economic domains) under a new configuration of global power relations
(the political and civic domains). This is not to suggest that these new power structures represent a total rupture from those that preceded them, but simply that there are significant discontinuities and emergent tendencies in this restructuring of geopolitical organization. Two of the most important (and interrelated) developments in this transition have been the decrease in the centrality of the nation-state within what Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri identify as the shift from an imperialist to an imperial mode of power and the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant economic logic of this new global order. Together these two developments have created the conditions under which the expansion of global capitalism has effectively intensified the divisions in the distribution of wealth between the center and periphery as well as between the upper and lower classes within both the center and periphery.

Globalization and ‘Network Power’

Hardt and Negri, in their book *Empire*, argue that the postmodern era has entailed a shift from a modern state-centered form of sovereignty and imperialist model of power to a decentralized postmodern form of sovereignty and imperial model of power, what they term ‘network power.’ The nation-state, Hardt and Negri suggest, which lay at the center of modern conceptions of sovereignty with their conceptions of bounded space, has within this new global order become just one among many nodes in a global network consisting of various supranational organizations (United Nations, International Monetary Fund, NGO’s, etc.), a network constituted by a form of imperial sovereignty with a fundamentally expansive conception of space as always open. The development of a global order characterized by ‘network power’ and imperial sovereignty has presented a form of political organization particularly well suited for the intensification of
global capitalist expansion, creating the conditions wherein “as the world market today is
realized ever more completely, it tends to deconstruct the boundaries of the nation-state.”
Whereas under the imperialist model, “nation-states were the primary actors in the
modern imperialist organization of global production and exchange,” today nation-states
“appear increasingly as mere obstacles” to the world market (150).

As Hardt and Negri suggest, this new form of power is specifically a product of the
historical development of US democracy and imperial expansion. Locating the
emergence of imperial sovereignty in the US constitution, they explain:

The American Revolution and the “new political science” proclaimed by the
authors of the Federalist broke from the tradition of modern sovereignty,
“returning to origins” and at the same time developing new language and new
social forms that mediate between one and the multiple. Against the tired
transcendentalism of modern sovereignty…the American constituents thought
that only the republic can give order to democracy, or really that the order of the
multitude must be born not from a transfer of the title of power and right, but
from an arrangement internal to the multitude, from a democratic interaction of
powers linked together in networks. (161)

Hardt and Negri go on to argue that a fundamental characteristic of this new concept of
sovereignty is “its tendency towards an open, expansive project operating on an
unbounded terrain” (165). Furthermore, as opposed to the tendency of European-style
imperialism to exclude, US expansionism operated through an inclusive form of
sovereignty that absorbed others into its productive multitude. It is this tendency that
explains the drive behind the US’s imperial expansion across the continent and ultimately
the expansion of ‘network power’ across the globe. However, Hardt and Negri note that this expansive and inclusive tendency continually ran up against a counter-tendency to fall into European-style imperialism, creating a paradox consisting in the coupling of “the open and expansive space of empire together with its continuous reterritorializations,” a tension that runs “throughout the articulation and establishment of imperial sovereignty in practice” (167). This tension becomes evident early in US history in the brutal subordination of the Native Americans who “could not be integrated in the expansive movement of the frontier as part of the constitutional tendency; rather, they had to be excluded from the terrain to open its spaces and make expansion possible” (170).

Of even more significance for the project at hand, though, is that Hardt and Negri identify another early manifestation of this tension and the resulting tendency of the US to resort to European-style imperialism in the establishment of the Monroe doctrine and US efforts to exercise control over Latin America. The Monroe doctrine, Hardt and Negri note, “was presented first and foremost as a defensive measure against European colonialism.” Thus, in the establishment of the doctrine, “the United States assumed the role of protector of all the nations of the Americans against European aggression” (177). Besides the general assumption by the US of the role of world policeman, we already see here, early in the 19th century, the nascent development of two characteristics that would later come to define the relationship between the US and its southern neighbors and thus the hemispheric hegemony of the US: the practice of political and military intervention in the affairs of Latin American countries by the US and the tendency of the US to justify these interventions through the imagining of its role as that of ‘protector or defender,’ acting in the best interest of the people of those countries. While the US did engage in
some instances of formal colonialism in the region following the Spanish-American war (Cuba and Puerto Rico), its hemispheric hegemony would become most pronounced in its tendency towards neocolonial interventions that began with the deployment of marines to Nicaragua in the 1920s – David Harvey marks this as the ‘paradigm case’ of a “more open system of imperialism without colonies” (27) – and continued to develop throughout the Cold War and into the present era. We will return to the tensions and contradictions that Hardt and Negri recognize in the development of imperial power in US history and their significance to current global developments shortly. First, however, it is necessary to briefly outline the transition to the present global order.

Given the genealogy of the imperial notion of sovereignty in the development of US democracy and expansionism, it is certainly not surprising that the US has survived as the major superpower of the present era. Nor is it surprising that the internationalism of this era and the constitution of global network power grew out of US attempts at establishing a truly international order. Hardt and Negri locate the emergence of this order in Woodrow Wilson’s adoption of “an internationalist ideology of peace as an expansion of the constitutional conception of network power” (174).

While persuasive, Hardt and Negri’s account of the transition to a global order characterized by network power is somewhat problematic in that it simultaneously neglects and overemphasizes the nation-state. Hardt and Negri overemphasize the centrality of the United States (and thus, ironically, the importance of a nation-state in a global order in which the nation-state has supposedly become obsolete) in this transition to the extent of ignoring (or at least downplaying) other global developments that have played a crucial role in this transition. Furthermore, their insistence on conceptualizing
Empire as a fundamentally deterritorializing force representing a rupture from the bounded notion of the nation-state leads them to neglect the continuing importance of the nation-state to the new global order. In supplementing Hardt and Negri’s analysis and addressing its shortcomings, John Kelly and Martha Kaplan’s account of the emergence of a global system of nation-states following WWII is particularly useful. While acknowledging the privileged position of the US in hegemonically defining the terms of this new global system, Kelly and Kaplan argue that the inception of the United Nations after WWII and the proceeding global dynamics of the decolonization of the European empires were crucial in the transition to the current era and the creation of a new global order. They point out that “since 1945 the local is framed by a different global: a global of formal horizontalities and symmetries (one nation-state one vote), and a civility based upon allegations about nature (human rights, needs, freedoms), not culture (or civilization)” (4). Thus, the post-WWII and decolonization period marked the beginning of a global circulation of primarily Eurocentric discourses on ideas such as democracy and human rights and the establishment of a world system founded on the idea of a global community of nation-states promoted by the UN. The process of decolonization entailed “the superimposition of something, the reconfiguration of local civil hierarchies into the terms of a new global plan for political order” (16). This conception of a new global order constituted by a world system of nation-states is not at all inconsistent with Hardt and Negri’s notion of a global order constituted by ‘network power.’ It simply insists on placing nation-states at a slightly higher level in the global hierarchy than that at which Hardt and Negri locate them. We can conceive of the current global order then as
representing a fundamentally new configuration of power while still recognizing that the nation-state serves as an important form of organization in this new order.

To return now to the tension between the deterritorializing imperial tendency and the reterritorializing imperialist tendency in the development of network power throughout the history of the US, we find here another particularly problematic aspect of Hardt and Negri’s analysis of the transition to the present global order. For Hardt and Negri, this is a tension that no longer exists in Empire as it has been resolved in favor of the deterritorializing tendency of imperial sovereignty. Specifically it was the US defeat in Vietnam that signaled for Hardt and Negri the “final moment of the imperialist tendency” in US history. They argue it was at this moment that “the path of European-style imperialism had become once and for all impassable, and henceforth the United States would have to both turn back and leap forward to a properly imperial rule” (178-179). This insistence on asserting the end of the tension between imperialist and imperial sovereignty leads Hardt and Negri into positing a complete rupture in the transition to a new global order. In this way, they fall into the same tendency shared by many theorists of postmodernity and globalization in that they fail to recognize significant continuities in the present historical moment. I would suggest instead that the tension between imperialism and imperialism that Hardt and Negri claim has been resolved in Empire in fact continues remarkably on a global scale. Nowhere is this tension more evident than in the growing hegemony of global neoliberalism, the development to which we now turn our attention.

Neoliberalism and Uneven Geographic Development
Perhaps the most prevalent and intensely studied aspects of the current global order and the various processes that have come to be signified by the term ‘globalization’ is the emergence on a global scale in the late 1970s of the new political and economic logic known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism refers essentially to the economic and political philosophy guided by the “assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey 7), and its growing international hegemony has actuated a process of global neoliberalization in which supranational organizations (such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO), multinational corporations, and the dominant Western nation-states (most notably the US) have pursued the development of a global free market, pressing for the opening of global trade and neoliberal reforms in developing nations. The primary goal of the neoliberal project, then, is to free capital from the constraints imposed on it by the system of ‘embedded liberalism’ that developed as the primary form of political-economic organization in the wake of WWII and that was focused on “full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens” and the deployment of Keynesian monetary policies to manage economic crises (10-11). The intellectual development of neoliberal theory began with the work of the Austrian philosopher Friedrich von Hayek and the creation of the Mount Pelerin Society in 1947 and grew to a position of influence within the academy with Milton Friedman (himself a founding member of the Mount Pelerin Society) and the ‘Chicago School’ in the US. These theorists posited the unregulated free market as the antidote to the ills of capitalism and the best engine for global development and freedom ().

However, there has always existed a tension between neoliberal theory and practice. Despite its claim to promote economic equality through the free market,
neoliberalism has in actuality, as Harvey notes, achieved the upward redistribution of wealth and the intensification of global social inequality:

We can…interpret neoliberalization either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites…the second of these projects has in practice dominated. Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite. The theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument has…primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to be done to achieve this goal. (19)

It is in this tension that we can see the continuation of the tension between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, or between European-style imperialism and imperial sovereignty, that Hardt and Negri find in the development of imperial power in the US (but claim has been resolved in the current global order). While neoliberalism in theory (and occasionally in practice) does achieve the deterritorializing flows that Hardt and Negri see as characteristic of the global market, in practice it has largely served the reterritorializing function of reproducing colonial structures of global economic inequality (or in other instances producing new structures of inequality). As Harvey argues, global neoliberalization has in fact “been increasingly impelled through mechanisms of uneven geographical developments” (87).
Although the reality of this uneven geographical development is a product of diverse global and local factors in particular situations, a significant cause has been the tendency of the US (and to a lesser extent Western Europe and Japan) to utilize neoliberalization to its advantage in order to consolidate and extend its international political and economic dominance. Harvey notes that the opening of the world to global capital flow accomplished by neoliberalization has served as “the foundation of the capacity of the US financial power as well as that of Europe and Japan, to extract tribute from the rest of the world” (93). Furthermore, the US and other economic powers have used their influence in international organizations like the WTO, World Bank, and IMF in order to facilitate this extraction of wealth from developing countries. Membership in the IMF and WTO is conditional upon the opening of capital markets, leaving developmental nations little power to contest the logic of neoliberalism. The IMF and the World Bank, in particular, have become “centres for the propagation and enforcement of ‘free market fundamentalism’ and neoliberal orthodoxy” (29). In return for development loans or rescheduling of previous loans, conditions of ‘structural adjustment’ were imposed that required indebted countries to adopt neoliberal reforms that often made it easier for Western capital to penetrate national markets in these countries. Thus, the “restoration of power to an economic elite or upper class in the US and elsewhere in the advanced capitalist countries drew heavily on surpluses extracted from the rest of the world through international flows and structural adjustment practices” (29-30). While the growth of international institutions that ease these extractions is a new development, this kind of extraction itself is not. Rather, as Harvey notes, it “is an old imperial practice…[that] has proven very helpful to the restoration of class power, particularly in
the world’s main financial centres” (74). Thus, we find in the neoliberal global order not a fundamental rupture but rather the development of a new global form of political organization and economic logic that allows for the reproduction of colonial power structures threatened by historical developments following decolonization.

The growing hegemony of this logic became most prominently displayed under the regimes of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. However, as Harvey points out, the first experiment with neoliberalization did not take place in the US or Europe but rather in Chile in the 1970s under General Augusto Pinochet. Of course, this experiment was conducted largely through US influence, and the US assisted in the overthrow of the democratically elected president Salvador Allende and in Pinochet’s seizure of power that created the favorable political conditions under which this experiment could take place. In this way, Chile became a kind of laboratory for US economists and policy makers to test out their theoretical suppositions about the efficacy of neoliberal governance. This is, of course, hardly surprising if we remember the Monroe Doctrine and the development of US imperialist intervention in Latin America throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In fact, the string of US interventions in Latin America beginning with the Chile experiment can be understood as a continuation of the imperialist tendencies evinced by earlier interventions in a new neoliberal form. These interventions now take place under the guise of promoting free trade and guaranteeing individual liberties against supposedly dictatorial left-wing governments. However, in line with the general tendency of neoliberalization noted by Harvey, in practice these interventions have been in the interest of restoring US economic power and international hegemony. Furthermore, despite the United States’ promotion of neoliberalization as an
engine for increasing capital accumulation in Latin American nations, neoliberal reforms have in fact often led to conditions of economic stagnation in these nations while US financial power has reaped the gains of these reforms. Direct and indirect military intervention, however, has not been the only form of US intervention in the region intended to bring about neoliberalization. Trade agreements have served as particularly powerful tools in this pursuit as well. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, for example, effectively opened up the Mexican market to both the exploitation of cheap labor by US-based transnational corporations and to the extraction of tribute by US financial institutions, and the US has taken the lead in the efforts to expand this agreement into the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas.

This is not to say that neoliberalization in Latin America is only a product of US intervention in a way that simply replicates colonial power structures. Harvey is certainly right in arguing that global neoliberalization is not so much the result of a direct imposition by the US (and other Western states) on the rest of the world as it is the product of interactions between transnational and highly particular internal national forces and the efforts of the national capitalist classes to (re)establish their power. However, these capitalist classes in the formerly colonized world, and particularly in Latin America, are themselves products of colonialism and reproduce what Quijano refers to as the ‘coloniality of power.’ As Quijano argues of the postcolonial capitalist classes in most Latin American nations, “the coloniality of their power led to the perception of their social interests as the same as other dominant whites in Europe and the United States” (214). Thus, the achievement of independence by Latin American states was not a radical break with colonialism; independence was not “a process toward
the development of modern nation-states, but was instead a rearticulation of the
coloniality of power over new institutional bases” (215). In this light, then, while there
has certainly been a decentering in the organization of global power, this decentering
must be understood, not as the foundation of a new global order representing a complete
rupture from colonialism, but as a product of colonialism and as operating within the
logic of coloniality.

