NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry
Vol. 23 (I) June 2025

e ISSN 2789-4665; p ISSN 2222-570
https://doi.org/10.52015/numljci.v23iI.310

Terraforming the Red Planet: Imperial Domination, Neocolonial Control, and Resistance in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*

Jonathan Caleb Imdad[1]

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received:
May 8, 2025
Accepted:
June 23, 2025

Funding:
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of interest:
The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

This paper uses Edward Said's concept of colonial discourse to examine how Mars is colonized by the governments of Earth and dominated by transnational capitalism, as it is depicted in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*. The novel portrays Mars as a battlefield for the imperial powers of Earth, where the wars for Martian land proceed from well-known predilections for imperialist and neo-colonial capitalism. Mars appears as a "frontier," neither settled nor exploited, that can be colonized, where both the colonizers and colonized struggle for dominance. But Martian colonists reject corporate and institutional control and fight their own battles reminiscent of anti-colonial struggles on Earth. This qualitative study investigates how Mars can be viewed as an extension of neocolonialism by arguing that Robinson has depicted Mars as a colonial/neocolonial space. The novel serves as a warning to the institutions of Earth as it demonstrates that conquest, corporate dominance, and economic exploitation are challenges that must be continually opposed. The research underlines the need to create a system based on justice, freedom, and the wellbeing of all settlers. It raises both political and ethical questions and illustrates how speculative fiction like *Red Mars* plays a role in policymaking conversations.

Keywords: *colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, resistance, Speculative Fiction, planetary colonization*

[1] Lecturer in the Department of English at Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore. He may be accessed at jonathanimdad@fccollege.edu.pk

(I)

The idea of space colonization is deeply connected to Earth's own history of conquest and occupation. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (1993), the first novel in the Mars Trilogy series of science fiction novels, offers an interesting depiction of planetary colonization. While the novel receives most of its praise for its scientific rigor and technological speculation, it ultimately offers a critical examination of the power structures that dictate how Earth colonizes Mars. Colonization is not a neutral undertaking. It is an economic, political, and ideological endeavor by which it is decided, through force, who controls the land, who rules it, and who enjoys sovereignty and for how long. Terms such as imperial domination, neocolonialism, and resistance are central to this analysis. Imperial domination, for Edward Said (1994), "means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" (p. 7). Neocolonialism, in Kwame Nkrumah's (1965) view, refers to a form of control in which a state appears independent but, "in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (p. ix). Resistance, as Ania Loomba (2015) notes, is frequently pathologized by colonial authorities. Loomba observes, "resistance to colonial rule is routinely 'attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior'" (p. 144). Additionally, colonial strategies of governance are frequently separated from discussions about legitimate warfare, which in turn reinforces and broadens how terrorism is defined, casting it as an especially dangerous form of violence outside state authority (Kolb, 2021, p. 211). *Red Mars* interrogates the ethical issues surrounding colonization, resistance, and autonomy in space by tracing imperial and neocolonial forces that shape Martian settlement.

The colonization of Mars in *Red Mars* is orchestrated by state and corporate power, paralleling colonial projects on Earth. The first settlers, called the First Hundred, arrive under the pretense of scientific progress. Earth-based governments and transnationals soon usurp them, seeking to capitalize on the planet and claim legitimate governance. This paradigm reflects Edward Said's theory of colonial discourse, whereby colonial powers frame novel territories as 'empty' frontiers, drawing from a long history of "willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through during many centuries" (Said, 1979, p. 201). Seen this way, Mars is not just a planet to be explored. In speculative fiction, as Kitchin & Kneale (2005) note, "space is not a neutral backdrop for human action but is charged with meaning through discourse and practice" (Sadaf, 2024, p. 135). It's a space to be claimed and administered under the economic and legal systems of the Earth, continuing a history of imperialistic patterns of domination.

Robinson indicates that the most prominent role in this colonial enterprise is played by corporate power. In the narrative, the development of Mars is built through this force. Neocolonialism is an economic and corporate control that replaces direct imperial rule and allows the former colonial powers to continue their dominance through structures of capitalism rather than through military force. In the novel, groups such as Praxis and TransNat function as imperial actors who control the supply and distribution of water, minerals, and technology. They impose dependent economic systems. These large corporations ensure that Mars's

wealth and resources benefit Earth, in a way that mirrors how, over the past five centuries, European economic and cultural forces have entered, reshaped, and dominated non-European regions through activities like exploration, resource extraction, land seizure and settlement, as well as systems of imperial control and rivalry (Rieder, 2008, p. 25). This also echoes certain real-life situations where powerful multinationals own land, labor, and markets in formerly colonized countries long after military force has faded from the scene.

However, Mars is not merely the site of exploitation; it is also a battleground on which resistance and independence from that exploitation take shape. As the novel progresses, an increasing number of settlers agitate for self-determination and reject compliance as Earth's laws are enforced upon them, their struggle reinforced by "the inseparability of land from their existence" (Mohan, 2024, p. 1), which echoes real-world anti-colonial campaigns. Native and colonized communities have historically opposed imperial powers to reclaim their land, governance, and cultural identity, demanding that the "Empire should cede an increasing degree of autonomy to its constituent parts" (Biggar, 2023, p. 44). Robinson offers various visions of Martian independence, some within the confines of an uneasy balance with Earth. Others chart a radical revolution, springing from the belief that decolonization can only come through fierce resistance. The novel, therefore, presents a nuanced portrait of power dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed but also within the resistance itself.

