

# Aspects of Neoliberalism in the work of David Simon

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Aspects of neoliberalism in the work of David Simon

Američka književnost i kultura

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## Introduction

Today's United States when compared with the past evinces significant changes. The cultural paradigms it once relied on are now substituted with a culture of capital accumulation. Idealism takes the back seat to money. The country which was supposed to be "indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" is now torn and ruptured due to economic and social differences of its people and the strife between multiple ethnic groups. In the age of neoliberalism, capital has become the basic metric of a person's worth. This paper will center itself around an analysis of neoliberalism and the structural problems this system presents through the work of David Simon. It will try to analyse modern American neoliberalism by delving into the way a modern urban city functions in today's USA and how this is reflected upon its citizenship. Furthermore I will look at the development of the American military in the past 50 years and outline the current economic and political configuration of the United States.

The paper is divided into the following sections: Neoliberalism, in which the paper will seek to explain how this economic and social theory works by looking at its roots and characteristics. The following section, The notion of the city and neoliberalism, will deal with the inner workings of a modern American neoliberal city, focusing on the city of New York – how neoliberalism affected public life in large urban centers, how it changed the principles of work for the local governments and how these processes reflect upon the community. The third section, David Simon, the journalist, will give an overview of David Simon's career and political background before he started working as a showrunner, and analyze his modus operandi and

worldview. The section devoted to *The Wire* and the neoliberal city will proceed to analyze the television series, while keeping in mind former sections of the paper. This part of the paper will deal with different facets of a neoliberal city and how they affect various spheres of public life. In the next section, *Generation Kill* – war and neoliberalism, the paper will focus on how neoliberalism functions within the framework of war. It will try to answer the question of what are the reasons for engaging in wars in the contemporary world, the privatization of the US military, and the lives of soldiers participating in war. The final section, Neoliberalism and the Trump administration, will scrutinize the presidency of Donald Trump and the ways this president tackles current issues. At the very end I provide a conclusion.

The point of the paper is to provide a broad insight into neoliberalism when the system is put into practice and to determine what its problems are, while focusing on the lives of the people who exist as a part of this system and addressing the existent, widening social and economical gaps between the few and the many.

## **Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism has become global, all the world's biggest powers are either already employing this economic system or turning towards it – United States of America, China, South African Republic, the wealthier nations of Europe such as Germany, France and Switzerland, etc. Neoliberalism also has roots in the public sphere, and influences decisions made in the worlds of media, education, government and the military. Neoliberalism has become the centerpiece and

the common sense of our culture. Up to the outbreak of the coronavirus, neoliberalism was professed as the system without an alternative.

Gane describes neoliberalism as a “form of governance that seeks to inject marketized principles of competition into all aspects of society and cultures” (2004:1092). Neoliberal theory’s roots and beginnings can be traced back to the ending of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the decline of classical liberalism – some of its modern characteristics being implemented into the existing system of the time during the years between the two World Wars and the post-war settlement period: mobilization of the free-market ideas in 1947, remaking of the laissez-faire principles by Chicago-school economists and the emergence of the ‘Chicago Boys’ policies in countries of Latin America in the 1970s. According to David Harvey, neoliberalism is a “theory of political economic practices” which revolves around the idea that the well-being of human kind and society is to be developed by “liberating individual entrepreneurial rights, free markets, and free trade” (2007:22). The state’s duty in such a theoretical framework is to guarantee “the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and juridical functions required to secure private property rights and to support freely functioning markets,” but, the state’s interventions into the free market must be as minimal as possible (Harvey, 2007:22). Harvey also defines a specific state apparatus, which he calls the neoliberal state – “... a state apparatus whose fundamental mission was to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital. The freedoms it embodies reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital.” (2005:7)

The term neoliberalism was coined by Alexander Rüstow, a German sociologist and economist, in 1938, in order to indicate the distinction between pro-collectivist liberal ethos and

traditional liberalism (Turner, 2008:4). Despite the fact that there are some differences between the European and American forms of neoliberalism due to different schools of thought concerning this economic theory, they find common ground in shared aims, arguments and assumptions. Turner states that there are 4 main principles of neoliberalism (2008:4-5).