**The Discursive Production of Latin America**

To best understand the links between the material and discursive production of Latin
America, it is useful to consider this production in terms of the historically contingent
articulation of continuous and discontinuous political forms, economic processes and
discursive constructs. I use articulation here in the sense that Stuart Hall employs it to
refer to a historically contingent “linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute
and essential for all time.” Such an understanding of articulation allows for both “an
understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere
together with a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated,
at specific conjunctures, to political subjects” (Grossberg 142-43). We can thus
understand the production of Latin America that will be our focus as a complex structural
articulation of diverse economic, political and discursive elements – including new global
power structures, old and new political forms, the continuing expansion of global
capitalism, neoliberal ideology, Eurocentric discursive constructions of colonial and
neocolonial discourse – to the political and economic interests of US hegemony and
transnational capital.
The production of Latin America as a space does not only occur through the material production of this space through the mechanisms of uneven geographical development inherent in the spread of global capital that were discussed in the previous section but also through the construction of what Said terms ‘imaginative geographies’, referring to the ways in which other places, people and landscapes are imagined. As Said points out, this active spatial imagining bears no necessary relation to any objective qualities of the space imagined; rather, “space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here” (Orientalism 55). Furthermore, imaginative geographies are not as concerned with an understanding of distant spaces as they are with constructing an identity derived negatively in opposition to the Other, the foreign or unfamiliar, that these spaces represent. Thus, Said notes, “often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is ‘out there,’ beyond one’s own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the un-familiar space outside one’s own” (54). This imagining, however, is not innocent or neutral – as Said suggests, it is not “simply…a necessity of the imagination” (5) – but is bound up in relationships of power and domination. One of the primary functions of (neo)colonial discourse, then, has been to naturalize these power relations through the construction of imaginative geographies that produce an image of the colonized as fundamentally barbaric, underdeveloped, or otherwise inferior to the colonizer. The construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas that I argue has occurred through cinematic representations of Latin America thus must be understood as a product of the relations of power that have been discussed in the first part
of this chapter. Additionally, it must be considered as emerging from the historical
development of both the Eurocentric discourse on Latin America and (neo)colonial
discourse more broadly.

The European discourse on Latin America holds particular importance as its
development marked the inception of colonial discourse and the formation of a
Eurocentric system of knowledge and social classification. This is not to say that
colonial discourse did not draw from cultural images preceding this period – Said traces
the roots of Orientalist discourse, for example, back to ancient Greece – but that the
representation of Latin America emerging from the Spanish exploration of the ‘New
World’ marked the first time a structure of such images was articulated to colonialism
and global capitalist expansion. Quijano argues that Spanish colonization of the
Americas inaugurated a new model of global power, “one of the fundamental axes…[of
which] is the social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race, a
mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and
pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific
rationality: Eurocentrism” (181). The development of a system of social classification
based on the idea of race was fundamental to the construction of European identity and to
the legitimation of colonialism, which “needed the elaboration of a Eurocentric
perspective of knowledge, a theoretical perspective on the idea of race as a naturalization
of colonial relations between Europeans and non-Europeans” (183).

However, as Mignolo notes, racism as a ‘classifying matrix’ does not operate
solely on the basis of skin color “but also extends to the realm of human activities like
religions, languages…and geopolitical classifications of the world.” Thus, “racialization
is applied not only to people, but to language, religions, knowledge, countries, and continents as well” (17). Although this racialization process has often operated through the construction in colonial discourse of absolute binary oppositions (self/other, colonizer/colonized), it is in fact flexible enough to allow for a wide range of relationships between the West and its colonial Others and for the construction of a complex and shifting global hierarchy of races. This flexibility, as we will see in Chapter 2, is responsible for the ambivalence that marks many cinematic representations of Latin America. Nevertheless, Europe (or the US) always retains the superior position, as it is only a Eurocentric locus of enunciation that provides the privilege of classifying the rest of the world. Here, Said’s observation of Orientalism that it “depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7) is applicable to colonial discourse as a whole. This ‘flexible positional superiority’ has consistently allowed Western powers to legitimate (neo)colonial intervention through positing themselves as relationally superior and embodying a better way of life or higher form of civilization, whether it is through the defense of the ‘civilizing mission’ of British and French colonialism or the rhetoric of democracy and modernization of the neoliberal Washington Consensus.

Eurocentric imagining has always been propagated through a complex intertextual and interdiscursive network. Nevertheless, particular mediums have typically held a privileged position in this propagation in particular historical instances. During Spanish exploration of the Americas, for instance, the writings of Spanish explorers and missionaries were of paramount importance in structuring European understanding of the
land and the peoples of the Americas. During the height of European imperialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the bourgeois novel became the central form for the construction of imperial imaginaries. As Said argues, “imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible…to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (Culture 71). The bourgeois novel, though, was also of central importance to the development of nationalism during this same period. As Benedict Anderson notes, the emergence of the novel (along with the newspaper) was intricately connected to the development of nationalism. The most significant aspect of the novel, in terms of national imagining, was its narrative temporality, which allowed it to reproduce a sense of ‘homogeneous, empty time’ by narrating an individual’s, or group of individuals’, movement through this time. This “idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (26).

The central position of the novel to both national and imperial imagining (the two, of course, are interconnected) was usurped, however, by the development of a new medium in the early 20th century: the cinema. The cinema was crucial to the development of an imperial consciousness in Europe and the United States. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam note, the cinematic apparatus, which granted the spectator “the illusory ubiquity of the ‘all-perceiving subject’” (103), was particularly well suited to the development of the imperial gaze:

In an imperial context the [cinematic] apparatus tended to be deployed in ways flattering to the imperial subject as superior and invulnerable observer…The
cinema’s ability to “fly” spectators around the globe gave them a subject position as film’s audio-visual matters. The “spatially-mobilized visuality” of the I/eye of empire spiraled outward around the globe, creating a visceral, kinetic sense of imperial travel and conquest, transforming European spectators into armchair conquistadors, affirming their sense of power while turning the colonies into spectacle for the metropole’s voyeuristic gaze. (104)

Thus, the cinema heightened the sense of superiority and power over the colonized granted to the reader by the 19th century novel through endowing the spectator with the visual power of the gaze. The film also “inherited the social role of the nineteenth-century realist novel in relation to national imaginaries”, communicating the ‘homogeneous, empty time’ of the nation through arranging events and actions into a temporally linear narrative (102). Furthermore, Shohat and Stam suggest, the film also overcame the obstacle of literacy that prevented literature from reaching a truly mass audience (103). The accessibility of cinema thus allowed for the fostering of national and imperial consciousness on a scale unimaginable for the novel.

The centrality of the cinema for the construction of colonial imaginaries and its importance for national imagining put the US in a privileged position from which to employ the power of this new medium, given the increasing hegemony of Hollywood within global distribution channels. As noted previously, the experimentation of US imperialism with colonialism in its proper sense was quite limited. Thus, cinema was never used extensively to foster the imagining of an imperial community the same way in which it was in European cinemas. Rather, film became the privileged medium for the legitimation, both at home and abroad, of the substantial neocolonial project that
developed out of the US imperialist drive. Of course, Latin America occupied a central place in this neocolonial project, and thus, unsurprisingly, the imaginative geography of the Americas that I explore in the following chapters began to develop throughout the early and mid 20th century in cinematic representations of Latin America and its inhabitants.

An imaginative geography of the Americas first appeared notably in Hollywood productions during the Mexican Revolution. As Margarita De Orellana demonstrates in her analysis of US films from this period about the revolution, several significant tropes and themes that would come to define Hollywood’s image of Mexico and Latin America as a whole and that would structure US imagination of its southern neighbors emerged prominently in this era. As De Orellana notes, the central theme of these films “was the heroism and superiority of the United States, whose citizens alone were portrayed as capable of bringing peace, order, justice and progress to a country like Mexico.” It was the representatives of the US, and not the Mexican revolutionaries, that were the protagonists of these films, thus promoting the idea that “Mexicans are incapable of carrying out a struggle for democracy without the assistance of the United States” (6).

De Orellana also identifies two figures or stereotypes that emerge in these films: the ‘greaser’ and the ‘beautiful señorita’. The figure of the ‘greaser’ embodies the innate violence emphasized as one of the defining characteristics of the Mexican. He is “irresponsible, treacherous, vengeful and pray to an uncontrolled sexuality” (10). The ‘beautiful señorita’, on the other hand, is represented as docile and sensual; she is also usually of Spanish rather than Indian or mestiza origin, thus associating her with whiteness and positioning her closer, although still inferior to, the North American (13).
In this opposition of the ‘greaser’ and the ‘beautiful señorita’, we already see the development of a fundamental ambivalence – along with a whole constitutive set of binary oppositions (male/female, other/same, etc.) – in the imagining of Latin America that defines the alternating utopian/dystopian image of this space in later films that I explore in Chapter 2.

De Orella’s work also reveals a significant spatial dimension in the imagining of Mexico in US films about the revolution. The US/Mexico border is constructed as a frontier, a zone of adventure and danger that marks the “outer limit of the civilized world” and the dividing line between nature and culture:

In the USA the population enjoys a security that stems from order and democracy. The other side of the Rio Grande is dark and confusing, a place of exile for all sorts of North American ruffians fleeing from the law of their own country, a land of bandits, arbitrary crimes and perpetrators who go unpunished. Over there it is evil, and it is those who provoke disorder and chaos who are protected. (9)

De Orella goes on to suggest that the spatial imaginaries of these films “may unwittingly have pointed to a new colonization, the domination of a new frontier – an allegorical journey confirmed by the very way in which the landscape was portrayed” (10). As I will argue, this ‘allegorical journey’ has in fact continued into contemporary cinematic representations of Latin America and the portrayals of landscape in films like Up and The Mission, developing into a complex ideological structure for imagining, thinking and speaking about Latin America and its inhabitants.

Hollywood’s interest in Latin America again became particularly notable during the period of the Good Neighbor Policy, as the US hoped to enlist support among Latin
American nations for the war against the Axis powers through exporting films with ‘Latin American’ themes and characters to Latin American markets. Despite (or perhaps because of) the intentions of these films, they reproduced popular stereotypes and frequently employed (neo)colonial tropes in their representations of the Latin American Other. As Shohat and Stam note, Latin American characters held only marginal roles (mainly as entertainers) in these films. Furthermore, these characters hardly ever developed throughout the films’ narratives, “in contrast with the teleologically evolving North American protagonists” (158), and thus were important in the early representation of Latin America as a chronically undeveloped and primitive space that would become a central trope in later films. The Good Neighbor era films also employed the colonial trope of eroticizing and exoticizing the colonial Other that had “allowed the imperial imaginary to play out its own fantasies of sexual domination” (158). This was most evident in the representation of Latin American women, who were hypersexualized and presented mainly as objects of desire for the North American male, a construction most prominently exemplified by Carmen Miranda. This eroticizing of the Latin American Other became part of a regional association in Hollywood films of Latin America with “tropical heat, violence passion, and spice” (138). The exoticized and eroticized Hollywood imaginary of Latin America was perhaps nowhere more evident than in films set in Brazil (and particularly in Rio), which as Sérgio Augusto notes became “mystified as the ideal site of enraptured romance” (355).

Even the more liberal or left wing films of the 1960s unconsciously reproduced these structures of representation established in earlier films despite their attempts to depart from them. In his reading of The Magnificent Seven (dir. John Sturges, 1960), for
example, Edward Buscombe notes that despite the film’s self-conscious attempt to establish “a difference which is not necessarily an inferiority,” it nevertheless presents Mexicans as either bandits or peasants, with the peasants portrayed as helpless children and identified with nature (17-19). Furthermore, the attitude of the Seven towards the peasants is either one of superiority or of idealization, revering them as the mythical noble savage; thus, this liberal attempt at representing difference nevertheless falls into the same binary conceptualization of the Other exhibited by earlier films (21-22). As Christopher Frayling notes, even the Marxist-influenced Spaghetti Westerns that would follow *The Magnificent Seven* tended to reproduce this same binary understanding, albeit in a much more politically cynical form (qtd. in King, López, and Alvarado 15-16).

The contemporary films that I explore in the following chapters in many ways represent a direct continuation of the discourse on Latin America developed in US films throughout the 20th century and reproduce many of the tropes discussed above. There is, however, in these later films, a significant discontinuity that coincides with the much-debated transition to ‘postmodernity’ in the West and the development of new global political forms and power structures. There has always been in (neo)colonial discourse, and the cinematic representations of Latin America discussed above are no exception here, the perception of temporal separation between colonizer and colonized, what Johannes Fabian has called a ‘denial of coevalness’ – the notion that the colonial Other exists in a pre-modern historical past, temporally separated from the colonizer along a continuum of modernity. This temporal separation has arisen from the idea that Europe or the US is on the cutting edge of history, always at an advanced stage of historical
progression while the rest of the world lags behind, an idea firmly planted in the Enlightenment notion of history as a linear progression.

However, in ‘postmodernity’ and with the growing hegemony of neoliberalism, the cutting edge of history no longer exists for the Western nations, and in particular the United States. ‘Postmodernity’ has, as Fredric Jameson notes, entailed a loss of historicity, and the US (along with most of the West) now perceives of itself as having reached the ‘end of history’. The notion of ‘postmodernity’ is, however, a fundamentally Eurocentric construction, and the need for legitimation of the reproduction of colonial power structures and the consolidation of US political and economic power necessitates that the ‘Third World’ nations continue to be perceived of as existing in some earlier historical era, having not yet reached the ‘end of history.’ Thus, there arises a split-temporality in which the US exists outside, or at the end of, historical progress while Latin America, along with other postcolonial nations/regions, is still imagined within the temporality of the Enlightenment as lagging behind and needing to progress along the linear path determined by the West. This split temporality is a feature of many contemporary films – and will be the focus of Chapter 3 – involved in the imagining of Latin America and one that distinguishes it from earlier films. Another consequence of this split temporality is the spatialization of history wherein the US becomes the telos of historical development, representing the utopia of neoliberalism and the triumph of the market and democracy. Thus, contemporary films that involve movement from one side of the US/Mexico border to the other, as in the case of All the Pretty Horses, tend to visualize this spatial movement as temporal movement, with movement into the US from
Mexico representing a liberating movement towards the telos of historical development and movement in the opposite direction becoming a historical regression.