Terraforming, one of the premier scientific endeavors in *Red Mars*, intensifies matters even further when it comes to discussing colonization and identity on Mars. The dichotomy between "Reds", who want Mars kept untouched, with its pristine environment preserved, and "Greens", who support bold, planetary terraforming that would make the planet habitable to humans, reflects the ideological fight in our own society. This struggle centers on who has the right to shape and control land. Colonial powers have long justified land transformation, deforesting vast expanses of land, irrigating it, mining and converting it for agriculture in the name of modernization. This has often forced indigenous ecosystems into a kind of living torment. In the context of Mars, terraforming is framed both as a necessity and a conquest. This raises ethical questions about humanity's tendency to transform environments to accommodate colonial needs, as "colonial forms of environment making emerge across the sites of extractive capitalism" (Ruiz, 2021, p. 4). Though this debate addresses environmental concerns, it reveals the broader imperial mindset that informs the colonization of space.

Paradigms of postcolonial and neocolonial criticism interpret *Red Mars* not as a speculation about future space exploration but as a political critique of current colonial systems. Drawing on Edward Said's theories of colonial discourse, this study explores how Earth's governance of Mars reflects imperial domination. It further examines how corporate governance of Martian resources amounts to neocolonial economic exploitation, and how Martian settlers represent anti-colonial claims to sovereignty. The research sheds light on how the colonization of space, whether fictional or real, carries the same ethical and political dilemmas as

colonial expansion, since "science fiction has always been a politically active form of literature" (Langer, 2012, p. 54) and is a tool that writers use "to conceptualize problems of . . . imperialism, postcolonialism and identity" (p. 54). *Red Mars* challenges the perception of space as a neutral frontier, presenting it instead as an extension of Earth's long legacy of conquest, resistance, and power dynamics.

(II)

Scholarly discourse surrounding Robinson's Mars trilogy highlights a variety of critical approaches that situate it at the nexus of myth, irony, science, and politics. White (2007) points out "Robinson's sensitivity to structure both in his scholarship and in the construction of the trilogy itself" (pp. 589-599). Using a semiotic method, White tracks character types and the metaphor of alchemy as it shapes the utopian visions and ironic reversals of the narrative. He examines how "myth and irony work to produce the fiction, generating story as pure narrativity folded back upon itself" (p. 599); thus, the trilogy can be seen as a literary artifact in which social critique arises from rival, opposing narratives. White's structuralist interpretation, though generative, tends to foreground the internal operations of literary meaning-making, thereby potentially sidelining explicit engagement with the wider sociopolitical stakes of speculative fiction. In particular, this approach may overlook how such fiction can function as an instrument of imperial and colonial agendas.

Another substantial contribution is made by William Dynes, who traces multiple views that travel through the narrative's multi-perspectival framework. He observes that the trilogy's "elaborate pattern of checks and balances" (Dynes, 2001, p. 162) in its representations of Martian government reinforces the Martian institutions' principles of tolerance and synthesis. Dynes goes on to argue that the true protagonist is not an individual one, but rather "Mars itself, particularly … the myriad ways in which humans … shape and are shaped by its outgassing regolith" (p. 162). He casts the ending of the trilogy as "a characteristic conflation of objective and subjective vision" (p. 163). Nevertheless, Dynes' focus, despite an awareness of pluralism and negotiation, is more with the possibilities for synthesis and accommodation than with the persistent structures of economic and political domination. He pays less attention to issues of resistance in colonized cultures.

Eric Otto, addressing environmental ethics, places Robinson's trilogy in the tradition of Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic". Otto (2003) explains that the novels suggest "a range of perspectives regarding human relationships to the land, from treating the land as an economic resource to leaving the land in its primal state" (p. 119). He asserts that by the end of the trilogy, "it is our responsibility to synthesize the environmentally sound and unsound viewpoints…to construct a viable model for ecological sustainability" (p. 119). What Otto offers, to highlight the trilogy's ecological dimension and its exploration of the potential of critical utopia, is a relatively limited, sustained engagement. He addresses how ecological paradigms intersect with, for example, the legacies of colonial exploitation. However, he gives less attention to the reproduction of imperial forms of power within new or post-planetary environments.

R. S. Banasode foregrounds the imperial and post-imperial lines in science fiction's rendering of planetary expansion. He observes that "the publication of *Red Mars* revived the debate on the imperial perspectives" (Banasode, 2023, p. 75) and the trilogy explores "multiple interplanetary colonial, neocolonial and postcolonial voices" (p. 75). Banasode situates Robinson's work as one of the texts that allows for the questioning of the "reflection and exposition of interplanetary (post/neo) colonial threads" (p. 75), and it continues to highlight technology as a core feature in the imperialist project. This analysis is particularly significant in recognizing the explicit heritage of colonial discourse and politics of domination and resistance. For the most part, however, it engages with texts on a thematic plane. Rather than performing close readings by considering postcolonial theory, it stops short of posing a critically informed interaction with Said's theoretical framework.

In his article, Markley (1997) conceptualizes the trilogy as an "analytic to reveal—and indeed to gesture beyond—the forms of alienation that structure and are structured by the deep-seated antiecological values and assumptions characteristic of western thought" (p. 774). He interprets Robinson's narrative as "historical simulations…images, endlessly reiterated" (p. 773). These, he argues, are staging a dystopic anticipation of Martian colonization. In this way, Mars becomes a space in which to rehearse and to problematize utopian desire and the "doubled desire of technology" (p. 774). His model illuminates this dialectic of simulation and representation, arguing that the tension between conflicting yearnings leads Robinson to enter into an examination of the effects of people struggling to yoke together opposite impossibles. Markley deftly traces the mixed consequences of technological progress and the persistent alienation it engenders. However, he falls short of consistently foregrounding colonial power dynamics as a central analytic category.