The first principle is the importance of the market order as an indispensable mechanism for the allocation of resources and the protection of individual freedom. The market is not a tool but a perceived entity that functions as a mode of governance over finances and the economy. The second principle of neoliberalism is the commitment to the rule of the law-state, meaning that the government is perceived as the instrument of law when dealing with the regulation of conflicts among autonomous individuals in the market society, or, to be blunt, the government serves as the judge between two or more sides in conflict when the need arises. The third principle is minimal state intervention in the inner workings of the free market, meaning that the government should not and will not interfere with the “natural” flow of the market system and will instead leave it to regulate itself, with the exemption of situations described in the second principle. This is because the state – and all other human entities – are unable to truly have the information which would allow them to second-guess prices and because interest groups would spin and/or distort these interventions to their benefits. The fourth and final principle is private property – ownership of consumption or capital goods by non-governmental entities.

Nicholas Gane refers to two economists whom he believes set the ground-rules for neoliberalism and its operations – Ludwig von Mises (2004:1093) and Friedrich Hayek (2004:1096). Von Mises was an Austrian economist. He stood in defense of the notion of private property, and was influential for the development of some later pro-neoliberalism literature. In his book, *Human Action*, he states that “All human values are offered for option. Everything,



even life, becomes open to marketised forms of choice” and supports the notion of market competition (cited in Gane, 2004:1095). According to Foucault he was influential for the Chicago school of thought (Foucault, in Gane, 2004:1095). For Mises, human actions are “guided by values and purposive in intent, and are seen to be economic rather than social in basis in the first instance” (cited in Gane, 2004:1093), meaning that human actions are guided by economic principles and their monetary significance rather than being humanocentric and benevolent in their nature – “All action is economizing with the means available for the realization of attainable ends. The fundamental law of action is the economic principle” (cited in Gane, 2004:1095). As for the Chicago school, their form of neoliberalism sought “to apply economic analysis to a series of objects, to behavior or conduct which were not market forms of B and C..., to marriage, the education of children, and criminality,” therefore injecting market principles in all public spheres (Gane, 2004:1095).

The other important economist Gane mentions is Friedrich Hayek (2004:1096). For Hayek, the rational human subject is at the heart of economic and social actions – Hayek has a different view on market rationality and market principles. He criticizes *homo economicus* (a rational human being who tries to obtain maximum profit via the most efficient utilization of knowledge and information) on the basis of the fact that human knowledge is imperfect, and therefore no single mind can fully understand the complexity of the empirical world, or in simpler terms, a single human entity is unable to predict market fluctuations without error – “How can the combination of fragments of knowledge existing in different minds bring about results which, if they were to be brought out deliberately, would require a knowledge on the part of the directing mind which no single person can possess?” Hayek argues that the free market can do that for us instead, in the form of price (in Gane, 2004:1096). Hayek opposed state

planning of economics and state intervention into the free market, and instead believed that the government and the state can be deployed in the service of the market.

As mentioned earlier, there are some differences between European and American neoliberalism. When talking about American neoliberalism, Foucault mentions three contextual elements important for its development (1978-79:216-217): the first one is the New Deal and the development of the Keynesian policy by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933 and 1934. The second element is the Beveridge Report of 1942, a British governmental report which influenced the founding of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, as well as all other projects of social and economic interventionism which were developed during World War II. The third element concerning the development of neoliberalism refers to the programs dealing with poverty, education and segregation which were developed in the United States between the Truman and the Johnson administration – these programs included the growth of the federal administration and state interventionism. These three elements became the ‘enemies’ of neoliberal thought.

Harvey believes that the turn to neoliberalism happened because of the economic global recession in the 1970s, during which the general dissatisfaction of the population stemmed from the rise in unemployment and the growing inflation rates (2005:15). This situation caused the convergence between labor and social movements and pointed towards the development of a socialist alternative which could threaten the usual ways of capital accumulation as well as the people of the highest economic and political echelons who were not about to relinquish their power and influence. The power of members of the upper class was restrained, and the money was, at least partially, allocated into the hands of the working class (Harvey, 2007:27-28), which was reflected in the national income. In the United States, the top 1 percent of income earners’ profit decreased around 50% after World War II, and their capital lost even more value when the