**The United States and National Identity in the Age of Globalization**

Cinematic representations of Latin America have served as more than just the means of legitimation for US neocolonial intervention in the region; they have also been of crucial importance for national imagining. In many ways, Latin America (along with the Middle East) has provided, in recent years, an Other against which US national identity can be negatively defined. Thus, the construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas has not only served the ideological ends of the concentration of class power under the neoliberal global order, it has also been essential for the construction of national identity in this order. While it may seem somewhat anachronistic to insist on the importance of national imagining in an era where the nation-state has been decentered in the new global power structures, the continuation of a strong nationalism in the US is not surprising when we look at the particular ideological structure that has grown hegemonic within the US in the neoliberal era. In particular, it is the marriage of neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies that has ensured that the global consolidation of class power can coincide with a strong, and often militant, nationalism. As Harvey argues, neoconservativism is not at all inconsistent with the “neoliberal agenda of elite governance, mistrust of democracy, and the maintenance of market freedoms” (91). At the same time, however, it serves as an antidote to the ‘chaos of individual interests’ that neoliberalism tends toward with its “concern for order...[and] for an overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers” (82). Under this ideological configuration, individual
pursuits can continue unhindered in the economic sphere while a collective morality ensures the cohesiveness of the national community in the social, cultural and political spheres. The neoconservative emphasis on militarism is also important to the construction of national identity. Neoconservatives are, Harvey notes, “far more likely to highlight threats, real or imagined, both at home and abroad, to the integrity and stability of the nation.” With respect to Latin America, the insistence on the perceived threats posed by ‘illegal immigrants’ crossing the US-Mexico border, drug violence in Mexico, or Hugo Chávez’s alliances with Iran and Russia provide just a few examples of how this militant neoconservative nationalism has been mobilized through the US/Latin America opposition reproduced through the construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas.

It is here that we once again find the continuation of the tension between imperial and imperialist sovereignty – between the tendencies towards deterritorialization and reterritorialization – that Hardt and Negri identify as reaching resolve at an earlier moment in US history. In the dominant ideological structure that mixes neoliberalism and neoconservatism, the deterritorializing tendencies of neoliberalization exist in tension with the reterritorializing force of neoconservative nationalism. Thus, US nationalism, as Harvey argues, assumes a ‘dual character’:

On the one hand it presumes that it is the God-given…manifest destiny of the US to be the greatest power on earth…and that, as a beacon of freedom, liberty, and progress, it has been and continues to be universally admired and considered worthy of emulation…The US therefore benevolently and generously gives freely of its resources and its values and culture to the rest of the world, in the cause of
conferring the privilege of Americanization and American values on all and sundry. But US nationalism also has a darker side in which paranoia about fearful threats from enemies and evil forces from outside take over. The fear is of foreigners and of immigrants, of outside agitators, and now, of course, of ‘terrorists.’ (195-196)

In this ‘dual character’ of US nationalism, we see most clearly displayed the contradictions inherent in US expansionism and its influence on the present neoliberal global order. And it is these same contradictions that emerge in the cinematic images of Latin America that I explore in the following chapters. In this intertextual network of images, Latin America appears at once as a space presenting innumerable threats to the existence of the US in its present state (immigrants, crime, left-wing ‘dictators’, moral corruption, etc.) and as a naive and underdeveloped region awaiting the gifts of democracy and free-market capitalism that only the US and the neoliberal institutions through which it wields its influence can provide.
Chapter 2: Latin America as Utopian/Dystopian Space

In this chapter, I explore the alternating conceptions of Latin America as a utopian/dystopian space. Since the inception of European exploration and colonization of Latin America, the region has existed alternately as a dystopian and utopian space in the Western imaginary, providing a tabula rasa onto which the West has projected its visions of paradise and fears of a hell on earth. From early official communications to European travel narratives to the novels of Conrad and Graham Greene, Latin America has remained a place beyond the space and time of Western rationality, fertile for the development of utopian and dystopian visions. In fact, the very notion of utopia is tied to European imagining of Latin America. As Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco argues, Thomas More’s *Utopia* is most likely based on the Brazilian island of Fernando de Noronha (qtd. in Nagib 8). What these utopian/dystopian images of Latin America have shared is the assertion that for either the utopia of Latin America to be realized, or for it to be rescued from a dystopian existence, Western intervention is necessary. In this way, these representations have served to legitimate colonial and neocolonial expansion into, and exploitation of, Latin America.

This alternating image of Latin America as utopia/dystopia is a symptom of what Homi Bhabha refers to as the ‘ambivalence of colonial discourse.’ Bhabha argues that colonial discourse relies on the ‘productive ambivalence’ of its object – “that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision” (67). This ambivalence represents an ‘ironic compromise’ between the two notions inherent in the temporal contradiction of colonialism: the pressure of historical change in the processes of colonialism and the demand for a static colonial Other. It expresses a “desire for a reformed, recognizable
Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (86). In the construction of difference in representations of Latin America, as in that of other (neo)colonized spaces and peoples, this ambivalence is most clearly displayed in the noble savage/violent barbarian dichotomy. This dichotomy has been central to structuring Western understanding of Latin America since the inception of Spanish exploration. As Tzetan Todorov has noted, this dichotomy emerged prominently in the writing of Spanish explorers who alternately regarded the indigenous people they encountered as friendly and welcoming, apparently eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Europeans, who could easily be acculturated to European values and (most importantly) converted to Christianity, or as irredeemably savage and only amenable to harsh repressive practices and useful only to exploit for slave labor. Todorov finds the emergence of this binary understanding in Columbus’s own writings:

Either he conceives the Indians…as human beings altogether, having the same rights as himself; but then he sees them not only as equals but also as identical, and this behavior leads to assimilationism, the projection of his own values on to the others. Or else he starts from the difference, but the latter is immediately translated into terms of superiority and inferiority…What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself. (42)

As we saw in the previous chapter, this same response to alterity in the understanding of Latin America has structured cinematic representations of the region since the early 20th century.
The imagining of Latin America as utopia/dystopia has become increasingly evident in its recent representation in Hollywood films. While in some films, such as Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto* and the Disney-Pixar production *Up*, these alternating imaginaries seem to exist in relatively equal proportions within the same film (with the edenic wilderness utopia of Paradise Falls in *Up* quickly turning into a nightmarish deathtrap and, in *Apocalypto*, the pastoral splitting of the idyllic countryside and the corrupt city) or the utopian vision is clearly privileged – as in *The Mission* – in others, for example Rodriguez’s *Desperado*, the dystopian image appears to assume dominance as Latin America becomes a purely dystopian space, plagued by crime and violence, which are represented as products of moral depravity, disconnected from socio-political factors. However, despite these notable variations, in all of these films we can catch a glimpse of both utopian and dystopian images and possibilities, thus highlighting the inescapability of the ambivalence that has structured (neo)colonial discourse and its reproduction in cinematic representations of Latin America.

**Utopia/Dystopia and Western Intervention**

One of the defining characteristics of Latin America as utopian/dystopian space as it is constructed in recent US films is that it is a space wherein Western individuals act and make history. Latin American characters are either completely absent – as we will see in *Up* – or they serve as passive background characters against which the heroic actions of Western protagonists, or the actions of Western villains, are carried out – as in the case of *Quantum of Solace* and *The Mission*. Western intervention in these films becomes naturalized as necessary in order for the utopia of Latin America to be realized and/or to rescue Latin America from a threatened or realized dystopia. Such a construction
resonates quite well with the ideological claims of US-driven neoliberal globalization which, against the discredited utopian visions for political and social change offered by socialism, proposed the utopia of the market as the panacea for inequality and stagnated development and modernization in Latin America.

While in many recent films, as we will see later in this chapter, Latin Americans are themselves portrayed as responsible for their own backwardness and underdevelopment – whether due to ignorance or corruption (or some combination of the two) – in others they instead become passive victims as other Western individuals/groups become the antagonists responsible for the failure to realize the utopian promise of Latin America or for the decline into dystopian reality. In these films, Latin Americans are represented as incapable of defending themselves against the threat posed by Western antagonists and thus in need of the intervention of other Western actors who are represented as saviors of the people. Thus, Latin America becomes, rather than a space wherein the inhabitants of this space act, a stage upon which Western actors struggle to rescue the utopia of Latin America against other Western actors who threaten it and, in the process, intervene for the apparent benefit of Latin Americans whose conditions are endangered by the greed or selfish motives of other Western powers. The construction of the Western protagonist as savior of the Latin American people is particularly important for the legitimation of what the United States sees as its new role in the global community, particularly in the post-Cold War era. As Hardt and Negri note, in the new global order, the US is often called on by supranational organizations (the UN in particular) to act as the military enforcers of international law. In this way, the United States is bestowed upon the responsibility of being the world policeman and protector
The notion of this new role has also been consistently reinscribed in recent cinematic depiction of US heroes and their actions in foreign countries. As Lina Khatib notes, this new American hero is represented as a “rescuer and liberator of oppressed peoples” (65). Furthermore, this image is not necessarily limited to North America protagonists in recent US film, and other Western heroes are often also imagined within this mold of the benevolent hero. We see this image of the Western hero as ‘rescuer and liberator’ quite clearly embodied in the characters of Carl and Russel in *Up*, James Bond in *Quantum of Solace*, and the Jesuit Fathers in *The Mission* through their ‘humanitarian interventions’ in Venezuela, Bolivia, or Brazil/Paraguay.

Perhaps one of the most interesting films contributing to the construction of Latin America as utopia is the Disney-Pixar animated production *Up*. *Up* has been one of the most critically successful Pixar films to date, not only winning the Oscar in 2010 for Best Animated Picture but also even scoring a nomination for Best Picture. What makes *Up* particularly interesting, though, is not its unusual success as an animated film but rather the fact that even though around three quarters of the film takes place in South America, the viewer does not see a single human inhabitant of the region. Instead, the jungle region around the aptly named Paradise Falls where the majority of the action is set is constructed as a ‘pre-modern’ (and pre-historic) utopia of pure and untouched natural beauty. This choice of location is interesting, as Paradise Falls is simultaneously an imaginary space and is given a ‘real’ place through the film’s locating of it geographically within South America. In this way, it is both the ‘good place’ and ‘no place’ of utopia and falls squarely within the tradition of European utopian literature inaugurated by More that situates imaginary utopias within actual geographic regions.
However, Paradise Falls nevertheless bears a striking resemblance to Venezuela’s Angel Falls (see image 1) and when we see the plane tickets that Carl Fredrickson has bought for his and Ellie’s planned trip to Paradise Falls, the destination is clearly designated as “Venezuela.” And again, later in the film, as Carl is looking through the scrapbook that he and Ellie kept, we find written on one of the pages the phrase “when I move to Venezuela…” The projection of a utopian vision onto Venezuela seems peculiar given the clearly dystopian vision of that country as a backwards socialist dictatorship under the reign of a power-hungry and unstable leader (the media caricature of Hugo Chávez mentioned in the introduction) that has been constructed through mainstream news coverage and the political rhetoric of Washington, particularly during the reign of the G. W. Bush administration. In this context, Up appears to attempt to erase this dystopian image of Venezuela and re-imagine the nation as a tropical paradise through an allusion to its most widely recognized natural landmark. Of course, it would seem impossible for such an attempt to ignore the complex social and political conditions in Venezuela and their connection to transnational forces and power structures. Up’s interesting solution to this problem is, as we will see, significant not only to US imagining of Venezuela but also to the larger construction of a utopian vision of Latin America.

The only living native inhabitants of the jungle surrounding Paradise Falls that we see, other than the lush vegetation, are the family of rare tropical birds, an apparently undiscovered species that Carl and Russel must protect from Charles Muntz, the jaded North American explorer who is attempting to capture the bird to rescue his tarnished reputation. In its construction of a specifically natural utopia, the film follows a trend in films since the 80s - including The Mission, The Emerald Forest (dir. John Boorman,
Figure 1: The fictional Paradise Falls in *Up* (top) bears a striking resemblance to Venezuela’s Angel Falls (bottom)

1985), *Apocalypto* and *Avatar* (dir. James Cameron, 2009), amongst others - set in Latin America (or some simulacra thereof) that has coincided with the rise of the modern environmentalist movement in recent years and its concern with the destruction of the Amazonian rain forests. In the face of the threats to the environment posed by
modernization and the exploitation of transnational capitalism, these films have, as Franco notes, posited a return to a ‘pre-modern’ past, represented by the natural utopia of the jungle regions of Latin America, as the only possibility for utopian imagining (82).

Where *Up* differs from films like *The Emerald Forest* and *Avatar*, however, is that it does not include the indigenous inhabitants of these regions, the figure of the noble savage important to the neo-indigenismo¹⁸ ideological underpinnings of these other films, in its utopian vision of the Latin American jungle. Instead, the utopian space of *Up* is emptied out entirely of native human inhabitants, indigenous or otherwise. The film seems to almost self-consciously call attention to this strange absence in one scene where, as Carl wanders among oddly-shaped rock formations, he sees what he believes to be another person in the distance. Carl begins to talk to the stranger, but as he gets closer, he realizes that it is actually just another rock formation and that the voice responding to him belongs to Doug, one of Muntz’s dogs that has been equipped with a human voice box. This absence of inhabitants in *Up* serves two interrelated functions: it elides the human victims of US intervention in the region and strengthens the construction of Latin America as pure and natural utopian space. I will explore the significance of the second function (and its interrelation with the first) in the next section of this chapter. At this point, however, it is the first function that is of particular interest for our discussion.

In emptying out the space of Paradise Falls of human inhabitants, *Up* creates the Latin American jungle solely as a space in, and for, which the North American characters of the film struggle against one another. The absence of individuals who might be affected adversely by the characters’ interventions and struggle allows the film to avoid the need of constructing passive victims and a situation in which the North American
protagonists must come to their rescue. Nevertheless, Carl and Russell do act as saviors, but it is the space itself they are rescuing, a space that exists purely for them, and by extension, the United States; the absence of human inhabitants negates any claim that might be staked to this material and symbolic space by any potential inhabitants.

We are first introduced to the Edenic Paradise Falls at the beginning of the film when it is featured in a film about the explorer Charles Muntz that we see the young Carl watching. Both in this film and a black and white photograph of Ellie’s, Paradise Falls is described as a “land lost in time,” attesting to its potency as a ‘pre-modern’ utopia (see Image 2). The image of Paradise Falls becomes the motivating utopian vision for Carl and Ellie throughout their marriage. The savings jar and photograph of Paradise Falls during the montage sequence keep this utopian vision centered in the film’s narrative development and the repeated emptying out and refilling of the jar as various complications prolong the continual deferment of the realization of this utopia. It is not until after his wife’s death that Carl is able to make the trip to Paradise Falls, when the encroachment of a commercial development on his property leaves him no choice but to leave. We can see here a rough analogy for the present state of the US: increasing domestic strife (most notably the economic crisis) has, in recent years, held the US back from realizing its ambitions abroad, namely the neoconservative/neoliberal vision for a global order organized around Western ideals of democracy and the free market. Thus, despite Up’s implicit critique of modernization and capitalism in its positing of a return to a ‘pre-modern’ natural utopia, Carl’s desire to reach Paradise Falls manifests the same expansive desire that motivates the neocolonialist expansion of the US and global capitalism. The film’s construction of Paradise Falls as an empty space in which Carl’s
Figure 2: Paradise Falls as 'pre-modern' utopia in *Up*

desires for a ‘pre-modern’ existence can be realized contributes to the discursive construction of Latin America as a space where US neocolonial desire for a free market utopia can be actualized. We see here that the specific content of the utopian vision is less important than the perspective from which it is enunciated. It is the fact that Latin America appears to exist *for* the North American imagination and is made available as a space that can be possessed and onto which utopian imaginaries can be projected that is the central point here. Despite the potentially ‘progressive’ content of these imaginaries, they nevertheless are the product of what Said, in discussing Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, refers to as the “imperial attitude” (*Culture 22*).