K. Daniel Cho foregrounds the repetitive structures of revolution in the narrative and reflects on how "revolution recurs throughout, appearing in each installment, each time taking on a different, more alien, form" (p. 66). Talking about revolution, Cho expresses the need for "completely dismantling it, reexamining its tactics, and expunging its problematic features" (p. 67). He further asserts that Robinson's text "asks whether revolution can serve as the methodology for completing the work that remains after the initial act of separation" (p. 68). Cho's reading productively centers on ways of resisting and reimagining social life. However, his argument is less concerned with the details of imperial domination or neocolonial control than with the formal and theoretical novelty of revolutionary repetition.

A criticism of the failure of utopia in Robinson's narrative techniques is provided by Giovanna Ike Coan. She observes that despite the promise of progress in biotechnology and science, the story "seems to reinforce both the impossibility of change in society and the maintenance of History and its flaws" (Coan, 2009, p. 2). She criticizes utopian fiction projects that represent otherness and asserts that such textual utopias often "fail in the construction of the 'Utopian Imagination'" (p. 1), particularly when it concerns alternatives to established social orders. This view highlights the tensions between utopian ambition and institutional continuity.

However, it does not bring to the forefront the extent to which such tensions might be related to the rhythms of colonial domination, of capital, or imperial agency.

Furthermore, William J. Burling locates the trilogy's portrayal of the construction of politics within the tradition of radical democratic theory, including that of Laclau and Mouffe. He highlights Robinson's representation of an innovative and transformative vision of politics, and his contention that "provides a vivid concretization of Laclau and Mouffe's political theory" (Burling, 2005, p. 77). Burling's interpretation of the democratic struggle thus reconstructs it as a contest in which the "contingency and ambiguity of every 'essence,' and… the constitutive character of social division and antagonism" (p. 77) is evident. Although such insights are important for mapping the pluralistic and dialogic character of Martian society, the critique succeeds mainly at the level of political form and fails to probe systematically the colonial or neocolonial conditions of the battle for self-determination and autonomy.

There is considerable critical discourse on Robinson's *Red Mars*. However, it is characterized by a research gap concerning the application of postcolonial theory to the analysis of imperial and neocolonial oppression. In particular, little attention has been paid to the relevance of Said's work for such an analysis. Though scholars have noted themes of governance, ecology, revolution, and utopia concerning planetary settlement, there has been relatively scant in-depth attention to how the trilogy dramatizes patterns of subjection. The texts also explore contention and the reproduction of colonial relations beyond Earth. Yet, these dimensions have remained largely under-examined within the existing scholarship. This research, therefore, highlights the synthesis for more work that explicitly mobilizes postcolonial paradigms to critically read Mars as a colony. It also positions Mars as a radiant core of neocolonial and imperial power struggles, extending beyond the red horizon of the planet.

This qualitative study explores the socio-historical context of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* through thematic textual analysis. The analytical process proceeds in three steps: First, passages from the novel that illustrate patterns of colonial, neocolonial, and anti-colonial dynamics are identified and collected, with particular attention to both narrative structure and character interactions. Second, these examples are interpreted using the critical frameworks of foundational postcolonial theorists to reveal how Robinson's depiction of Mars echoes and critiques real-world imperial formations. Third, findings are synthesized to map the interplay between institutional/corporate control and resistance, and to draw out the novel's broader political and ethical implications for planetary colonization. The analysis reflects on colonial and neocolonial power dynamics inherent in Mars' colonization. The research seeks to analyze and transform politics based on postcolonial theory, specifically Said's notion of colonial discourse, which he describes as "a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy" (Said, 1994, p. 12) that still exercises tremendous force. It is "the formidable structure of cultural domination" (Said, 1979, p. 25) that provides the foundation for how imperial forces rationalize control in the domains of government, economy, and ideology over colonized peoples. Employing the framework of decolonial thought

on neocolonialism, this analysis examines how the corporate and governmental institutions of Earth maintain economic dependence over the planet of Mars. This framework serves as the lens through which power relations, resistance, and corporatism in the novel are examined.

The primary text for analysis is Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*; secondary sources include a range of scholarly writings on postcolonialism, science fiction studies, and corporate imperialism. The research examines three central areas of inquiry: colonial governance and Martian subjugation, which illustrate the mechanisms by which Earth's political apparatus imposes its will upon Mars. It also explores corporate domination and economic exploitation, highlighting how Earth's multinational companies operate as neocolonial instruments for perpetuating dependency. Finally, it analyzes resistance and the struggle for independence, focusing on the ways the settlers endeavor to achieve autonomy through ideological self-determination and revolution. These themes are discussed by closely analyzing relevant excerpts from the novel and situating these interpretations in the context of academic literary discourse, informed by Said's insight that "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable" (p. 36). It shows how the gathering and deployment of knowledge in *Red Mars* serves as a mechanism of control as well as a site for resistance.

The study is limited to *Red Mars*, the section of the trilogy focused on colonization and power dynamics, rather than the broader schemes that unfold in the later sequels. As colonialism "turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it" (Fanon, 1963, p. 149), a process mirrored in the contested histories and shifting power structures within the novel. Moreover, while ecological and environmental issues are a factor in the novel, this study emphasizes political and economic power configurations more than ecological critiques of terraforming. Ethical considerations include proper referencing of all sources and approaching historical and contemporary colonial frameworks with critical insight and due respect to support a robust analysis. Through this approach, the research aims to show how *Red Mars* acts as a speculative critique of historical and prospective paradigms of space imperialism.