value of stocks, properties and savings collapsed in the 1970s (Harvey, 2005:15). The neoliberal machinery sought a different path to secure its capital, which it managed to accomplish by exploiting the situation in Latin America via the coup in Chile and the military takeover in Argentina. According to Harvey, early stages of these events were highly profitable for the ruling elites of those countries and the foreign investors (who were mainly US citizens), at the expense of regular citizens. Re-allocation of wealth and capital resulted in a high increase in social inequality, which became the staple of the neoliberal project, as can be witnessed not only in the United States, but also in Britain, Russia, China, and Mexico (2005:17). After these capital redistributions were made, the top 1 percent of income earners in the US reached a 15% share of the national income, and the top 0.1% of income earners' share increased from 2% in 1978 to 6% in 1999. This information is supported by the fact that in a 30-year period (1970-2000), company CEOs' salaries saw a sharp growth. When comparing the salaries of workers against the salaries of CEOs we can see the following – in 1970 the median compensation of CEOs against workers was 30:1, and that ratio was almost 500:1 in 2000. This trend was furthered during the Bush administration and was accompanied by the diminishment of the estate tax, capital gains and taxation on income, whereas the taxation on wages and salaries remained untouched (Harvey, 2005:16). Despite its name, neoliberalism lost its liberal elements and turned right-wing. The reason for this was that the Republican party incorporated the Christian right leaders into the Business Round Table, and on the other hand, the working class found their enemies in the marginalized members of society – liberals, African-Americans, feminists, gays and lesbian population, etc. (Harvey, 2007:30). This situation is reflected in the development of American cities and the American society, visible in the growing economic disparity between the members of the upper economic-social echelons and the rest of the society – middle class,

working class, and the underclass. It is important to note that the neoliberal project reflects not only upon the lives of the society, but also on the development of cities and their infrastructure. It pertains to the rhythm of urbanization, to decisions of local governments and the shift from the well-being of citizens to securing the stability of financial institutions, which in turn leads to the deepening of social inequality and the rise in the numbers of members of the underclass, a social group whose constant in life is unemployment and the impossibility of finding and holding a steady job. The following section will deal with the issues of the modern neoliberal city.

## **The Notion of the City in neoliberalism**

When discussing what cities mean to humankind, Harvey merges the thoughts of Robert Park and Karl Marx by posing the questions „What kind of cities do we want to live in?“, „What kind of people do we want to be?“ and „What kind of humanity we wish to create among ourselves?“ (2007:2). These questions are juxtaposed in order to show that the city and the people inhabiting the city are inseparable. Harvey takes the stance that the city is a reflection of humanity (2007:2) – its inner workings, modes of government, economy, culture and idiosyncrasies are all connected into an expanding and evolving 'organism' which reflects the nature and the governing principles of the people inhabiting it.

Harvey then further remarks that the notion of the city has been important even in the medieval periods, quoting an old saying which goes „city air makes one free“ (2007:3), designating cities as man-made places which allowed humanity to set itself apart from the rest of this planet's living beings and exercise their freedom. The city is treated as an entity intertwined with humanity, which shares a primordial connection with it – when people change, the city changes, and vice-versa. The neoliberal form of the city however is very different from this

idealized perception, and is characterised by the following: fiscal austerity in the public sector, privatisation of the public sphere, state sponsored gentrification, criminalization of the poor and the causalization of labour (Fairbanks, 2011:5), a type of city whose type of municipal government, social structure and development relies on the neoliberal modes of thinking. What occurred in these neoliberal cities was: the privatization of private utilities for transitioning public housing residents, new strategies were developed for policing space, education and social reform within the context of neoliberal principles and the remaking of the material and cultural landscape (Fairbanks, 2011:7).

The culture and tradition of the United States of America has been rooted in the concepts of freedom of will, freedom of speech, self-sufficiency and individualism since its conception. These characteristics are the cornerstones of American identity. On the other hand, neoliberalism, – which is quickly becoming another „American staple“ - started off as an economic philosophy in the 1930s. However, both the term and the philosophy gained prominence later, during the 1970s (during the administrations of presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter) and 1980s (Ronald Reagan administration). Neoliberalization came in the form of economical restructuring in the 1970s, and Fairbanks enumerates several characteristics of the neoliberal movement: the globalization of finance capital, the decline and displacement of the industrial economy, the withering power of organized labour, a decades-long stagnation of real wages and increase in job insecurity, widening economic inequality accompanied by the importance of high-tech innovation and cultural industries (2011:3).