The notion of Latin America as an empty space existing for Western actors to realize adventures and utopian visions is further inscribed through the film’s allusions to the Boy Scouts in the form of the ‘Wilderness Explorers’ to which both the young Carl and Russell belong and their links to imperialistic adventures. As Joseph Bristow notes,
the founding of the boy scouts was directly connected to the imperial enterprise. The survivalist training of scouting, along with fictional narratives of colonial adventures, functioned to turn young boys into ‘aggrandized subjects’ attuned to the aims of imperialism (qtd. in Shohat and Stam 101). As Shohat and Stam suggest, this same ideal also played immediately into the imperial adventure film, which “provided a vicarious experience of passionate fraternity, a playing field for the self-realization of European masculinity” (101). *Up* in fact cites the imperial adventure film in its opening sequence, in which a young Carl sits in the cinema watching a film about his idol, the adventurer Charles Muntz. While this is certainly the most explicit citation, there seems to be a more general indebtedness of the film to the imperial adventure genre. In particular, *Up* brings to mind *King Kong* (1936), as the plot centers largely on the attempts of a Western explorer to capture a rare and ‘exotic’ creature and bring it back to the US for exhibition. However, unlike in *King Kong*, in *Up* this explorer, Muntz, is clearly identified as the antagonist of the film and it is the benevolent Western characters who end up fighting to preserve the natural space that become the protagonists. We can see this shift as symptomatic of the shift from the US’s view of its role in the world from a (neo)imperial superpower (albeit one claiming to be motivated by the goals of spreading democracy) to that of savior and protector of the ‘Third World.’ The opposition of the characters of Carl and Muntz is thus central to establishing this new geopolitical role of the US in the post-Cold War era.

While *Up*’s emptying out of human inhabitants is certainly curious, it is not, as Roland Joffe’s *The Mission* proves, necessary. In fact, *The Mission* relies heavily on its indigenous characters to construct its image of a ‘pre-modern’ utopia in the jungles of the
Brazil/Paraguay border region. The Guaraní people whom Jesuit Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) persuades to join him in building and inhabiting the San Carlos mission perfectly embody the Western image of the noble savage. They are portrayed as a mostly docile and simple group content to hunt and farm on the mission. Furthermore, they are exceptionally amenable to the Jesuits’ civilizing and Christianizing efforts, adopting easily to agricultural work, playing European musical instruments, and living on the mission. In fact, when the papal emissary Altamirano (Ray McAnally) tells the Guaraní that they must leave the mission, they refuse, stating that they are happy living on the mission and do not want to “go back to the jungle.” The noble savage/violent barbarian opposition in Western understanding of the indigenous people of Latin America is dramatized in Cabeza’s (Chuck Low) debate with Altamirano and Father Gabriel over the morality of enslaving the Guaraní people, a debate that in many ways echoes the public debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in the 16th century over Spanish treatment of indigenous people in the Americas. However, the film’s narrative identification with the Jesuits clearly privileges the noble savage image and dismisses Cabeza’s arguments as rooted only in his interest in profiting from the slave trade. Even when one of the Portuguese proclaims that the Guaraní kill their own children, Father Gabriel retorts that they only do this out of necessity because they can only run from the slave traders with one child. Thus, this seemingly barbaric practice is justified as a product of European attempts at exploitation and not attributed to any moral deficiency in the Guaraní people themselves.

Nevertheless, the Guaraní characters are of little importance to the film’s narrative development. It is rather the struggle between the Jesuits and the Portuguese colonists
(and their Spanish slave trading allies) over the fate of the missions in the newly Portuguese territories that is the focus of the film. The Guaraní serve as little more than background characters, part of the utopia represented by the missions that the Jesuits are trying to save. Thus, just as in Up, the primary focus of The Mission is on the struggle of Western individuals to protect a threatened Latin American utopia from its destruction at the hands of other Western individuals. Europeans are the active agents while the indigenous characters are mostly passive. We see the Guaraní primarily in the sequences of life on the San Carlos mission, central to the construction of the film’s utopian imaginary, in which they are usually either talking and laughing with one another or with the Jesuits, playing music, or working in the fields or workshops. These sequences also tend to be dominated by images of the Guaraní children playing and laughing, which not only contributes to the association of the Guaraní with youthful innocence and thus the images of the noble savage and a ‘pre-modern’ utopia but also insinuates the necessity for adults, the Jesuit ‘fathers’, to protect them in their parental role.

The utopia of the noble savage plays an important part in the Jesuit mythology on which The Mission draws. As Franco notes, “The Jesuit missionaries who…propagated the myth of the noble savage regarded America as a Utopia, as a territory that had not yet felt the corrupting winds of Europe. Their mission was both to bring the indigenous into the harmonious choir of the Christian world and to preserve their innocence.” Central to this utopian vision was music, which “soars over differences of cultures and brings about an almost magical understanding” (83). The importance of music is made explicit early in the film as Father Gabriel enters Guaraní territory and begins to play the recorder. The Guaraní emerge slowly, first with bows
drawn, but are gradually enchanted by the music and accept the Father among them.

Music is not only the tool that Father Gabriel uses to win over the Guaraní; it also plays an important role in the above mentioned mission sequences, in which the juxtaposition of joyous images of the Guaraní and sweeping overhead shots of the lush tropical landscape with the enchanting non-diegetic music contributes to the construction of a utopia that is made both visual and aural.

The Jesuit utopias of San Carlos and San Miguel are also central to the film’s critique of transnational capitalism, which is allegorized in the international slave trade with its cooperation between nation-states in the exploitation of indigenous land and labor and the complicity of international organizations (represented here by the Catholic church). This critique is made explicit in the film’s closing caption that connects the historical exploitation of the slave trade to the present-day destruction of the rain forest and exploitation of labor by transnational capital. Against this exploitative system, the missions are presented as alternatives, embodying the utopia promised by a different form of economic organization; specifically, the missions are socialist utopias. When
Altamirano visits the San Miguel mission, Cabeza asks the Jesuits sarcastically what the difference is between this plantation and his own (slave) plantations, to which Father Gabriel responds that this plantation belongs to the Guaraní. Rodrigo (Robert De Niro) then illuminates another difference as he exposes the scars on the back of a runaway slave and informs Altamirano that the slave was bought by a Spanish settler from a slave trader. Cabeza’s response that “supply and demand is the law of trade” highlights the opposition between the exploitative forces of capitalism and the communal and humane existence of the missions. As Altamirano continues his tour, he asks the head of the mission about their economic operations. The Father informs him that all of their profit is “shared among them equally” and that “this is a community.” Altamirano retorts that “there is a French radical group that teaches that doctrine,” thus clearly linking the economic vision of the missions with the development of utopian socialism in Europe.

This opposition between capitalism and socialism, however, remains a fundamentally Eurocentric opposition, a battle between two Western economic systems and forms of social organization. The Guaraní are not capable of developing the utopian alternative represented by the missions on their own; it is only through the intervention of the Jesuits that these socialist utopias can be realized. Furthermore, there is never any suggestion of pre-existing economies practiced by the Guaraní before their encounter with the Europeans that might present real alternatives to both of the Eurocentric models. Nor is the possibility presented that the Guaraní might adopt the economic ideologies propagated by the Jesuits in specific ways suited to their own needs, social practices, and epistemologies.
In Marc Foster’s *Quantum of Solace*, the latest installment in the James Bond series, present-day Bolivia, much like colonial Brazil/Paraguay does in *The Mission*, provides a space in which Western actors struggle against one another, with Latin American characters (and particularly indigenous characters) serving as a backdrop. *Quantum of Solace* departs significantly from the rest of the Bond series (both novels and film adaptations) in that, in contrast to the Manichean oppositions the rest of the series has tended to construct between either the West and the Soviet Union or between the ‘First’ and ‘Third World’, *Quantum of Solace* presents a more nuanced picture of the geopolitical situation that clearly implicates Western political and economic power in the environmental destruction and political instability in Latin America. Like *The Mission*, *Quantum of Solace* critiques the role of transnational capitalism in disturbing Latin American communities’ (and particularly indigenous communities’) ways of life. However, *Quantum of Solace* does not couch its critique in historical allegory, as *The Mission* does, but clearly identifies transnational capitalism in the present through the character of Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), the CEO of an international energy company. After the left-wing government of Bolivia refuses Greene an energy contract, Greene collaborates with a right-wing military group, promising them assistance in overthrowing the current government in exchange for helping him secure a large desert area, which he uses to divert and shut off the country’s water supply. We quickly find out that Greene also has the support of the CIA, who agrees to turn a blind eye to the planned coup. However, James Bond (Daniel Craig) and Camille (Olga Kurylenko), a young woman who grew up in Bolivia and whose parents were murdered by one of the generals, stumble upon Greene’s plan and travel to Bolivia to stop him.
While the assumed suffering of the Bolivians resulting from the drought and military coup provides the moral charge to the film’s progression, the film focuses almost exclusively on the conflict between Bond (and to a lesser extent Camille) and Greene. There are no significant Bolivian characters with the exception of the military leaders and Camille (who is half-Russian). There is, however, one short scene in which we see the inhabitants of an indigenous village discovering that the water supply has been cut off (see Figure 4). However, none of the villagers speak; we only see their suffering faces. Despite the lack of water, the village appears as a romanticized, folkloric image of Bolivian indigenous life. We see the village as the embodiment of a natural ‘pre-modern’ utopia threatened by the actions of Greene. The silent inhabitants of the village are constructed as passive victims, incapable of defending themselves against the threat that they face. Thus it becomes necessary for Bond, as the Western hero, to intervene, rescuing and restoring the threatened utopia. The opposition of the would-be military dictatorship and the indigenous villagers also clearly reproduces the noble savage/violent barbarian opposition of colonial discourse. Thus, both the utopian and dystopian images of Latin America appear in *Quantum of Solace* almost simultaneously within the national space of Bolivia. We see at once the romanticized ‘pre-modern’ utopia of the indigenous village and the dystopian vision of a population oppressed by a savage military dictator.

**Natural Utopia and the Pastoral Trope**

For two of these films – *Up* and *The Mission* – as well as for Gibson’s *Apocalypto*, nature and the representation of the natural environment play a central role in their construction of a Latin American utopia. The representation of the natural landscape of the colonized in Western cultural production has been an important feature of colonial discourse. As
W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, “the representation of landscape is…also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism” (9). Furthermore, these representations have been inextricably tied to utopian imaginaries of colonial spaces and the ambivalence inherent in them. Thus, they can be seen as “the ‘dreamwork’ of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance” (10). Visual landscapes in particular are imbued with the spatial power imbalances of (neo)colonialism. In film, as in landscape painting, the Western spectator is given a privileged position from which to behold the colonized landscape; they are placed in the position of a “predator who scans the landscape as a strategic field, a network of prospects, refuges, and hazards…” and in a protected, shaded spot (a ‘refuge’), with screens on either side to dart behind or to entice curiosity, and an opening to provide deep access at the center” (16).
The representation of (neo)colonial landscapes has also frequently been employed in the association of the (neo)colonial Other with nature, a central trope of (neo)colonial discourse. It is in the historical development of this discourse that Latin America in particular has been and continues to be associated with nature. As Walter Mignolo explains:

When Development replaced the civilizing mission as a project of the developed countries, the Third World was (and still is) equated with “nature”; that is, not with the “industries” and “sciences” of progress that put the First World ahead in the temporal imagination. If, in the sixteenth century, “Nature” was conceived in terms of lands and territories to be mapped or as the spectacle of the world through which its Maker could be known, from the beginning of the nineteenth century “nature” became the fuel, the raw material, for the industrial Revolution and the forward-moving engine of progress and capital accumulation. This transformation put a premium on the already-existing continental division, and “nature” became increasingly associated with South America, Africa and Asia. Thus, the idea of “Latin” America was coetaneous with the increasing value of Europe’s new imperial countries as the sources of “culture.” (82)

This association of Latin America with nature (as opposed to the West, associated with ‘culture’) has notably been articulated to diverse political interests. Not only does it serve the interests of the proponents of capitalist expansion and modernization who see in Latin America a supply of resources and a space in which modernizing projects can be carried out; it also fuels the imagination of the romantic/primitivist or socialist opponents of capitalism and/or modernization who see in Latin America a utopian alternative to the
ills of capitalist modernity. Despite political differences, however, these visions share in their reinscribing of the neocolonial power relationships between the US and Latin America that make the latter into a space available for the former to project is utopian imaginaries.

This utopian conception of Latin America’s natural environment – either as a boundless resource supply or exotic natural escape from modernity – also always implicitly or explicitly invokes its Other, the dystopian image of the city. In both The Mission and Apocalypto, this opposition between country (or jungle) and city is made explicit and is central to their construction of a natural utopia. The pastoral dichotomy of country/city did not, of course, emerge out of colonial discourse, but instead has a long history in European cultural production. As Raymond Williams notes, the pastoral trope in European literature can be traced back almost endlessly, at least to ancient Greece, but became particularly prevalent in neo-classical and romantic literature of the 18th and 19th century where the country became associated with “a natural life: of peace, innocence and simple virtue” in contrast to the city, identified “as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition” (1). With the development of colonialism, however, the pastoral trope was transposed onto an understanding of the native Other and was particularly important in constructing the image of the ‘noble savage’.

The attempt to construct Latin America as a natural utopia and the employment of the pastoral trope in Up, The Mission, and Apocalypto is problematic, however, not only because it obscures the neocolonial power relations that structure these representations of Latin American natural landscapes, but also because it ignores the material processes that have shaped both these landscapes and the urban environments to which they are
implicitly or explicitly placed in opposition. Here, William’s critique of the pastoral trope in British culture – that it tended towards an essentialization that ignored specific economic developments that linked country and city and that elided agricultural class conflicts while also failing to recognize the potentialities represented in the city – is also applicable to utopian imaginaries projected onto the natural landscape of Latin America. In particular, these imaginaries have, as Franco argues, concealed “a complexity of political and economic factors, not the least important of which is capitalist development” (82). The essentializing images of unspoiled nature presented by films like *Up*, *The Mission*, and *Apocalypto* are problematic precisely in that they ignore the real complexities of transnational capitalism and the ways in which it has transformed both urban and ‘natural’ spaces in Latin America.