(III)

The colonization of Mars in *Red Mars* alludes to both historical imperialism and contemporary neocolonialism, with the retention of governance by Earth-centered political interests and corporate control. Edward Said's concept of colonial discourse is exemplified by the depiction of Mars as a blank, uncivilized space in need of Earth's authority, which creates a rationale for domination. In the same way as historical empires imposed legal, economic, and cultural systems on colonized spaces, Earth's governments impose rules on Mars, treating it as an extension of terrestrial sovereignty rather than as an autonomous entity. In addition to direct imperial control, the novel further critiques neocolonial economic arrangements, in which corporations such as Praxis exert control through the continued control over resources, privatization of the economy, and economic dependency. This resembles real-world scenarios where neocolonial powers exploit economic

structures and wealth distribution to influence former colonies, as "on the economic front, a strong factor favouring . . . monopolies . . . is international capital's control of the world market" (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 241). Simultaneously, *Red Mars* also discusses resistance movements that, to some extent, contest colonial authority. These movements reflect the complexities of decolonization struggles, as settlers must devise their own governance and identity to shed imperial influence. Shedding light on Martian independence, plighted by the tension between colonial control and corporate imperialism, the novel creates a vivid environment through exquisite world-building and conflict among characters. It also offers a critical examination of the ethics of space colonization.

Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* imagines Mars through the lens of an extension of Earth's imperial ambitions, a colonial landscape where transnational corporations and governments seek to conquer the planet. Mars is portrayed as a frontier, a virgin land, reminiscent of historical "New Worlds" where untapped natural resources are free to be exploited under the direction of Earth. At one place in the novel, this is expressed as: "'You know what this is,' Nadia said to Sax Russell one evening, looking around her warehouse, 'It is an entire town, disassembled and lying in pieces.' 'And a very prosperous town at that'" (Robinson, 1993, p. 125). The setting of Mars as a fully prepared colony before any settlers arrive is a persistent myth of imperial projects, serving "for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence" (Said, 1994, p. 63). In these projects, foreign powers established the infrastructure to exploit, while ignoring, often violently, indigenous sovereignty. For Mars, that sovereignty is also simply the ecological integrity of the planet. Settlers in the novel are passive tools for a distant resource-extraction enterprise, not independent pioneers, mirroring how colonial settlers in the real world historically operated as agents of an imperial center. Additionally, Frank's claim that the UN will ultimately control political decisions about Mars, "That's not our decision to make… The UN decides that one" (Robinson, 1993, p.149), reinforces the idea that Earth retains centralized control over Martian affairs. This is akin to the bureaucratic control that distant governments exercised over past colonies whose settled territories were repurposed with little regard for the existing residents.

The exploitation of the planet is evident in the way it is treated as a raw material for corporate and state expansion, with scientific exploration yielding to power politics. One of the characters in the novel explicitly states the colony's mission: "We obtain water to allow us to explore, we don't explore just to obtain water! You've got it backwards! I can't believe how many people in this colony do that!" (p.171). This tension between exploration and exploitation echoes historical colonial endeavors. In such cases, the feasibility of exploration is not determined by intellectual curiosity aimed at enhancing scientific knowledge, nor by respect for native land, but rather by the availability of natural resources. Through the ongoing process of extracting water, nitrogen, and other atmospheric materials for industrial use, Mars emerges clearly as a world of material interest rather than a place to value on its own merits. Nadia's exclamation, "So we have more water than we'll ever need!" (p.168), ironically emphasizes the exploitative mentality fundamental to

colonial exploitation. The settlers, in their capacity as imperial representatives, reveal that their function is not that of builders of a new world but of managers of resources.

Interestingly, it is the settlers' conversations, their struggles for autonomy in the wake of Earth's dominance, that begin to take the shape of resistance, echoing the anti-colonial struggles across history. The governance of Mars is plagued by internal conflict, and rival factions complain about outside intervention. Ann's frustration with the constraints of bureaucracy echoes this sense of dissatisfaction: "We are not lords of the universe. We're one small part of it. We may be its consciousness, but being the consciousness of the universe does not mean turning it all into a mirror image of us" (p. 204). She feels angry towards the power of the establishment, externalizing her behavior. In other words, she has not much use for her agency, just like the colonial subjects of colonial administrations. Her ideological resistance to terraforming, her insistence that Mars ought to remain untouched, serves as a metaphor for environmentalist resistance to colonial expansion, like indigenous movements for land sovereignty. Ann realizes that even though settlers may have their own aspirations for Mars, the outcome of the planet's future is ultimately in the hands of distant elites. It is a cycle of subjugation that she suggests is nothing new when it comes to the structures of colonialism.

The expansion of warring factions among the settlers is symbolic of the internal rifts of colonial societies. The conflicting visions of Ann and Phyllis for what the settlement serves, scientific discovery or resource extraction, mirror a fracture between independence-seeking settlers and those leaning toward Earth's transnational interests. Phyllis states pragmatically, "We're up here to get water. We're not up here to fool around" (p. 171), emphasizing a utilitarian, corporate-minded viewpoint. Ann answers with earnest ideological resistance: "It's not fooling around! … We obtain water to allow us to explore, we don't explore just to obtain water!" (p. 171). These contrasting perspectives reflect historical rifts between those who have desired self-determination within colonial societies and those who chose to be loyal to imperial rule out of economic incentive or belief in the benefits of imperial governance. The unresolved tension also reflects Bhabha's (1994) notion of ambivalence and hybridity, as Martian settlers occupy a space of double articulation, "so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (p. 86), developing identities both shaped by and resistant to Earth's colonial authority. Robinson frames this schism as an almost inevitable effect of colonial expansion, mirroring power struggles evident even according to the norms of Earth's own history.