Harvey pinpoints 1975 as the year that neoliberalism finally gained traction and the year in which it was decided that the well being of financial institutions takes precedence over the well being of the population (2007:8), along with the general goal of creating a healthy business

climate (2007:9) through the municipal government. It was the year New York City went bankrupt (2007:6). In order to understand how the economic policy of the USA took a turn to neoliberalism, it is necessary to find out what happened before New York went bankrupt. This particular event is important for understanding how neoliberalism developed through the United States of America, since neoliberal principles employed in New York have since been employed in the rest of the United States and serve as an indicator of the neoliberal turn in the United States of America as a whole.

Starting with 1960, New York City went into a steady economical decline. Companies were moving outside New York, which in turn caused many to lose their jobs and left the city „occupied by disaffected, unemployed, marginalized and very often racially marked populations“ (Harvey, 2007:6). This state of affairs led to what is known as the Urban Crisis of the 1960s, marked by riots centering around the American Civil rights movement. Harvey goes on to explain how the federal government went about rectifying the situation. They started a recovery program which was reliant on the expansion of the public sector – meaning the government poured their finances into the expansion of education, healthcare and the municipal sector (garbage collection and transit workers), as well as supporting the integration of racial minorities into the current workforce (Harvey, 2007:6). During this period New York was also plagued with problems on the property market. Since people (and businesses) were leaving New York for places with a favorable business/employment atmosphere, there was a lot of real estate which could not be properly utilized. However, money which the federal government gave to the city was not enough for such an expansive plan and soon enough the city started running low on funds and was forced to turn to investment bankers for loans. The financial support from both the

federal government and the investment bankers came to a screeching halt in 1973 and 1975, respectively (Harvey, 2007:7).

According to Harvey, the investment bankers (a group of wealthy, ambitious, influential and powerful people, spearheaded by prominent figures such as David Rockefeller) took issue with the way money was being redistributed. As mentioned, New York City at the time also dealt with and supported the growth and influence of workers' unions and the integration of racial minorities into the workforce (2007:8). The atmosphere surrounding these events was anti-corporate, and the big business owners wanted to turn the tables to their benefit, which resulted in cutting off any financial support for New York City. Once budget responsibilities were handed over to the Municipal Assistance Corporation, later known as Emergency Financial Control Board, a corporation led by investment bankers, the first item on the agenda was dealing with the accumulated debt New York City owed to the bondholders. This again led to cuts in employment and services since all the money was being redirected into paying off the city's debt. They even rigged the game against the municipal unions by putting their pension funds into the debt, so that if the city went bankrupt, the union members would lose their pensions (Harvey, 2007:8).

However, in 1973, the investment bankers procured a very good deal with the Saudi Arabia government, which found itself with hefty capital on their hands due to the changes in oil prices. The government of Saudi Arabia agreed to „recycle their petrodollars through the US investment banks“ (Harvey, 2007:9). Now that the bankers were in possession of both capital and real estate, they were able to draw up a plan for the revitalization of New York City's economy.

The bankers founded the Downtown Business Partnership and tried to rebrand New York as a tourist destination, but had some trouble down the road as unions were angry with their current situation – there was obviously enough money to work with, but the union members found their salaries decreasing and a lot of union-members were fired. These circumstances in New York led to the creation of notorious „Fear City“ pamphlets, which in turn prompted the officials to action which led to the re-employment of the union members in Manhattan, while other boroughs were marginalized. Manhattan at the time was considered a safe, privileged place to live in as opposed to the other boroughs of New York. They were plagued with „a crack epidemic, an AIDS epidemic and a public health crisis“ (Harvey, 2007:10). The economic and social differences are still visible today, and Manhattan has since been turning into a domicile for the rich, the social elite, with living costs too steep even for the members of the middle-class. In the meantime, petrodollars attained from the deal with Saudi Arabia were being put to use.

Fairbanks sees neoliberalism as a flexible and an aleatory creed capable of deriving its „dynamism as much from instances of failure as it does by its targeted successes“ (2011:6), a view reflected in the bankers' actions (and their success) with petrodollars. Investment bankers lent the petrodollars to other countries in need (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina), whose debt grew due to the 1979 inflation, because the chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Paul Volcker decided to raise the interest rates, resulting in the declaration of bankruptcy by Mexico in 1982 (Harvey, 2007:10). This meant that the US banks which lent the money to the Mexican government were about to lose money on their investment, something that the IMF could not and would not allow to happen. Once again, the well-being of the financial institutions took precedence over the well-being of the people, meaning that the citizens of Mexico were the ones who ended up paying off the debt as the consequence.