The natural landscape of the Latin American jungle is, as noted above, central to *Up*’s utopian imagery. Furthermore, the landscape’s emptying of human inhabitants also significantly means the emptying of human labor and its interaction with these landscapes. William’s observation that “a working country is hardly ever a landscape” (120) is instructive here as it illuminates the necessary elision of the real processes of human labor in the imagining of a natural utopia as an alternative to the ills of modernity. In particular, the exploitation of Latin American labor on plantations and in logging operations and its transformative effect on the natural environment is rendered invisible. The presentation of a return to a ‘pre-modern’ past of a ‘primitive’ relationship with nature ultimately registers a refusal to address the real and most likely irreversible effects of transnational capitalist development and modernization on the natural environment and the connections between the natural and man-made world. It is a failure to understand
that, as Neil Smith points out, nature is always to an extent ‘produced’ by human activity (81). In their construction of an Edenic ‘pre-modern’ utopia, these films belong to what Fredric Jameson terms ‘nostalgia film’ (287) as they are only capable of producing utopian images in reference to a long-lost past. Their utopia is, to borrow a term from Lucia Nagib, an ‘empty utopia’ devoid of any real political possibilities for the future. And it is this same empty Edenic utopia apparent in the jungle paradise of Paradise Falls that is presented through the essentializing city/jungle dichotomy of The Mission and Apocalypto.

In The Mission, the natural paradise of the San Carlos mission and the surrounding jungle is opposed to the colonial city. The mission/jungle scenes are dominated by sweeping overhead and wide-angle shots of the lush green landscape, objectifying the Edenic space for the gaze of the Western viewer. Central to this natural utopian landscape are the majestic Iguaçu falls, in which nature is embodied as a dynamic and productive force, highlighted both in wide shots of the falls framed by the surrounding jungle and in close-ups highlighting the power of the rushing water. The sequences of naked Guaraní children playing in the water and the Jesuit Fathers talking and laughing with the adults juxtaposed with images of the surrounding jungle present the human as existing in a state of primeval harmony with nature. The scenes in the colonial city, in contrast, consist almost exclusively of tight, mostly interior, shots. In opposition to the lush green that pervades the mission and jungle, the city is entirely devoid of vegetation, almost completely brown and arid. The harmony of the jungle is absent from the city that becomes a site of conflict, not only between the Jesuits and the pro-slavery Spanish and Portuguese, but also even among the Spanish settlers. When we
first see the city, it is when Rodrigo returns with the Guaraní he has captured to sell as
slaves. After finding out that his lover has been having an affair with his brother,
Rodrigo ends up murdering his brother in a swordfight. It is only after joining the Jesuits
on the mission, and thus leaving the city for the jungle, that Rodrigo is able to find peace
and redemption. The city also provides the setting for Altamirano’s hearing to decide the
fate of the missions in which the struggle between the Jesuits and the pro-slavery Spanish
and Portuguese settlers is dramatized. Even before the hearing, the city is again
established as a space of conflict and exploitation. The dust clouds generated by the
carriages traveling down the dirt roads from which the settlers shield themselves through

Figure 5: Visual opposition of colonial city and jungle utopia in *The Mission*
covering their mouths with handkerchiefs, in addition to suggesting the pollution of the modern city, introduce the urban space as stifling and contaminated. The presence of African and indigenous servants invokes the exploitative character of the Settler’s relationship with their racial Others. Even Cabeza’s children are denied the pleasures of childhood, as Cabeza scolds two of the youngest for playing a game. Thus, the exploitative nature of indigenous (and African) labor along with the confining environment of the city provides a stark opposition to the equality, openness and pleasure of the mission and surrounding jungle.

*Apocalypto* employs an opposition between jungle and city similar to that of *The Mission*. However, in *Apocalypto*, the Spanish colonizers are absent until the film’s final moments. Thus, instead of being used to construct an opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Europeans (the Jesuits and the settlers) as in *The Mission*, here the pastoral dichotomy structures the opposition between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ natives, the former group represented by the peaceful jungle-dwelling band of Mayans and the latter by the violent and barbaric Mayan inhabiting the city. Thus, the pastoral trope becomes the central mechanism by which the film reproduces the noble savage/violent barbarian opposition of (neo)colonial discourse. The village of the jungle-dwelling band, to which the film’s protagonist Jaguar Paw (Rudy Youngblood) belongs, is presented as the utopia of the noble savage. The first scene in the village, in which one of the men plays a practical joke on another provoking the entire village to erupt in good natured laughter, serves to identify Jaguar Paw’s band as almost the same as the US or European spectator. The jungle-dwelling Mayan are also, much as the Guaraní in *The Mission*, represented as living in balance with nature, an association highlighted by the eco-conscious philosophy
propagated by the band’s elders. The Mayans of the city, in contrast, are portrayed as irreconcilably savage and violent, adorned with extravagant body paint and piercings (a Gibson invention), confirming their absolute Otherness. Furthermore, we quickly discover that they have destroyed the surrounding natural environment through their over-extraction of resources. However, they are incapable of seeing their own actions as causing the destruction and instead engage in brutal human sacrifice – depicted in gory detail through close-ups of severed heads and body parts tumbling down the pyramid stairs to the cheers of the spectators below – to appease the gods. As in *The Mission*, there is a stark visual opposition constructed between jungle and city. Jaguar Paw’s village and the surrounding jungle in which we see the band hunting in the film’s opening scene (in a sequence that appears to cite the boar hunt scene in *The Mission*) are covered by lush greenery, presented as an almost endless expanse of trees and bush. The city, on the other hand, is a homogenous brown and dusty landscape that is almost

Figure 6: *Apocalypto’s jungle utopia*
indistinguishable from the limestone powder-covered bodies that populate it, marked by images of human suffering amidst dried river beds and dead trees.

However, even in these films’ utopian vision of nature, the ambivalence of (neo)colonial discourse becomes evident. The utopian image of nature is, in all of these films, ultimately unstable, as this image always turns into its opposite and the natural environment imagined as an Edenic paradise becomes a source of danger and entrapment. In *Up*, for example, after escaping from Muntz’s cave, Carl, Russell, and Doug, as they flee the dogs Muntz has sent in pursuit, are faced with a seemingly endless onslaught of obstacles presented by the jungle environment. Close calls with steep cliffs and loose rocks constantly threaten the protagonists’ lives and Carl’s house is imperiled by low overhanging rocks and trees as they make their escape. In *Apocalypto*, the jungle environment similarly presents obstacles to the escape of Jaguar Paw as he flees the warriors from the city. The tight shots as the camera follows Jaguar Paw imbue the dense jungle with a sense of claustrophobia and panic. Jaguar Paw’s flight is ultimately halted by the ocean as he emerges from the jungle to reach the beach, and we are led to believe it is only due to the arrival of the Spanish ships at that very moment that Jaguar Paw’s life is spared. Ironically, then, it is the technology of the Spaniards that saves Jaguar Paw rather than the previously idealized natural environment that would only have assisted his pursuers in capturing and killing him. In *The Mission*, the picturesque Iguaçu falls that, along with the lush jungle, provides the mystical and utopian backdrop for the Jesuit compound becomes a violent and deadly force as a priest tied to a cross plunges over them in the opening moments of the film and again as Fielding (Liam Neeson) and several Guaraní are sent to their death over them as they are pursued by the Portuguese.
America’s Id

As Edward Buscombe notes, “it has been well remarked that Mexico is the Western’s Id. South of the border is to the body politic of the Western what below the belt is in popular physiology – a place where dark desires run riot, a land not just of wine, women and song, but of rape, treachery and death” (16). I would suggest that in the present this observation can be extended geographically well beyond Mexico to encompass all of Latin America and generically beyond the Western to include the majority of US films that look south of the border. Thus, it is not just Mexico that is the Western’s id, but all of Latin America that becomes America’s id within the imaginative geography constructed through contemporary cinematic representation. Latin America has consistently been associated in contemporary film with a fundamental lack of the restraint and rationality that characterizes North America. The image of this lack of restraint generally takes one of two forms, an opposition that we have already seen in De Orella’s identification of the ‘greaser’ and the ‘beautiful señorita’ in films about the Mexican Revolution. Either it is manifested in a dystopian image of Latin America as a land of excessive violence and criminality that is seemingly without social, political or economic cause and instead attributed to a fundamental deficiency of character, or it appears in the form of a utopian image of the region as a space of unrestrained sexuality and libidinal pleasure. What is significant of both forms is that they contribute to an association of Latin America with the body in contrast to North America, which is associated with the mind. Both violence and sexuality are manifestations of an intense physicality freed from the restraints of Western rationality. This mind/body opposition is an old colonial trope and one that retains a central importance in the neocolonial discourse on Latin America.
Robert Rodriguez’s *Desperado* provides perhaps one of the best examples of the dystopian image of Latin America as America’s id. *Desperado*’s Mexico is an anarchic land overrun with crime, violence and corruption. The film’s villains, Bucho (Joaquim de Almeida) and his henchmen, are without remorse and seem to take a sadistic pleasure in their violent actions. Even El Mariachi (Antonio Banderas), the protagonist, is motivated purely by revenge and is incapable of being swayed by reason, as we see in two scenes in which he rejects the pleading of his North American friend Buscemi (Steve Buscemi) to end his killing spree. The Mexican town in which the film takes place is presented as an isolated community, run completely by Bucho, who supports the local businesses financially in turn for their help in trafficking drugs. There does not appear to be any form of political organization in the town, nor is there a police force or any threat of outside intervention. Bucho and his organization are allowed to operate with impunity, with only El Mariachi’s vigilante violence posing any threat to the continuation of their business. Perhaps more important, however, is that the town’s insular existence allows for its disconnection from any external social, economic or political realities. Thus criminality, and particularly drug trafficking, appears as a product of the inherent moral weakness of the people and not of specific social and economic conditions. This naturalization reproduces the dominant understanding of the existence of drug trafficking and violent crime in Mexico as somehow a manifestation of the essential backwardness or immorality of Mexicans, an understanding that ignores the role of the United States’ ‘war on drugs’ in perpetuating drug trafficking and drug-related violence in Mexico as well as that of the intensifying socio-economic inequality caused by the neoliberal expansion of US capital into Mexico. Even in *Desperado*’s dystopian Mexico, however,
there exist some glimmers of a utopian imaginary. The figure of the Mariachi represents one such utopian possibility in the return to traditional values and cultural practices. However, this image, like those of *Up* and *The Mission*, is capable only of turning to the past for its source of utopian possibilities and thus fails to engage with contemporary political realities. *Desperado* also presents another kind of utopian image, though, in the character of Carolina (Salma Hayek): the utopia of the ‘beautiful señorita’, the image of Latin America as an eroticized space of unrestrained sensuality.

This utopian image of Latin America as a space of sensual pleasure and liberating sexuality also appears significantly in the recent films *Brokeback Mountain* and *Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead*. The cities of Tijuana and Rio de Janeiro, both of which have historically epitomized (along with Buenos Aires) the US cinematic imagination of Latin America as a space of libidinal liberation, provide the respective loci for these films’ journeys south of the border. Even though very little of either film actually takes place in these cities, the characters’ experiences and actions there have crucial implications for the narrative development of both films. *Before the Devil Knows You’re
Dead opens on Andy Hanson (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) and Gina Hanson (Marissa Tomei) in the middle of an intense sexual encounter in a hotel room in Rio. We soon find out that Andy and Gina’s marriage has hit a rough patch and that their vacation in Rio provided the only moments of true happiness they have had in quite some time. Thus, Rio is immediately associated with the ‘enraptured romance’ that frequently characterized the city in films like Flying Down to Rio (dir. Thornton Freeland, 1933) and Latin Lovers (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1953). Back in the US, Andy, desperate to save his marriage, conspires with his brother Hank (Ethan Hawke) to rob the jewelry shop their parents own in order to get enough money so that he and Gina can move to Rio. Thus, the hope for romantic bliss provided by the utopian image of Rio becomes the driving force behind the film’s narrative development. In Brokeback Mountain, an adaptation of the Annie Proulx short story of the same name, Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), who is having a homosexual affair with Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) that both men hide from their families, goes to Tijuana after becoming frustrated with the increasing infrequency of his and Ennis’s trysts and has sex with a male prostitute. Tijuana thus provides a space where Jack can escape the heteronormative barriers of North American society and freely engage his sexual desires.

However, in both films the utopian promises provided by Rio and Tijuana are ultimately unattainable, as the characters are unable to escape the confining conditions of their life in the US and are punished for their irrational sexual transgressions. In Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead, Andy and Hank’s plot to rob the jewelry store goes awry, and their mother is killed by Hank’s friend whom he enlists to help with the job. Andy and Gina’s marriage further disintegrates, and Gina finally leaves him and reveals that
she has been having an affair with Hank. Finally Andy is killed by his own father, who learns that his son was behind the mother’s murder. In *Brokeback Mountain*, Jack’s exploit in Tijuana serves as one of the final straws in ending Jack and Ennis’s relationship after Ennis brings it up during their fight the last time that they see each other. Jack too is killed at the end of the film after his wife’s family finds out about his homosexuality. Both Andy and Jack ultimately pay for their libidinal transgressions in Latin America with their life, and thus in both films the rational and restrictive order of North American society is upheld over the unrestrained eroticism threatened by the space south of the border. Not only then is the association of Latin America with the body in opposition to that of North America with the mind reproduced; in both films also the superiority of North American rationality is ensured over the physicality and eroticism of Latin America through the necessary punishment of those North American characters motivated by the utopian image of Latin America as a space of sexual liberation and
unrestraint. Thus, despite the utopian hopes promised by Latin America in both films, ultimately the positional superiority of the US over Latin America is once again upheld.
Chapter 3: The Return of the Colonial Past

In recent years, the persistence of the colonial past in the present has become particularly evident. The growth of indigenous movements in response to the hegemonic forces of neoliberal globalization serves as a potent visible reminder, through these movements’ resistance to its logic, of the continuing presence of the ‘coloniality of power’. The increasing presence of postcolonial and indigenous scholarship that insists on the colonial wound as an experience that persists in the present also refuses the reterritorialization of colonial history. Perhaps the most powerful reminder of a persistent colonial past, though, is the present global order itself and the growing hegemony of neoliberalism that in many ways reproduces the logic of colonialism. In the wake of these developments, many Hollywood films have engaged in the rewriting of colonial histories in an attempt to deal with the threat of this persistent past. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam note, the cinematic chronotope is particularly unique in its ability to “mediat[e] between the historical and the discursive, providing fictional environments where historically specific constellations of power are made visible” (102). This ability, I would suggest, makes film an especially apt medium for the (re)writing of colonial histories. In general, these films have taken one of two forms. They have either appropriated historical narrative to return to the colonial past, or the colonial past reemerges as a temporal disruption in the present through the presence of supernatural figures. It is this first form that is taken by *The Mission* and *Apocalypto*. *The Mission*, set in the Brazil/Paraguay border region during the 18th century, focuses on the attempts of Spanish Jesuits to protect an Indian tribe from pro-slavery Portuguese colonizers, while *Apocalypto* returns to the early colonial past to depict the self-destruction of the Mayan empire on the eve of Spanish
arrival in the Yucatan. The latter form is taken by the horror films *From Dusk till Dawn* and *The Ruins*. In *From Dusk till Dawn*, the threat of the colonial past becomes embodied in the undead vampires, inhabiting a bar built on the remains of an Indian pyramid, who threaten, and are ultimately defeated by, the North American protagonists. In *The Ruins*, the colonial past reemerges in the form of the haunted jungle surrounding a Mayan temple, which comes to life and murders a group of North American teenagers on vacation in Mexico.