The terraforming plans proposed by Sax Russell and Hiroko are an overt exercise in claiming control over the planet, much like colonizers imposing their will on new territories. The windmill heaters project, which was meant to speed up atmospheric thickening, reveals their inclination to change the world in preemptive ways. It is a strategy by the settlers to make the environment conform to their needs instead of adjusting themselves to it: "A little heat for a little wind is a great trade-off" (Robinson, 1993, p. 172). The irreversible decision to change the planet permanently for the sake of economic and survival gain tracks with patterns of

colonial exploitation of resources. It is rooted in the approach to radically alter environments through deforestation, large-scale irrigation, and terrain modification, often without regard for long-term ecological consequences. The moral consideration of whether Mars should remain in its natural state or be redesigned for human habitation speaks to larger ecological concerns surrounding imperial expansion: "If the terraformers have their way, this will all go like dew on a hot morning. Into the air to make pretty clouds" (p. 170). This statement by Ann highlights that Mars is also exposed to the forces of irreversible change, similar to colonial modernization projects, where existing ecosystems are sacrificed for perceived progress.

The settlers' reliance on Earth for supplies and policy decisions reinforces neocolonial economic arrangements that ensure former colonies remain dependent, despite the long history of settlement. The debate over water importation from Phobos highlights this dependency: "Phyllis even suggested shipping water down from Phobos, which was silly, even if their supplies were low and their demand increasing" (p. 145). This echoes real-world postcolonial states that have been coerced into economic dependency on global capital, precluding actual sovereignty. The restrictions on Martian governance, mandated by UN officials light-years away, cement the settlers as semi-independent subjects, rather than fully self-governing individuals. Nadia herself eventually acknowledges this power dynamic when contemplating the state of the group: "We ought to stay under the hill most of the time, and bury all the labs as well" (p. 148). However, some do not agree with her, and the contrast between their externally mandated rule and the settlers' pioneering spirit turns Mars into a place of growing conflict.

Red Mars shows that the colonization of the planet by Earth follows a pattern of imperial domination that has long defined human history, marked by both opportunistic settlement and fervent pursuit of economic gain. These settlers are torn between colonizing and resisting control from the central government, making their conflicts, like other settler struggles, expressions of the contradictions within imperial projects. Ann Clayborne observes bitterly, "It won't be here long" (p. 176), foreshadowing the irreversible transformation of Mars through the actions of distant governments. The novel situates Mars as an ideological battleground, where colonial and neocolonial forces collide over the future of power beyond the confines of Earth. Through this diverse narrative, *Red Mars* works simultaneously as a critique of imperial expansion as well as an exploration of genuine self-determination for a newly accessible world. Yet, within this context of domination, seeds of resistance and demands for autonomy begin to take root among the Martian settlers themselves. The tensions between externally imposed systems and emergent Martian agency form a central axis of the novel's conflict, highlighting not only the burdens of dependency but also the possibilities and complexities of rebellion. This interplay between domination and resistance underscores the colony's social divisions and sets the stage for examining the economic structures and revolutionary struggles that follow.

In *Red Mars*, Kim Stanley Robinson depicts Mars as a site of colonial settlement and neocolonial economic control, with transnational corporations and governments on Earth exploiting the planet for their benefit. Echoing imperialism throughout Earth's history, Mars is portrayed as 'open', available for resource acquisition and human settlement under false pretenses of neutrality. It is a place that "exists, in a sense, as we know it" (Said, 1979, p. 32), made vulnerable precisely through the knowledge and authority asserted over it. Early on during Frank Chalmers' conversations regarding the treaty, he recognizes the unequal power of transnational corporations over Mars. "The rich had the money, but the poor had the people, and the weapons were pretty evenly distributed, especially the new viral vectors that could kill everyone on a continent" (Robinson, 1993, pp. 437-438). The disproportionate influence that shadow factions exert over Mars is reminiscent of neocolonial economic practices on Earth, where developing nations remain trapped in cycles of dependency despite nominal sovereignty. In addition, Chalmers acknowledges the need to reconstruct the colonial economy: "This is the chance to assert the interests of you and your population over those free-floating accumulations of capital which are very near to holding the ultimate power on earth!" (p. 441). This critique highlights that it is economic control, rather than direct political rule, that enables neocolonial domination in colonized lands, making Earth's influence over Mars a new form of 'global' capitalism.

On Mars, the imposition of Terran economic systems further reinforces neocolonial dependency through quotas for immigration and investment rights. The original treaty negotiations highlight how Earth's national delegates see Mars as an outlet for economic and demographic issues, especially in response to Earth's troubles: "If you give in to the transnationals … then they're the real government of the world" (pp. 440-441). This is analogous to how multinational corporations impose economic policies in semi-independent countries, as observed in the histories of Africa and Latin America. It is later observed that the treaty is not very effective: "We're here on a deal that the treaty says is illegal, man. And it's happening all over. Brazil, Georgia, the Gulf States, all the countries that voted against the treaty are letting the transnats in" (p. 474). Here, the failure of administrative authority mirrors closely the failure of postcolonial states to retain control over their own economic development amid the pressures exerted by global capital and transnational institutions. This suggests that creating an independent colony is proving more difficult to achieve than expected and deepens *Red Mars*' engagement with neocolonial paradigms.