This was achieved through the liberalization of the Mexican market – „get rid of strong unions, introduce flexibility into the labour market, and reform your pension structures“ (Harvey, 2007:11). Rinse and repeat. The end result was the neoliberalization of Mexico, and the effects of this action are plainly visible. By the end of 1986, the Mexican economy went into the state of recession: pesos suffered a triple digit inflation, real per capita income decreased by 13.5% by the end of 1986 (Buffie and Krause, 1989:141), real wages went down by approximately 30% (Buffie and Krause, 1989:164), and Mexico's terms of trade declined for 42.2% (Buffie and Krause, 1989:163). The levels of poverty, unemployment and social inequity have been on the rise since, as evidenced by the rise in the number of „hyperghettos,“ places drained of wage labour, submitted to punitive welfare state apparatus (Fairbanks, 2011:4), and, on the other hand, the emergence of a few billionaires (such as Carlos Slim and Alberto Baillères). The process was repeated in many a country while the investment bankers rubbed their hands together and smiled watching these processes unfurl and attain them great wealth and influence over the global economy.

While Harvey sees the events surrounding New York City as the principal actuator of the neoliberal economical reformation, Fairbanks argues that USA made the 'neoliberal turn' with the election of Ronald Reagan, who served two presidential terms from 1981 to 1989, and whose policies relied on „progressive delegitimization of the post-war welfare state, punitive tactics directed at the poor and the exaltation of the market economy“ (2011:3). Harvey believes that neoliberalism was designed to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. He brushes aside the notion that these processes were just an accidental side effect or that the poor were non-intentional collateral damage, and instead perceives it as a failure in regards of capital accumulation but concedes that it helped restore the power and influence of the United States in

the global economy as well as succeeding in the creation or reinforcement of billionaires. He perceives neoliberalism as a class project (in Fairbanks, 2011:4). His position is reinforced by data and raw numbers: in the past twenty years the richest 1% of the population has doubled its share of the national income, the 0.1% have quadrupled their share, whereas the richest, the 0.01% have increased their share by 497 percent (Harvey, 2007:12). Changes introduced to the system, the way a neoliberal city functions, and the emergence of capital as the sole designator of a person's value are scrutinized in the opus of David Simon.

## **David Simon, the journalist**

David Simon is best known for his work on critically acclaimed TV-series such as *The Wire* (which ran for five seasons in the period between 2002 and 2008), *Generation Kill* (2008), *Treme* (2010-2013), and *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-1999). He primarily served as the story editor and producer for *Homicide*, and was an executive producer, writer and the showrunner for the rest of the TV-series he made. However, before achieving success and gaining renown due to his work on television, Simon was employed as a journalist in *The Baltimore Sun* from 1982 to 1995, where he spent the bigger part of his journalistic career as a police reporter covering crime and drugs (Drumming, 2006).

He started out his job as a reporter with great ambition, believing that what he was doing was both altruistic and beneficial to the world around him, and with a belief that journalism has the ability to „change the terrain“ (Rose, 1999). However, experience taught him that his opinions were an indicator of his youthful naivete. He has since grown increasingly cynical of journalism and its ability to shape his surroundings in the contemporary world, believing that it

does not hold as much power and influence over the world at large as it once did (Rose, 1999). That cynicism transferred on to his work at HBO, with Simon stating that *The Wire* will also change nothing, except for giving a new perspective to a smaller group of people who viewed the acclaimed TV series with a critical eye and an open mind (Walker, 2004), and similarly stating that *Generation Kill* would first and foremost give its viewers the truth and a sense of modern warfare, as opposed to spewing ideology and drama at them (Beck, 2008).

That is not to say that Simon did not learn anything during his years in journalism. In fact, it was very beneficial for his future work with HBO. He claims that „journalism teaches you how to approach a world that is not your own, process it, and explain it,“ (Dreifus, 2018) a skill which enhanced both Simon's grasp of the different social circles (the underclass, the police, the army, the bureaucrats, the understanding of politics, drug-trade, modern warfare, porn industry, etc.) around him and the way he writes his scripts and stories. Simon's disillusionment with the positive impact of journalism can be observed through his two leaves of absence from *The Baltimore Sun*. During these periods Simon concentrated on writing his non-fiction books: *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (published in 1991) and *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (1997), which he co-wrote with Edward Burns, a former Baltimore police detective who spent some years in both the Homicide division and the Narcotics division.