Despite the difference between the temporal settings of the narratives (past versus present) in these films, they all deal with the threat of the persistent colonial past in essentially the same way. All four of these films attempt to reterritorialize the colonial past into a linear narrative – turning the ‘past that is’ into the ‘past that was’ – while at the same time constructing an imaginative spatio-temporal geography in which Latin America, and specifically Mexico, continues to exist in a pre-modern historical state. Despite the seeming contradiction of these two tendencies, both serve to reproduce the temporal logic of neoliberal globalization and a neocolonial discourse that works to legitimate the exploitation of Latin American labor by Western, and particularly US, capital through positing the political and economic intervention of the US and other Western powers as necessary to bring the region into modernity. Despite neoliberalism’s claim to provide a model for a more democratic and equitable distribution of global wealth, neoliberalism has in practice meant, as David Harvey notes, the development of “the capacity of the US financial power as well as that of Europe and Japan, to exact tribute from the rest of the world” (93). Thus, Harvey suggests, neoliberalism has in fact been “increasingly impelled through mechanisms of uneven geographical developments”
In this way, neoliberalism has come to serve as the legitimating ideology of neocolonial capitalist expansion.

In the first section of this chapter, I explain how *Apocalypto*, *From Dusk till Dawn*, *The Mission*, and *The Ruins* reproduce the image of a ‘pre-modern’ Latin America. I then proceed to a discussion of how this image becomes complicated within the split-temporality of these films that seeks to reterritorialize the colonial past into a narrative of historical progress while still denying the historical coevalness of Latin America in the present.

**Imagining a ‘Pre-Modern’ Latin America**

As I argued in chapter 1, the present spatio-temporal imagining of the non-West as existing outside the narrative of Western historical development represents a continuation in colonial discourse, a reproduction in global neoliberal logic of what Johannes Fabian calls a ‘denial of coevalness’, the understanding of the colonial Other as existing in a pre-modern historical past. In this way, neoliberalism reproduces in a reconfigured form the enlightenment temporal logic of history as a progressive linear development. While a loss of historicity may, as Fredric Jameson has noted, mark the postmodern era, the ‘end of history’ has, in neoliberal/neocolonial logic, only come for the West. Thus, there is a kind of spatialization of historical development, wherein the West, and in particular the United States, represents the telos of historical progress, the utopia of the market that Latin America has not yet reached, and requires the intervention of Western powers to achieve.

In all four films, Latin America is represented as a ‘pre-modern’ space, existing temporally separated from the United States along the continuum of modernity. The
historical narrative of *Apocalypto* is set in the early colonial period before the Spanish arrival in the Yucatan. Gibson has stated that he intended the film as an allegory for the current situation of the United States, illustrating the ways in which environmental destruction and war can destroy a great society. This use of historical allegory to address contemporary political issues here is particularly problematic, though, as it serves to reproduce the image of a primitive and ‘pre-modern’ Mexico in the present. As Franco argues, “the appropriation of historical narratives…serves to freeze real problems in an anachronistic mode” (83). In the case of *Apocalypto*, the appropriation of historical narrative means that the environmental destruction in Mexico appears as a product of the inhabitants’ ineptitude and remains unconnected to the forces of transnational capitalism.

*Apocalypto* also engages in, as Annette Kolodny notes, the construction of a pastoral dichotomy between “the innocent jungle dwelling villagers and a corrupt and evil city” (25). As I showed in chapter 2, this adherence to the pastoral trope creates an alternating utopian and dystopian vision of the Mayans, imagined as both noble savages and violent barbarians. This simultaneous embrace and disavowal also allows for a complex imagining of a Mexico ultimately incapable of achieving modernity. The city-dwelling Mayans are shown as being capable of great technological achievement, as evidenced by their refinement and use of limestone in architecture. However, the environmental destruction caused by these advances means that the city-dwellers simultaneously appear incapable of retaining control over these achievements. Thus, the Mayan city appears as an image of a failed attempt at modernization. This failure is not attributed to specific socio-historical factors but instead to an inherent lack of rational capacity. The Mayan elite is unable to understand the destruction of their natural
environment as a result of their actions, instead attributing it to the displeasure of the 
gods.

Jaguar Paw’s band, as the romanticized noble savages of the forest, in contrast, 
are endowed with a form of the rationality denied to the city-dwellers. In the story told 
by one of the elders, in which an owl remarks that the humans will never achieve 
happiness because they will continue to take from nature until there is no more left, there 
emerges an understanding of the connection between resource extraction and 
environmental destruction that is absent in the Mayans of the city. The operation of 
pastoral splitting here thus ensures that the capacity for technological modernization and 
the necessary rationality to manage this modernization cannot coexist in Mayan 
civilization, which therefore remains frozen in the past, incapable of historical evolution. 
As Henry Geddes Gonzalez argues, this imagining of the Maya as “exotic remnants of a 
majestic past to be simultaneously desired and disavowed” has specific implications for 
the present where this essentialized view impedes the understanding of the complex 
interactions between Mayan and global cultures (50).

*From Dusk till Dawn*, while set in the present day, nevertheless reproduces the 
image of Mexico as a primitive, pre-modern space. This image becomes the impetus for 
the narrative progression of the film as Seth and his brother Richie, after robbing a bank 
and murdering several people, are seeking to escape capture across the US/Mexico 
border. Thus, the image of Mexico as a pre-modern space where a criminal can easily 
elude the grasp of the modern state apparatus becomes the motivating force behind the 
actions of the characters. After the brothers and their hostages succeed in crossing the 
border, Seth provides Jacob with directions to the bar that is to serve as their rendezvous
point, telling him to keep going straight and then to turn on a street named “digayó”.
These simplistic directions suggest a Mexico of only barren back roads, lacking the modern infrastructure of cities, highways and interstate systems. This understanding is further reinforced through the brief landscape shots as the RV roams towards the bar that reveal a barren land devoid of any signs of modernization; the only buildings seen are dilapidated houses that appear almost to blend into the desert landscape (see Figure 9).

The imagining of Mexico as a pre-modern space is further established through the binary opposition of mind/body, an opposition central to (neo)colonial discourse in which the West is associated with the mind and rationality and the non-West becomes associated with irrationality and the primacy of the carnal. In temporal terms, then, the mind signifies the modern while the body signifies the pre-modern. The Mexican bar in which the second half of the film takes place, aptly named the “Titty Twister,” is a space of sexual pleasure and lack of physical restraint. The chaotic and cluttered mise-en-scène of the bar coupled with tight framing and short takes creates a sense of alternating ecstasy and panic conveying both a violent and sensual physicality. The Titty Twister’s biggest attraction is its ensemble of female strippers, particularly the beautiful Santanica. The narrative development of the film is halted for Santanica’s dance, which becomes an exotic spectacle for the Western male gaze, with Santanica’s animalistic sensuality accentuated by the live snake that adorns her neck as she dances.

In The Ruins, the image of a pre-modern Mexico is constructed through the opposition between the North American protagonists and the Mayan villagers who hold them prisoner within the ruins of an ancient Mayan temple. Specifically, the two groups are differentiated through their response to the threat posed by the living vegetation
haunting the ruins. The reaction of the Mayan villagers is characterized by irrationality and a relationship with nature based in myth and superstition and thus associated temporally with the pre-modern. They make no attempt either to discover the cause of the supernatural infection or to treat those who have, or may have, become infected by the plants. When Amy (Jena Malone), one of the North American tourists, throws a clump of the vines from the ruins that hits one of the Mayan children, the men quickly shoot and kill the child without waiting to see if he had actually been infected or trying to treat him medically. The North American protagonists, in contrast, respond to the threat with rational consideration and action suggesting a rooting in Enlightenment reason. It is particularly significant here that Jeff (Jonathan Tucker), Amy’s boyfriend, is a medical student and thus associated with a relationship to nature based on Western scientific rationality. When, after falling onto the floor of the excavation shaft, Mathias (Joe Anderson) is paralyzed and his legs become infected by the vines, Jeff conducts an improvised amputation in an attempt to save his life. Later, when Stacy’s (Laura
Ramsey) side and leg become infected, Jeff again utilizes his medical knowledge to cut out the vines.

The association of the Mayan villagers with the pre-modern is apparent from their first appearance, in which the tourists spot two small children in the distance as they cross a river en route to the ruins. The young girl, who we see only from afar, appears as a ghostly figure, standing and staring motionless, captured in shallow focus, which obscures any identifying details (see Figure 10). Thus, from their first appearance, the Mayans are more liminal remnants of an ancient past, as are the ruins themselves, than they are human characters existing in the present. The Mayan villagers furthermore are represented as an insular community that seems to have no contact with the outside world. They can react only with fear to the arrival of the North American tourists and none of them speaks any language other than their own. This representation of the Mayan is quite curious given the global social and political impact of indigenous groups throughout Latin America, particularly in the fight against neoliberal globalization. The film’s relegation of the Mayan to an existence in a pre-modern past, eliding their

Figure 10: Mayan children haunting the background in The Ruins
interconnection in global social and political struggles, thus appears as an attempt to 
negate the real resistance waged and political alternatives presented by indigenous groups 
in Latin America.

Just as Mexico in *Apocalypto*, the Brazil/Paraguay border regions in *The Mission* 
become frozen in the past through the film’s appropriation of historical narrative to 
allegorize contemporary problems. As I suggested in chapter 2, the film’s attempt at 
constructing a ‘pre-modern’ utopia in the Amazonian jungle is particularly problematic in 
its essentializing representation of the Guaraní, idealized as the Latin American noble 
savage living a simple life in balance with the natural environment. The Guaraní 
characters most frequently seen in the film are the children, who, when we see them on 
the mission, are usually either playing naked or singing or interacting with the Jesuits, 
who seem to serve as surrogate fathers. When the Jesuits from the San Carlos mission 
travel into the city for the hearing with Altamirano to decide the fate of the missions, it is 
one of the children from the mission that they bring with them to represent the Guaraní. 
The child becomes a kind of exhibit in the hearing, as both sides (the Jesuits and the 
settlers) attempt to use him as evidence to prove their points about the Guaraní. This 
association of the native Other with childhood reproduces a frequent trope in 
(neo)colonial discourse of relegating the Other to existence in an earlier stage of 
historical development through infantilizing representations. The film’s idealization of 
the Guaraní as embodiments of a simpler time and an existence more in tune with nature 
thus translates into an idealization of the youthful state represented by the Guaraní 
children. The nakedness of the children (and partial nakedness of the adults), particularly 
when opposed to the conservative dress of both the Jesuits and the Spanish/Portuguese
settlers, also functions in the association of the Guaraní with body (and nature) over mind. As in *From Dusk till Dawn*, this mind/body dichotomy operates in the association of Latin America with the ‘pre-modern’ in opposition to the West, which is associated with modernity, even though in the case of *The Mission* it is the former that is privileged over the latter.

**Split Temporalities and Narrative Reterritorialization**

What is most exhibitive in all four films, however, of colonial discourse in its neoliberal configuration is the existence of a split temporality that must contend with both the colonial past and the neocolonial present. There has always existed in colonial discourse some temporal contradiction, which as Homi Bhabha argues, is resolved in the ‘ironic compromise’ of the ambivalence of colonial discourse (122). However, this contradiction assumes a particular and distinct form of split temporality in the most recent reconfiguration of colonial discourse: Western intervention in the colonial era must be understood as a positive agent of development and progress; however, at the same time, the formerly colonized world must continue to exist in an underdeveloped and pre-modern state in order to legitimate continued Western intervention.

This split temporality can, I argue, best be understood as a product of two historical developments: global capitalism and US (neo)colonialism. As Quijano argues, there is a split temporality embedded in the very structural development of global capitalism. Under Spanish colonization of Latin America, the development of global capitalism involved the articulation of all historical forms of labor in the pursuit of capitalist interests, a reality that has persisted into the present era of neoliberal globalization (184). Thus, global capitalism has had to legitimate itself as a force of
progress and modernization while at the same time perpetuating the existence of pre-capitalist forms of labor in the non-West. The historical development of U.S. colonialism, on the other hand, has involved the discursive framing of the United States’ role in the world in a way as to decisively differentiate it from that of Spanish, and to a lesser extent other forms of, colonialism. Specifically, as Julian Go notes, US colonialism took on the tutelary role of teaching democracy and self-government that represented an extension of the progressive movement within the U.S. with its “ethos of reformism and transformism” (30-31), an ethos that has persisted in the reconfiguration of US neocolonialism with neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies. This ideological configuration has produced a specific view of the non-Western world and, in particular, the former Spanish colonies. As Go notes of the US view of Puerto Rico and the Philippines during their early colonial occupation, “centuries of Spanish colonialism had served to develop [them] beyond ‘savagery’ but it had not completed the job” (29). Thus, Spanish rule had in fact, in the US view, served as an agent of progress, but it had failed to develop its colonies into a state of historical coevalness with the US. With the confluence of global US and neoliberal hegemony, these two historical developments have become intricately interconnected and have contributed to both the material and discursive production of Latin America as a space of persistent underdevelopment while simultaneously remaining obligated to legitimate past colonial intervention as a civilizing and modernizing force.