Mars soon becomes a landscape of violent dispossession and exploitation of labor, bearing striking similarities to past colonial regimes. The trans-nationals set settlement policies, and new emigrants are funneled into corporate-controlled, labor-intensive sectors that magnify inequality. "The Arabs were engaged in pioneering new extraction and processing procedures; they had built an array of mobile equipment, altering construction vehicles and exploration rovers to suit their purpose" (p. 455). The forced adjustment of labor forces to meet Earth's needs mirrors the model in which native or migrant workers were once compelled to mine resources in colonized regions. Moreover, the interactions among the Martian settlements become increasingly chaotic as corruption seeps into governance:

"Private security companies come in from tents higher up and offer protection, but they're just gangs, it's just extortion!" (p. 491). The emergence of non-state actors backed by businesses helps solidify the colonial analogy. Corporate privatization of policing echoes how imperial authorities controlled local communities through armed corporate enforcers.

The influx of Terran emigrants serves to cement Mars's status as a neocolonial society, notably in the sense that the economic and political control remains in the hands of Earth. The local government's failure to enforce the treaty properly is highlighted by what Frank is told, "Security's lame" (p. 475). The new settlers soon discover that they are not safe from the system, that they have no agency or legal recourse, that they are little more than a reflection of the indentured servitude that marked colonial history. Moreover, the exploitation of valuable Martian resources has direct parallels to Earth's colonial past as "metals and ore-bearing minerals were being discovered in all kinds of locations and concentrations on Mars" (p. 455). Mars' natural resources being systematically depleted guarantees that profit remains in the hands of Earth-based corporations, and so does Martian labor.

Amidst these oppressive structures, Robinson traces the inexorable resistance, political and economic, of the colonists on Mars who start to revolt against the encroaching, transnational authority. The struggle for self-rule on Mars, driven in part by Arkady Bogdanov, embodies a revolutionary force rising against Earth's hegemony. "You got to be free, this Mars is the new frontier, and you should know some of us are treating it that way, we ain't no robot software, we're free men, making our own rules on our own world!" (p. 475). Their discourse closely resonates with the voices of representatives for anti-colonial uprisings on Earth, especially in its focus on autonomy and the repudiation of established social hierarchies. The building pressure is recognizable, "It's gonna blow pretty soon—A lot of people don't like it—Not just old-timers like you—A whole bunch of new-timers too" (p. 474). By presenting Mars as a battlefield for independence, the novel echoes its broader narrative of colonial control and of conquest, subjugation, and revolution. It shows the end of economic dependence as being determined by human agency.

However, corporate power is deeply entrenched, and this shows how neocolonial architectures endure, even in rebellion. As Chalmers gets the treaty designed to curb corporate growth, something troubling is quickly discovered. Cross-border corporations have already evaded it using freshly crafted political technicalities: "They'll make a new flag of convenience and it'll look like a country staking its claim here, exactly according to the treaty's quotas. But behind it will be trans-national money" (p. 451). This persistence of economic exploitation highlights Robinson's critique of capitalism's adaptability. Even though systemic oppression is acknowledged and politically challenged, economic forces exploit the system to maintain control. The fact that "they were ignoring the various local groups, ignoring MarsFirst" (p. 479) underscores the fact that corporate power structures are not so easily dismantled and proposes that only a more radical resistance can disrupt Mars' colonial state.

Arguably, *Red Mars* offers a decidedly bleak representation of Mars, serving as the culmination of both the historical legacy and present dynamics of imperialist, corporate control. It reveals the neocolonial tactics employed to impose economic dependence and labor exploitation, rendering Mars' inhabitants simultaneously settlers and colonized. Frank Chalmers, despite having negotiated the treaty, recognizes its futility in the face of overwhelming political machinery: "We'd better get to it again" (p. 436). Colonial control remains immovable, no matter how hard the idealists and revolutionaries work. But the rise of Mars' resistance movements offers the prospect of a future where any economic dependence can be severed, making *Red Mars* both a critique of neocolonialism and a model for a new kind of political evolution.

The terraforming agenda brings to a new world the established paradigm of colonial exploitation, but like all forms of colonization, this act is met with resistance by its inhabitants. The Martians of the novel fall under the authority of Earth's transnational corporations and governments, a state characterized by economic and political subjugation reminiscent of colonial expansion. The destruction of Phobos, the risen hidden colony, and the experiences of figures like Ann Clayborne and Frank Chalmers all exemplify the ongoing struggles for control over Mars. Frank Chalmers' acceptance of UN authority is clear: "That's not our decision to make… The UN decides that one" (p. 149). In contrast, Ann's refusal to condone full-scale terraforming is captured in her insistence, "It's not fooling around! … We obtain water to allow us to explore, we don't explore just to obtain water!" (p. 171), representing ideological resistance from within the settler community. These events reveal the settlers' resistance in ways that recall anti-colonial revolts against imperialist regimes throughout history. Despite destruction and corporate usurpation, settlers like Michel declare that they will not give up: "The past is wiped out, all that matters is now. The present and the future. And the future is this field of stones, and here we are" (p. 616). This feeling reflects the revolutionary consciousness that frequently characterizes anti-colonial opposition. It reflects the notion that breaking free from the past and pursuing a new life on one's own terms can be the only way forward. However, such a viewpoint is rooted in idealism, and, as with all forms of idealism, it is marked by inherent flaws. This becomes evident in the catastrophic floods that ravage the Martian landscape, epitomizing the unpredictable challenges of any revolutionary period.