His first book, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, describes a one-year period Simon spent working alongside the Baltimore Police Department's Homicide Unit in 1988. He spent that year participating in police investigations, interrogations and court trials with particular interest in deconstructing the figure of the „American detective,“ which is more than often romanticized in popular media. His other book, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-*

*City Neighborhood* deals with the life of the people „on the corner,“ a place where the bigger part of the drug-trafficking system (the street level) can be observed. The book revolves around addicts, sociological factors of entering the world of drug-trade and drugs, the drug trade itself, as well as the effects of drug addiction.

Despite the fact that Ken Tucker, and apparently the general population were under the impression that he is politically oriented towards Marxism due to the presence of systemic social and political critiques in his work on television, David Simon politically declares himself as a social democrat (Sheehan and Sweeney, 2018). He believes that capitalism is the only prevalent and the most powerful economic system in the world, with the addition of being „unrivaled in its power to produce wealth (Sheehan and Sweeney, 2018). It is Simon's belief, however, that Marx's *Capital* does a great job at pointing out the problems concerning capitalism and what sort of problems are to arise „when capital wins unequivocally, when it gets everything it asks for“ (Simon, 2004) – the margin of profit becomes the only metric of human value, while social relations, equity and solidarity are slowly turning into unwanted, dirty words and expressions. The great victory of capitalism in the twentieth century was achieved through the struggle between labour and capital, meaning that all the concerned groups were invested in the system, they all had their stakes in it, they all had a voice, and all of them, in a sense, shared the system. The emergence of neoliberalism as the economic system basically took out the human component from the struggle, and allowed the market to dictate the lives of the people. The working class' importance has since dwindled, and a cruel and perverted mode of self-sufficiency and greedy individualism instead took the central stage and started shaping society into what we can easily observe today. „But the idea that it's (capitalism) not going to be married to a social compact, that how you distribute the benefits of capitalism isn't going to include everyone in the

society to a reasonable extent, that's astonishing to me“ (Simon, 2004). Here, Simon indirectly refers to the people of the underclass, whom are almost certain to remain permanently unemployed and who do not have real opportunities to improve their lives, who are being left behind, written off by both the system and the people. What is even more alarming is that their numbers are on the rise. If this problem is not properly addressed, it will - over time - consume more and more people, and at some point the underclass will be the majority. Maximizing profit is not by itself a bad thing, but requires a modicum of human decency and solidarity.

Despite his awareness of the power of capitalism, his personal beliefs are somewhat different – rejection of the trickle-down economy, critique of the absence of community and solidarity between the classes which results in „needless pain, needless human waste, needless tragedy.“ He publicly supported Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Presidential elections, stating that Sanders was responsible for „rehabilitating and normalizing the term socialist back into American public life.“ (Sheehan and Sweeney, 2018).

As for Simon's writing style and process, he highlights the importance of the material's authenticity (as opposed to drama): "I write about people, time, moments and places. I try to capture them as they existed, as best I can. What I do is rooted in the real, in an attempt to capture a shard of the real" (Dreifus, 2018). He puts great value in the physical subject's opinion and speech, and the usage of real anecdotes and characters based on real people. Simon himself states that he does not want to either make a hit or sell drama but instead wishes to deliver the "best possible story" (in Dreifus, 2018). He describes his television work as "writer-driven projects," (Beck, 2008) meaning that he gives plenty of attention to characters' vernacular and patterns of speech - "I realised I needed to listen to people who spoke in cadences that were not my own. African-American kids, white Irish and Italian cops, and black cops." (Dreifus, 2018) as

well as minimizing the camerawork - the camera must not remind the viewer that he is watching a movie or TV series but should simply convey the story and keep the viewers immersed in it (Beck, 2008).