*Apocalypto, From Dusk till Dawn, The Mission,* and *The Ruins* all convey this particular split temporality through their attempts to reterritorialize the colonial past into a linear historical narrative of Western progress. In *Apocalypto,* the emplottment of
events into a linear narrative structure in representing the Maya serves to impose a particularly Western conception of time onto Mayan society while ignoring the indigenous epistemologies that would have structured their own temporal understandings. The film’s temporality thus reproduces a Eurocentric imagining of the non-West that fails to take into account alternative modes of experience and knowledge. The linear narrative structure of the film also allows it to reterritorialize the colonial past within the Western metanarrative of historical progress as the arrival of the Spanish at the end of the film appears as the intervention of a benevolent and civilizing force. The superimposed W. Durant quote in the film’s opening frame—“A great civilization is not conquered from without until it destroys itself from within”—serves to foreground this understanding, suggesting the Maya’s self-destruction as evidence of their inability to achieve modernity and thus colonial intervention as necessary to rescue the Mayan from themselves and to civilize and modernize their society. This assertion is further established in the powerful image of the Spanish ships arriving at the end of the film that communicates the superiority of the Spanish in two important ways (see Figure 11). The ships themselves, which clearly inspire the awe of Jaguar Paw and the two remaining warriors who pursue him, establish the technological superiority of the Western colonizers while the cross held by the missionary in the dinghy establishes their spiritual superiority.

The temporal linearity of the film also creates a tripartite division of time, a division, which as Adorno and Horkheimer note in their reading of Homer’s *Odyssey*, is integral to Western temporal rationality as well as to the dominant cinematic narrative temporality—what Deleuze terms the ‘movement-image’—of US and European films. *Apocalypto*’s past, represented by the idyllic existence of Jaguar Paw’s band in the forest
and the lost time of peace and abundance in the city, cannot be returned to, as it has been superseded by the present, in which environmental destruction and violence structure Mayan society. The only way forward out of this dystopian present then is in the future of Spanish colonialism, a future promised as a ‘new beginning.’ When Jaguar Paw’s band first encounters the band that has fallen victim to the invaders from the city, the leader tells Jaguar Paw that their land has been ravaged and that they seek a new beginning. However, it is clear that this new beginning eludes them, as we later find the leader of this band as a fellow captive of Jaguar Paw. It is only with the arrival of the Spanish ships at the end of the film that a new beginning can be realized. When Jaguar Paw’s wife asks him if they should go to the men on the ships, Jaguar Paw responds that they should go into the forest and seek a new beginning. Thus, even though they do not embrace the newcomers, their arrival allows Jaguar Paw and his family the freedom to start their new life. The closure of the narrative at this point allows the film to neatly elide the reality of the post-contact atrocities committed by the Spanish. It also suggests
that the Maya, as long as they relegated themselves to a peaceful hunter-gatherer existence, would be left undisturbed by the invaders, who would benefit them by defeating the city-dwellers.

In *From Dusk till Dawn*, the linear temporal development of the narrative is disrupted by the appearance of the vampires in the bar. Vampires represent what Ann Davies refers to as ‘embodied heterotopia’ as embodied figures that are “localizable but…[have] the capacity to contain all spaces, places and times” (396). Within the film, the vampires are established as embodiments of the pre-colonial and/or colonial past, as the final shot of the film reveals the Indian pyramid on which the façade of the bar is built. The reemergence of the past within the narrative space of a film, according to Anna Powell, confuses the temporality of the narrative, creating a “tension…experienced as an unbearable dilation of time” (qtd. in Martin-Jay 69). This is precisely what occurs here, as the appearance of the vampires creates a tension and indiscernibility between the layers of time. The remainder of the narrative, then, becomes concerned with reterritorializing this disruption and reasserting a linear temporal framework, as the protagonists struggle to, and ultimately succeed in, destroying the threat of the past embodied by the vampires. The temporal tension is thus ultimately resolved and the ‘past that is’ – the colonial past that persists in the present – once again becomes the ‘past that was.’

In order to perform this reterritorialization, the film must confirm the superiority of the Western protagonists both as the superiority of the Spanish colonizers and of the American neocolonizers. As in *Apocalypto*, then, the superiority of the protagonists is established in two domains: the spiritual and the technological. The former is important
in that it recalls the legitimation of Spanish colonialism, the need for the spiritual
salvation of native peoples. The latter reproduces the ideological claim of neoliberalism,
the economic and technical superiority of the West and thereby the implication of the
potential of the free market as an agent of global development. The scene in the supply
room provides an especially powerful example of how both of these forms of superiority
are constructed. Resolved to leave the shelter of the room to mount an offensive against
the vampires, Seth, Jacob, Kate and Scott scavenge the room for material to construct
makeshift weapons. The water gun loaded with holy water and the makeshift cross gun
are both particularly significant as they assume a double signification, representing at
once both the spiritual and technological superiority of the protagonists and thus the
spiritual and technological superiority of the West over Latin America (see Figure 12).

In *The Ruins*, the reemergence of the colonial past in the present, rather than
taking the quasi-human form of the vampires in From Dusk till Dawn, is embodied in the
natural environment – the supernatural vinery encasing the Mayan ruins. The use of
nature as embodiment of the colonial past is particularly significant given the persistent
association of Latin America with nature in (neo)colonial discourse as well as the
increasing attention given by environmental groups to environmental destruction in the
region as a consequence of the expansion of transnational capital. The supernatural
vegetation thus constitutes a particularly potent ‘return of the repressed’, invoking both
the exploitation of natural resources under past colonial expansion and the environmental
destruction under neoliberal capitalist expansion that (neo)colonial discourse has tried to
repress through the rhetoric of modernization and the championing of land as property.
Unlike the reterritorialization of the colonial past accomplished by the other films, *The Ruins*’ reterritorialization is spatial rather than temporal. In the death of the North American protagonists at the hands of the deadly vegetation, it becomes clear that the reemergence of the colonial past cannot be returned to the ‘past that was’ by the successful intervention of Western or North American protagonists, as it was in *Apocalypto* and *From Dusk till Dawn*. Instead, the threat of the persistent colonial past is contained within a space that is itself associated spiritually and historically with the pre-modern, the Mayan ruins. It is this spatial containment that ensures the reemergence of the colonial past provides no real threat to the current global order. It is especially notable that the beachside resort at which the five tourists are staying prior to journeying into the interior to visit the ruins, a typical symbol of the transnational tourist industry and its exploitation of natural resources and local labor, remains safe from the threat that victimizes those who explore the ruins. The jungle vegetation appears content to extract
its sacrifices from the few Europeans or North Americans that invade the spatial boundaries of the sacred ruins. The film does, however, in the next-to-final scene, present the possibility of the disruption of this spatial arrangement and thus the deterritorialization of the colonial past. As Jeff creates a diversion by attracting the attention of the Mayan villagers guarding the ruins (which ultimately results in his death), Amy escapes, running until she reaches the jeep left behind by the archaeological team. She successfully starts the Jeep and speeds away through the jungle. However, just as it appears she has escaped safely, a close-up reveals green veins protruding from her face – clearly indicating that she has been infected – right before the film cuts to black. If this were in fact the final scene of the film, it would suggest that the threat embodied by the vegetation had escaped its spatial containment and would be unleashed on the rest of the country (specifically the resort to which we would assume that Amy would be returning). However, this deterritorializing tendency is counteracted as the screen opens once again on the ruins and we see ‘the Greeks’, Mathias’s traveling companions, walking into frame in search of their friend, suggesting that they will provide the next sacrifice for the force haunting the ruins. Thus, the film’s final image, in returning us to the Mayan ruins, once again reterritorializes the threat of the colonial past that the preceding scene attempted to deterritorialize.

Of all four films, The Mission comes the closest to resisting the reterritorialization of the colonial past. In the film’s final moments, the closing caption – “The Indians of South America are still engaged in a struggle to defend their land and their culture. Many of the priests who, inspired by faith and love, continue to support the rights of the Indians for justice, do so with their lives” – makes a clear attempt at insisting on the persistence
of the exploitation of colonial labor and resources in the present, specifically in the
expansion of transnational capitalism under the neoliberal global order. However, the
emphasis in the caption on the “priests who…continue to support the rights of the
Indians” points to a larger problem in the film: it is the Jesuit priests, and not the Indians
themselves, who are the active agents in the struggle for the rights of the Indians. Thus,
just as in Apocalypto and From Dusk till Dawn, Western intervention in the colonial era
is still represented as a force of progress, even if it pits one form of intervention against
another. If it is the spiritual and technological superiority of the Western characters that
is established in Apocalypto and From Dusk till Dawn, it is their spiritual and
social/economic superiority that is upheld in The Mission. The gift of the Jesuits to the
Guaraní is not only Christianity but also a new form for the social organization of labor.
While this utopian socialist model certainly represents a radically different alternative
than that of the free market, it nevertheless remains rooted in a Eurocentric perspective.
In this context, then, the film’s closing caption ultimately does nothing more than to insist
on the continued need for Western intervention in the region, even if it is the intervention
of liberal priests as opposed to that of transnational corporations and neoliberal
institutions. As Franco argues, “by bringing the audience into the present, in the final
caption, the film reveals only too clearly its own limitations, and especially the fact that
the drama is played out not by the indigenous community but by different and conflicting
branches of the imperial power” [my emphasis] (85). The Guaraní are stripped of agency
both in the past and the present. The film’s neglect to examine the independent acts of
resistance carried out by the Guaraní or any alternative social forms that their society
prior to the Jesuit intervention may have presented thus render it incapable of a
meaningful reimagining of the colonial past. This is, as Franco suggests, “precisely the
problem of a historical film which is too faithful to history, for it cannot represent what
has gone unrepresented” (86).

**Split Temporality and the Border as Spatio-temporal Divide**

Another product of the postmodern split temporality (re)produced in contemporary
cinematic representations of Latin America is the significance of the border as an
absolute divide that splits the Americas into two spatio-temporal spheres. The border no
longer functions solely as a spatial division that marks the opposition between the US and
Latin America as one between civilization/barbarism, order/chaos, etc. It also now
assumes a specifically temporal dimension in that the border is imagined as a line of
division between a world that continues to exist somewhere within the linear historical
development of Enlightenment rationality and one that has transcended this development
and reached the telos of historical development and thus represents a realized utopia. The
US is therefore imagined as a free-market and democratic utopia that exists at the end of,
or outside of, history in opposition to a Latin America that remains lagging behind in the
linear development of history and needs the help of the US to progress towards the telos
of historical development that it has reached. Movement across the border from South to
North then becomes imagined as a temporal movement towards the end of history, a
transcendence of historical development in which, upon reaching the northern side of the
border, the character that makes this journey now exists outside history and is able to
realize the (neo)liberal democratic utopia of the US. On the other hand, movement across
the border from North to South becomes a movement of historical regression, a journey
backwards from utopia to the conflict and dissatisfaction of historical change and development.

This temporal imagining of the border is perhaps most powerfully conveyed by *All the Pretty Horses*, an adaptation of the Cormac McCarthy novel of the same name. In *All the Pretty Horses*, the journey of John Grady Cole (Matt Damon), Lacey Rawlins (Henry Thomas), and Jimmy Blevins (Lucas Black) to Mexico and the return journey of John become central to the construction of the border as a temporal, in addition to spatial, divide. At first, *All the Pretty Horses* appears to replicate the Western’s imagining of Mexico as a utopian frontier space of freedom and adventure. However, this early image is quickly revealed as illusory and it is the US, in John’s return trip across the border, that is rediscovered as a (neo)liberal democratic utopia. As we saw in *From Dusk till Dawn*, the southern movement across the border was imagined as a journey of temporal regression. In this regard, the border crossing in *All the Pretty Horses* is remarkably similar, particularly as one of the characters is on the run from the law and hoping to escape in Mexico. However, it is the return trip, absent from at least the diegetic space of *From Dusk till Dawn*, that is essential to *All the Pretty Horses’* imagining of the border.

The linear historical logic still present in this split-temporal imagining of the border becomes obvious early in the film as John and Lacey come upon the Rio Grande. As Roger Barta argues, the dominant logic of the border is that the appropriate response to it is crossing it; “the border is a line that demands straightforward behavior” (qtd. in Noble 194). This straightforward response to the border thus represents a fundamentally linear response. Upon reaching the Rio Grande, the only question for John and Lacey
becomes when and where to cross, suggesting the linear response of crossing as the only available response. Upon the three cowboys’ (Blevins has joined them by this point) dramatic crossing of the river, it becomes clear that this crossing represents a regressive historical movement to a pre-modern era. The hoots and hollers of the characters as they arrive on the Mexican side of the river communicate a kind of primal and irrational liberation from the constraints of (post)modern society derived from this historical movement. It is also precisely the image of Mexico as underdeveloped and primitive, an image seen repeatedly in the western’s imagining of Mexico as frontier, that draws the characters to make their cross-border journey. For John and Lacey, their journey is motivated by the supposed availability of undeveloped land in Mexico on which they could start their own ranch, in contrast to the private ownership and development of all the land in the US that presents a barrier to their hopes. Although Blevins never communicates exactly why he is running to Mexico or who he is running from, it is clearly implied that he is on the run from the law and hoping to escape south of the border. Thus, just as for Seth and Ritchie in *From Dusk till Dawn*, the apparent lack of a modern state apparatus and legal system in Mexico provides for Blevins the impetus for his cross-border journey.