The destruction and subsequent collapse of the Martian space elevator, along with all that it symbolizes, serve as an example of how colonized spaces respond violently when imperial structures disintegrate. This reflects the very real state of decolonization, a process which often gives rise to violence and instability, and spreads "like wildfire throughout the country" (Fanon, 1963, p. 79). As the elevator shoots down, Peter Clayborne and the remaining settlers tumble into an uncertain fate, in the knowledge that pure survival becomes an act of rebellion. The desperate push outward evoked both desperation and determination among the rebels, who preferred to die fighting rather than be held captive. "It was daunting indeed to launch into it in an untethered spacesuit, it felt to the young man like suicide; but the ones at the front pulled out and the rest followed, like spores from an exploding seed pod" (Robinson, 1993, p. 599). By comparing the settlers to

spores, the metaphor points not only to their vulnerability but also, and perhaps more importantly, to their instinct for migration and expansion. This dispersal establishes the foundations for new beginnings in other places, as seen in many postcolonial nations. Likewise, Peter's improbable survival signifies that no matter how vast the losses, colonial subjects — or in this case, Martian settlers — can survive and claim a new future for themselves. "It was an odd way to go. Something like the night before a date with the firing squad, perhaps, spent in a dream of space" (p. 600). This ominous sense of impending death reflects how revolutionary leaders often went to the guillotine before their causes finally prevailed.

Mars' environmental transformation, whether by disaster or terraforming, reflects the cultural and economic upheaval experienced by colonized communities as empires decline. However, the effects persist well beyond the imperial era. The great Martian flood starkly mirrors the destruction unleashed by relentless imperial policies, where natural and social landscapes are violently reshaped beyond recognition. "Now there was a river running down Valles Marineris, a broad, steaming, ice-choked deluge. Ann had seen videotape of the outbreaks in the north, but she hadn't been able to get to one, to see it in person" (p. 610). Environmental degradation often goes hand in hand with the colonization of land through mining, deforestation, and/or the aggressive repurposing of land for agriculture. In a similar way, the surface of Mars is being rewritten, but not exclusively by settlers; it is being transformed by the volatility that such intervention inevitably sets into motion. Sax's pragmatic attitude toward this process is an illustration of the colonial administrator's logic: "I wouldn't have done it this way!" (p. 621). His regret hints that the goal of colonial transformations and control frequently ends up dissolving into unwanted destruction.

The psychological toll on the novel's colonizers-turned-colonized recalls the disillusionment of those who survived the revolution, struggling with what independence wrought. Ann Clayborne stands as the embodiment of this struggle, embattled and depleted by Mars' transformation and her own failures: "And every single feature of the primal Mars would melt away. Red Mars was gone" (p. 614). As Martians travel through landscapes they can't recognize anymore, Ann's sense of resignation emerges as a broader metaphor for the irrevocability of revolution: "Some mistakes you can never make good" (p. 631). Her lament is like the nostalgia of those who fight to build a new world only to find themselves unable to embrace a place that surpasses even their most daring imaginings. This crisis of identity mirrors that of the postcolonial leaders, who, after years of struggle, find themselves witnessing the quick decline of what they once fought for.

The unfolding political and environmental chaos emanates from the refusal of the establishment to let go of colonial control. This mirrors how imperial powers have historically sought to hold onto economic control well after conceding political liberation. The hidden colony in the ice highlights the necessity to fight back against imperialism through silent action and the incredible use of subterfuge. This reflects the practices of anti-colonial movements as manifested through the underground networks. As the settlers arrive at Hiroko's secret refuge, the prospect of a hidden utopia has real-world resonance with the historical reality of resistance

networks. "Over the horizon appeared moving figures. One by one, they appeared, until there were seven of them, in a ragged line. They moved slowly, their shoulders slumped, their helmets bent forward. They moved as if they had no destination" (p. 635). Such a description evokes the endless marches of displaced revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters in forced exile, while they realign and regroup. When they eventually make it, Hiroko's defiant declaration, "This is home … This is where we start again" (p. 638) affirms its residents, who, despite Earth's continued dominance, still believe in freedom.

However, even in the revolutionary population, political divides echo the rifts that have long challenged anti-colonial alliances. The contrast between Ann's personal despair and Michel's optimism and Maya and Sax's practicality highlights that the path after renouncing colonial rule is rarely a matter of unity. The clash between Ann and Sax over terraforming shows how visions of the future inevitably collide among the formerly colonized, as they were "tired of talk again, tired of its uselessness" (p. 621). This reflects postcolonial discussions about modernization, where environmental and economic interests are often mutually exclusive. Mars' settlers are locked in an endless struggle as they are overshadowed by colonial powers whose strength they cannot rival. They fight to define nationhood under the rule of the empire.

Ultimately, *Red Mars* illustrates how colonial settlement produces anti-colonial resistance as an inherent consequence. It points it out through a lens aligned with real-world struggles for self-determination. From sabotaging transnational corporations to establishing an underground sanctuary outside the reach of Earth, Martian settlers engage in rebellion, which is both pragmatic and ideological. Their fight resonates with the defining issues of anti-colonial struggle: self-determination, the identity crisis that follows a revolution, and the struggles of postcolonial governance. Yet, as Spivak (1988) observes, "the subaltern cannot speak" (p. 308), and *Red Mars* suggests that even within revolutionary movements, certain Martian voices, especially those most marginalized or farthest from power, remain unheard or are spoken for by new elites. The characters in the novel know that, like Earth's other revolutions, Mars' struggle for freedom has irreversible consequences, for "they, and they alone, make, maintain or break revolutions" (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 254). By mimicking actual resistance movements, Robinson's novel ultimately critiques a world of conquest and sovereignty, cautioning that even in space, the reverberations of colonialism are inescapable.