### ***The Wire* and the neoliberal city**

Before delving into the analysis of *The Wire*, it should be noted that journalists were not the only ones interested in spreading correct information and representing the social reality of our world. There were writers and authors whose works of literature reflected the state of the world and the lives of people from different walks of life. Georg Lukács wrote: „If literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface. If a writer strives to represent reality as it truly is, i.e., if he is an authentic realist, then the question of totality plays a decisive role, no matter how the writer actually conceives the problem intellectually” (Lukács, in Wilson, 2014:62). With the invention of television and the development of cinematography, there came a new, visual way of depicting reality. Wilson traces the desire to use cinematic realism for journalistic purposes back to Italian Neorealism with movies such as Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* from 1943 and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* from 1946. Furthermore, he states these movies „relied on filmmakers shooting in real locations with non-professional actors in order to emphasize the authenticity of the films' social milieus“(2014:63). The contemporary United States has also turned to films and television series as the popular choice of entertainment

and popular culture, but also as a way of representing social reality. Modern American studies have turned their attention to this phenomenon. *The Wire*, in the fashion of the Italian neorealists, strives to be the contemporary, documentarian depiction of social reality, of economic and political issues of the modern United States, and of its institutions.

*The Wire* is David Simon's most popular piece of work and one that's been reviewed and critiqued the most. Alongside Simon, the important people behind the *The Wire* were Robert F. Colesberry (cast in the role of detective Ray Cole), his wife Karen L. Thorson and Nina Kostroff Noble. It is a crime drama television series, consisting of 5 seasons and a total of 60 episodes. The series was filmed between 2002 and 2008 and featured a long list of actors, most of whom were not well known at the time, such as Dominic West (detective James McNulty), Michael Kenneth Williams (Omar Little), Idris Elba (Russell „Stringer” Bell), Aiden Gillen (Thomas Carcetti), and many others. The show is lauded for its usage of authentic dialect and vocabulary native to Baltimore, as well as for its casting choices – many of the roles were distributed to people with experience in relation to the role they are playing: Felicia Pearson, who plays the character of Felicia „Snoop” Pearson and is a soldier in the Stanfield drug trafficking organization, served prison time for attempted murder. Edward T. Norris (detective Norris) was Baltimore police commissioner between 2000 and 2002, and later spent 6 months in prison for committing a felony. Jay Landsman, a longtime police officer, was featured in the show and played by Delaney Williams. The real Jay Landsman was cast in the role of Lieutenant Dennis Mello. The list goes on. During its time on television, *The Wire* did not garner a high viewership and was not a very popular show, but since then it attained a cult following and is now considered to be one of the best television series ever made.

Sven Cvek argues that *The Wire* as a topic of scientific analysis can be approached from various branches of research: film studies, media studies, urban studies, ethics, communication, criminal science, sociology, social anthropology, and social work (2014:1). Furthermore, Cvek states that *The Wire* can be considered „as a particularly successful representation of social processes such as: urban decay, political corruption, or criminalization of poverty” (2014:5). This paper will look at the characteristics of neoliberalism as depicted in the series, that is, it will take a look at the institutions around which the plot of the series revolves.

Younghoon Kim states that *The Wire* is a „subversive cop show that unveils the structural problems of the police and policing in contemporary America” (2013:190). Truly, *The Wire* deals with many issues present in the current neoliberal system such as the loss of blue-collar jobs, shrinkage of the tax base, rise in the concentration of poverty, racial segregation, the problematic of the drug trade and street gangs and problems in the system of education (Kim, 2013:193-4) and posits the city of Baltimore as the „star“ of the show because of the fact that the show tries to depict and describe every facet of the city, covering topics relevant to the modern institutions of a neoliberal city.

Season 1 of *The Wire* deals with the drug war waged between the police and the criminal drug traffickers, presenting both organizations as similar in form – „Heads of both organizations, official and criminal, wrestle with similar management problem and personnel issues, and resolve them with similarly cold self-interest”s (Kim, 2013:203). D'Angelo Barksdale explains chess rules to two low-level members of the criminal organization by comparing the figurines with the members of the organizations: the king is „the kingpin,“ the queen is the „go get shit done piece,“ rooks are the stash, and represent the muscle which goes with them, and the pawns are soldiers. D'Angelo further adds that the king stays the king, and Bodie adds that pawns, if