However, the utopian frontier images of Mexico quickly disintegrate as the film progresses. What emerges instead of a space of primitive freedom and possibility is one constructed as backwards and repressive. This becomes conveyed most clearly at first through the existence of the repressive traditional gender roles that keep John and Alejandra (Penélope Cruz) from continuing their romantic tryst and the contrast with the egalitarianism of the US. When Doña Alfonsa (Miriam Colón) forbids John from seeing
her niece anymore, she tells him: “This is another country. Here, a woman’s reputation is all she has. There’s no forgiveness for women. A man may lose his honor and regain it again, but a woman cannot.” John responds simply, “I guess I have to say that don’t seem right.” While the existence of repressive social inequality does function in the opposition of a historically backwards Mexico with the utopian society of the US, it is the role of private property and the legal system, and the connections between the two, that are essential to the film’s construction of this opposition. Private property and the law both play a central role in the film from the opening moments, where we learn that the ranch that has been in John’s family for generations is in danger of being sold, as it has been inherited by John’s mother who plans on selling it. It is in fact this event that disenchants John and motivates him to travel to Mexico. Later in the film, the significance of property and law become embodied in the characters’ horses and the way in which the legal systems in Mexico and in the US deal with the theft of these horses. The importance of respect for private property and its connection to the US are made clear in the reactions of John and Lacey to Blevins. John and Lacey are first reluctant to allow Blevins to join them on their cross-border journey. However, when the two ask Blevins why they should let him ride with them, he responds “because I’m an American” and the film immediately cuts to the three triumphantly crossing the river. Shortly after this scene, Blevins’s horse is stolen during a thunderstorm and John and Lacey assist him in recovering it. After they have parted ways, Lacey affirms Blevins’s good character by noting that he wouldn’t stand for anybody stealing his horse. Thus, respect for private property and ‘Americanism’ become specifically linked in Blevins and both qualities are clearly privileged over those of the Mexican townspeople who steal the horse.
Although the lack of respect for private property in Mexico becomes evident at this early point, it is not until later in the film when Blevins reappears that the corruption of the Mexican legal system becomes central to the image of Mexico as a backwards society. John and Lacey, who have both established themselves as workers on Don Hector de la Rocha’s (Rubén Blades) ranch, are suddenly arrested and taken to a small prison where they are reunited with Blevins. We quickly find out that Blevins was arrested after returning to the town to retrieve his gun, which had also been stolen by the townspeople, and shooting several townspeople, one of whom was a federale, in an altercation and is now being charged with theft and murder. Blevins reveals to John and Lacey that he has been physically abused by the police, and a close-up of his bruised and swollen feet provides the visual evidence of this brutality. The following day John is questioned by the captain, and this conversation is central to the opposition constructed between the Mexican and US legal systems (and their respect for private property) that becomes fully evident at the end of the film. In particular, it is the notion of truth – and specifically the ‘truth’ of property ownership – and the respective system’s dedication to this ideal that separates a backwards and still developing Mexican society from the utopian US in which truth is forever evident and always triumphant. After John insists to the captain that the horse Blevins is accused of stealing was in fact Blevins’s horse originally, the captain responds: “This is not the facts. We can *make* the truth here or we can lose it here,” continuing to tell John that the truth will be something different when he arrives at the penitentiary. John retorts, however, that “there ain’t but one truth. The truth is what happened. It ain’t what come out of somebody’s mouth.” Thus, for the Mexican legal system, the truth is conceived of as adjustable and is reduced to whatever
is convenient while for the American John it is an ultimate ideal, the reality of “what happened.” In Mexico, however, we see that this ideal of truth, along with the notion of due process, is a mere inconvenience, as in the following scene, Blevins is dragged away and shot to death by the corrupt captain and his deputy.

It is then in John’s return trip across the border that he realizes the (neo)liberal democratic utopia of the US in its opposition to the corrupt and backwards Mexico. Upon first crossing the border, John along with all three horses (his, Blevins’s, and Lacey’s) runs into two men standing by a stalled car and asks them if they would be interested in buying a rifle. One of the men, however, is a sheriff and suspects that John has stolen the horses. In the following scene, John appears in court and tells his story to the judge, who not only believes the story but goes as far as to thank John for restoring his faith in humanity. The judge orders John to be released and, most importantly, that his horses be returned to him. This scene is crucial to the film’s utopian imagining of the US for several reasons. First, unlike in Mexico where Blevins was held in jail for at least a month and executed without a trial, in the US John immediately receives a trial. Second, the truth of John’s story becomes self-evident to the wise judge, who like John and unlike the Mexican captain, understands truth in its ideal sense as the one and only truth of what really happened. Most importantly, however, is that the core of this truth is John’s ownership of the horses. Thus, in opposition to the corrupt Mexican legal system in which truth is manufactured and private property is not respected, the utopian nature of US society is realized in a legal system in which truth inevitably triumphs because the rights of the private property owner are always respected. Ironically then, the intersection of law and private property that originally prompted John’s journey to
Mexico (the ranch being inherited by his mother) is ultimately reaffirmed as the basis for the utopian society represented by the US and its opposition to a Mexico that remains in a developing stage and thus historically separated from the US. The film’s final shot, then, completes and visualizes this utopian image of the US (see Figure 13). A wide shot of the southwestern landscape with John returning Lacey’s horse to him in the background conveys a sense of timelessness, an existence of a landscape that seems to have transcended history. Here, the symbolic imagery of open landscapes central to the classic western coexists with the triumph of the free market and liberal democracy signified in the return of Lacey’s horse to its rightful owner, presenting a potent visual representation of the ‘end of history’ reached by John in his return journey across the border.

Figure 13: The ‘end of history’ in the closing shot of *All the Pretty Horses*
Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to illuminate the way in which cinematic representations of Latin America in US film have contributed to the construction of an imaginative geography of the Americas that has served to legitimate the expansion of transnational capital within a neoliberal global order and to reinscribe the hemispheric and global hegemony of the United States. Despite the variety in terms of genre and political commitment of the films studied, they have all relied on tropes and imagery that reproduce this dominant imagining of Latin America by the US and Europe within (neo)colonial discourse. In short, I have tried to provide a schematic outline of what has become the dominant or hegemonic image of Latin America within the US, particularly as it is constructed through cinematic production, which has, I argue, become the privileged medium for the construction of this imaginative geography. This is, however, only a beginning and far from a complete picture of the complex interactions in which this dominant imaginary is constructed and deconstructed, reproduced and contested, reinscribed and destabilized. To leave this analysis at this point would be not only to leave little hope for the possibility of resistance to the dominant spatio-temporal imagining of the Americas, but also to render Latin America silent, as simply an object of which is spoken and not a (heterogeneous collection of) subject(s) also quite capable of speaking back. I have not begun here to address those US films that, in varying degrees, subvert the dominant imagining of Latin America. Such a line of inquiry would provide a fruitful and necessary exploration of the ways in which, for example, Steven Soderbergh’s *Che* (2008) departs from the dominant imagining of country and city in its politicization of both spaces (despite its problematic nostalgia for a pre-‘postmodern’
revolutionary imaginary) or *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (dir. Tommy Lee Jones, 2005) destabilizes the temporal imagining of the US/Mexican border discussed in the previous chapter. I have also not explored here the way in which the hegemonic imagining of the Americas is variously reproduced – for example in the image of a pre-modern Mexico in *Como Agua para Chocolate* (dir. Alfonso Aura, 1992) or of the Brazilian sertão as a pastoral utopia in *Central do Brasil* (dir. Walter Salles, 1998) – or subverted – as in the politicized imagining of the global cities of Mexico City and Rio in *Amores Perros* (dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) and *O Homem do Ano* (dir. José Henrique Fonseca, 2003) – in Latin American films. Thus, I see this study as only the starting point of a much more expansive project, a project that would seek to understand the complex ways in which the dominant image of Latin America is alternatively reproduced and destabilized in both US and Latin American cinematic representations.

To fully understand US and Latin American cinema within the context of neoliberal globalization, one must take into consideration that while neoliberal globalization has most often manifested its most repressive forms, there are also latent potentialities within the technological, social and economic processes involved in the transition to a ‘globalized’ world that provide possibilities for contesting this new global order. As I have argued elsewhere, the globalization of the culture industries has opened up a space for Latin American films to reach a global audience and, from within this space, to destabilize the dominant spatio-temporal logic of the US and neoliberal hegemony as well as to imagine new identities no longer limited by the nation-state. In this regard, it is useful, I believe, to look briefly at Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros* and the possibilities it suggests for a transnational aesthetics of resistance that operates within the
conditions of possibility given by the current neoliberal global order to destabilize the hegemonic spatio-temporal imagining of Latin America. Both the international success and the destabilizing potentiality of Amores Perros can be attributed, I would suggest, to its employment of a hybrid aesthetics that uses a transnational cinematic language, utilizing Western cinematic conventions to reach a global audience, to articulate regional/national experiences with (post)modernity and neoliberal globalization in Mexico. The film thus occupies a hybrid transnational space, what Homi Bhabha terms the ‘third space of enunciation’, from within which it is able to destabilize the dominant spatial and temporal logic of US and neoliberal hegemony. Amores Perros constructs a labyrinthine temporality through a non-linear narrative structure that jumps around in time and between narratives. The effect is to dislodge the events of the film from a plane of causality linking past, present, and future in a straight line, instead presenting a multi-layered temporality without a necessarily true past or future. Through this narrative strategy, the film is able to destabilize the dominant linear temporality of the classical ‘movement-image’ central to US cinematic imagining of Latin America. Amores Perros also destabilizes the essentializing image of the Latin American city (the image we see in Apocalypto and The Mission) as a space of corruption and decay that signifies the inability of Latin America to achieve modernity. In opposition to this essentializing construction, Amores Perros de-essentializes and politicizes the urban space. The film’s representation of the city becomes a vehicle for exposing the inequalities between economic classes in Mexico City and the stark gap between the integrated and the non-integrated within global society. As Marvin D’Lugo points out, the Mexico City of the film is “characterized by the continuous juxtapositions between the modern and
primitive, between a glamorous world of televisual images and the leitmotifs of animalistic violence” (“Amores Perros” 224). The existence of these contrasting juxtapositions challenges the neoliberal market’s promise of egalitarian development and equal access to symbolic and economic products28.

The international success of Amores Perros, as well as films like Y Tu Mamá También (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), Cidade de Deus (dir. Fernando Meirelles, 2002), and Diarios de Motocicleta (dir. Walter Salles, 2004), also points to the increasing difficulty (and perhaps pointlessness) of constructing a clear opposition between US/European and Latin American film, as does the increase in Latin American directors like Iñárritu, Cuarón, Meirelles, and Salles who have moved back and forth between making films in their home countries and in the US or Europe. Given these contemporary conditions, to study US and Latin American film in terms of a fundamental opposition between the two would ultimately do no more than to reproduce the binary logic of (neo)colonial discourse evident in the dominant spatio-temporal imagining of the Americas, not to mention it would also homogenize the diversity and particularity of Latin American film and thus fail to grasp the complex dialogical relationship between the global and the local. Furthermore, such an approach provides no real space of enunciation for Latin American films to speak back and inaugurate a political project adequate to the present conditions of possibility29. Against such an approach, I would suggest the conceptualizing of the hemispheric (and global) image exchange as a liminal and indeterminate space and a site of hegemonic struggle wherein the dominant spatio-temporal logic of US and neoliberal hegemony is to varying degrees constructed and deconstructed, reproduced and destabilized. This understanding would insist on seeing
the imaginative geography of the Americas not as an image solely imposed from above by the dominant powers of the new global order but as the product of a ‘compromise equilibrium’\textsuperscript{30} and thus vulnerable to negotiation and contestation.

This is the project that I believe lays ahead and one that a growing number of scholars are beginning to grapple with\textsuperscript{31}. It is my hope that the engagement with this project will result not only in a more complex and suitable understanding of US and Latin American cinema within the material and discursive realities of neoliberal globalization but also in the illumination of new potentialities for resistance that push the limits of the conditions of possibility and point towards a future in which another world is truly possible.
Introduction

1 SB 1070 was signed into law by Arizona governor Jan Brewer on April 23, 2010 and went into effect July 29th, 2010. Several provisions of the act were blocked, however, by a federal injunction.

2 David Harvey argues that the US-supported overthrow of Salvador Allende and installment of Augusto Pinochet in 1973, along with the proceeding economic reforms, constituted the first US experiment with neoliberalism. See Harvey, A Brief History


4 “Another world is possible” is the slogan of the World Social Forum and one that, as Walter Mignolo notes, borrows from the Zapatista commitment to a “world in which many worlds can co-exist.” See Mignolo 139-144

Chapter 1

5 For an historical materialist critique of Said’s work, see Larsen, Determinations and Ahmad, In Theory

6 See Harvey, A Brief History

7 It should be noted that this is far from a consistent commitment in Marx’s thought, and he at many points appears to challenge this understanding. For a discussion of Marx’s
writings on teleology and the dialectic, see Martin “Rereading Marx” and Craven

“Marxism and Critical Art History.”

8 Quijano’s formulation of historical-structural change here shares some common ground with Michel Foucault’s understanding of ‘epistemic ruptures’ in historical transition. See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

9 For some notable examples of this tendency, see: Baudrillard, *Simulations*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; and Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*

10 See Todorov, *The Conquest of America* and Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*

11 Brazilian actress known for her roles in such Hollywood films as *Down Argentine Way* (1940), *That Night in Rio* (1941), *The Gang’s All Here* (1943), and *Copacabana* (1947)

12 See Fabian, *Time*

13 See Jameson, *Postmodernism*

14 This now-famous term is originally from Francis Fukuyama’s book *The End of History and the Last Man*

Chapter 2

15 See Phillips, *Heaven and Hell*

16 The term ‘utopia’ was coined by More, and as Lucía Nagib explains, “brings together the Greek term *topos*, or ‘place’, and the combination of two prefixes, *ou*, which is negation, and *eu*, meaning ‘good quality’. Thus ‘utopia’ signifies both ‘good place’ and ‘no place’, an ambiguity aimed at camouflaging More’s plans of social change designed for his own country, England” (9)

17 See Nagib, *Brazil* and Phillips, *Heaven and Hell*
While neo-indigenismo refers primarily to an artistic and literary movement that has attempted to recapture ‘primitive’ forms of aesthetic expression, it has also, as Jean Franco points out, “acquired another facet because of the global angst over the environment and the destruction of the Amazon rain forests. All of a sudden, the tribal ‘other’ has become a model of survival, a natural ecologist” (82)

On the significance of this debate for European understanding of the indigenous Other see Todorov, *The Conquest*

See Eco, “The Narrative Structure”


**Chapter 3**

See Kolodny, “Tropical Trappings”

See Mignolo, *The Idea* and Speed, *Rights*

See Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* and Said, *Orientalism*

Delueze distinguishes the ‘movement-image’, the classic film narrative which presents time as a linear progression through the protagonist’s movement through space and their ability to directly effect their situation through their action, from the ‘time-image’, a new type of film that emerged in Europe after WWII conveying a consciousness of time as labyrinthine rather than linear, with multiple virtual pasts, presents, and futures existing simultaneously. See Deleuze, *The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2*; also see Martin-Jay, *Deleuze*

See De Orellana, “The Circular Look”
Conclusion

See Smith, “Renarrating Globalization”

For further discussion of Amores Perros’s critical engagement with the conditions of neoliberal globalization, see: D’Lugo, “Amores Perros”; Tierney, “Alejandro González Iñárritu”; and Smith “Renarrating Globalization”. For an opposing perspective to these, see Sánchez-Prado, “Amores Perros”

On the impossibility of launching new political projects from a space of enunciation limited by binary or nationalist logics, see: Bhabha, Location of Culture (particularly on the notion of “Third Space’’); D’Lugo, “Authorship”; Newman, “National Cinema”; and Smith, “Renarrating Globalization”

See Gramsci, Hegemony

For examples of recent scholarship that has adopted this approach (at least to some extent) see: Stam, “The Aesthetics”; Newman, “National Cinema”; Shohat and Stam, Unthinking Eurocentrism; and D’Lugo, “Authorship”
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