(IV)

In Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, the colonization of Mars is vividly conceived as an extension of Earth's enduring legacies of imperial subjugation and capitalist exploitation. The novel also contemplates the allure of resistance that is difficult to ignore. With a deft touch, colonial and neocolonial dynamics are transposed onto Martian soil, suggesting that the exploration of new frontiers is as seldom benign as it is merely speculative. The novel cautions that even other planets, such as Mars, are not immune to Earth's reach. Martian settlers are enslaved in their own ways under Earth's bureaucratic and corporate schemes for political control, economic exploitation, and resource extraction, for "it devises

innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism" (p. 239). The novel reflects

> the wider historical patterns of colonization, forcing readers to consider the ethical and moral conundrum of territorial expansion, whether it be in space or in the world. While Martian colonists increasingly resist, by drawing on the spirit of anti-colonial revolutions of the past, autonomy is complicated and uncertain. It brings with it internal discord and ecological costs. *Red Mars*, therefore, serves as a powerful narrative tool for navigating the cyclical struggle of imperial power and insurrection. It unveils the underlying difficulties encountered by people seeking real self-determination.

Red Mars ultimately serves as a critique and warning about the resilience of colonial structures beyond Earth. It makes the point that in space, the same harsh power relations of conquest, corporate hegemony, and economic servitude persist, unless they are thoughtfully resisted. With these intriguing parallels and insights, Robinson's work has valuable lessons for readers and the visionaries shaping our journey beyond Earth. Postcolonial theory, when integrated with interdisciplinary approaches such as environmental ethics and the formulation of science policy, can enrich both scholarly discourse and practical deliberations about planetary colonization. In academic debate, as well as in the pragmatic decisions shaping extraterrestrial settlement, these convergences highlight the ongoing legacies of colonialism, demonstrating that "the danger to world peace springs not from the action of those who seek to end neo-colonialism but from the inaction of those who allow it to continue" (p. 259). For those who are currently envisioning humanity's expansion beyond Earth, including researchers, decision-makers, and industry leaders, Robinson's novel serves as a cautionary tale. It urges that new worlds be governed not by hierarchical, extractive paradigms of the past, but by inclusive, justice-driven structures that prioritize the rights, agency, and welfare of all settlers. The novel, in its quiet assertions, reveals that ecological guardianship and moral responsibility are imperatives that must transcend the dictates of profit and the will of the state. It guides humanity to break the cycles of oppression, and the findings of the research provide a possible framework that can help in policymaking debates related to space governance.

References

Banasode, R. S. (2023). Study of interplanetary (post/neo)colonial voices in Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy. *Rabindra Bharati Journal of Philosophy, 24*(1), 75–77. http://www.rrcollege.org/uploads/dptenglish/17%20Paper.pdf

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Biggar, N. (2023). *Colonialism: A moral reckoning*. William Collins.

Burling, W. J. (2005). The theoretical foundation of utopian radical democracy in Kim Stanley Robinson's Blue Mars. *Utopian Studies, 16*(1), 75–96. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20718710

Cho, K. D. (2010). Tumults of utopia: Repetition and revolution in Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy. *Cultural Critique, 75*, 65–81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40800642

Coan, G. I. (2009). Utopia falling into history in Kim Stanley Robinson's Red Mars. *Yawp, 4*(2), 1–10. https://dlm.fflch.usp.br/sites/dlm.fflch.usp.br/files/utopiafallingredmars.pdf

Dynes, W. (2001). Multiple perspectives in Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars series. *Extrapolation, 42*(2), 150–164. https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2001.42.2.150

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove/Atlantic.

Kolb, A. F. R. (2021). *Epidemic empire: Colonialism, contagion, and terror, 1817–2020*. University of Chicago Press.

Langer, J. (2012). *Postcolonialism and science fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Loomba, A. (2015). *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Markley, R. (1997). Falling into theory: Simulation, terraformation, and eco-economics in Kim Stanley Robinson's Martian trilogy. *Modern Fiction Studies, 43*(3), 773–799. https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.1997.0062

Mohan, M. (2024). Decoloniality, indigenous resistance, and environmental justice in Mother Forest: The unfinished story of C.K. Janu. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry, 22*(2). https://doi.org/10.52015/numljci.v22iII.297

Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism*. Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Otto, E. (2003). Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy and the Leopoldian land ethic. *Utopian Studies, 14*(2), 118–135. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20720014

Rieder, J. (2008). *Colonialism and the emergence of science fiction*. Wesleyan University Press.

Robinson, K. S. (1993). *Red Mars*. Spectra.

Ruiz, R. (2021). *Slow disturbance: Infrastructural mediation on the settler colonial resource frontier*. Duke University Press.

Sadaf, S. (2024). Speculations in space and subjectivity. In S. Sadaf & A. Kanwal (Eds.), *Contemporary Pakistani speculative fiction and the global imaginary: Democratizing human futures* (pp. 131–155). Routledge.

Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage.

Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. Vintage.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

White, W. (2007). Structuralist alchemy in Kim Stanley Robinson's Red Mars. *Extrapolation, 48*(3), 578–602. https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2007.48.3.13