they are smart enough can become queens („The Buys“). This analogy of chess is reminiscent of the neoliberal system where the king is also the last to fall, and will rarely be directly implicated in the action. The analogy is further extended in the second season with the introduction of the criminal organization led by a man known only as the Greek, who can usually be seen in the places of business, quietly listening and rarely taking part in any negotiations, whereas the police department is often influenced by the mayor's office, but it is the police commissioner who falls on the sword. Members of the middle management, for example lieutenants in both organizations are, to a degree, in a position of power, but are unable to effect any change (eg., Howard Colvin in the police department and Preston „Bodie” Broadus in Barksdale criminal organization – neither are happy with the way institutions they are implicated with are functioning, but are ultimately unable to change the way they function). Jason Reid, drawing on D'Angelo's chess analogy, compares the two institutions: „The world of business and the drug trade are thus two different manifestations of the same chessboard, of the same structure, in which the pawns remain pawns, slaving away, and the king stays the king. They may be separated by means, legal and illegal, but are ultimately unified by ends, by the pursuit of profit” (Reid, in Kim, 2013:203). The first season also brings up the ways wealth is created and distributed, and envisions the flow of capital visible in the relationship between the Barksdale drug trafficking organization and political elites of Maryland (Cvek, 2014:11).

Season 2 deals with the devaluation and the decline of the American working class, presented through the narrative of the International Brotherhood of Stevedores at the Baltimore docks, where longshoremen, spearheaded by Frank Sobotka (president of the local union), turn to smuggling to ensure their survival since their continued initiatives to make the Baltimore docks a prominent shipping location is at the bottom of the local politicians' to-do list. Sobotka uses the

money earned from his illegal enterprise to push his agenda in the political circles. He wants to repair and re-open the grain pier and have the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal dredged so that bigger ships can come in the Baltimore docks. Frank is a criminal with good intentions, and also uses the money to help other stevedores who find themselves in financial troubles because of the reduced workload at the docks. For Simon, the second season was „a multi-dimensional study of the grinding downsizing of the Baltimore docks and their articulation with global flows of criminal capital, the show is concerned with 'what happened in this country when we stopped making shit and building shit, what happened to all the people who were doing that'” (Simon, in Kinkle, Jeff and Toscano, Alberto, 2009). The situation the longshoremen find themselves in is the result of the deindustrialization of Baltimore which occurred after 1960 when the city lost two-thirds (around 100,000 jobs) of its manufacturing employment, and places like Betlehem Steel went from 30,000 employees to 5,000 employees (Harvey, 2000:151). This event is referred to during the seasons when the remaining stevedores reminisce about the old times, and is also mentioned by McNulty whose father was also fired in the 1970s.

The third season deals with the local politicians' inability to exact meaningful and positive changes – young councilman Thomas Carcetti runs for the mayor of Baltimore with big dreams and hopes, only to find himself unable to better the life of his constituents once he attains the position of power. His primary problem is the lack of funding, and he is not able to bring about the changes he promised during the elections. Instead, he just becomes one of many politicians who simply plays “the game” and focuses on his career, idealism be damned. What is introduced in this season and remains in focus until the end of the series is „juking the stats,“ in which the police officers are ordered to downplay or not report at all any crimes committed so as to make the police department look like they are efficient in crime reduction. Felonies become

misdemeanors, rapes are turned into assaults, smaller crimes are pursued, arrests are made for petty crimes and major cases are not pursued because they are too costly and ineffective statistics-wise. This allows the politicians and commissioners to appear tough on crime while maintaining the status quo and without having to tackle the underlying social and economic problems of Baltimore (Bzdak, Crosby and Vannatta, 2013:267). The stat game is the lie which destroyed real police work and functions as a mechanism which allows the perpetuation of the elites' social standing and influence while accomplishing nothing. Additionally, it is an apt description of the Baltimore police department and law enforcement in general as it is presented in *The Wire*. The only purpose of this institution is to prolong the status quo without concern for the consequences of their (in)activities (Potter and Marshall, 2009:54). This is what Cedric Daniels has to say about it: „But the stat game, that lie, it's what ruined this department. Shining up shit and calling it gold, so majors become colonels and mayors become governors. Pretending to do police work while one generation trains the next how not to do the job” („-30-,“).

Season 4 of the series presents the issues of the educational system, which is incapable of preparing the young pupils for life. School for these students is a place to practice their street skills – hustling, cheating, maintaining a street attitude and creed, preparing themselves for the life on the corner. Most of the teachers at the Edward J. Tilghman middle school are happy with just being able to keep the peace in their classes, and the curriculum often takes the back-seat in the face of the issue. Students are usually taught the material which will enable them to score a few points higher on the state assessments in order to ensure further state funding. Similarly, when Dennis „Cutty” Wise is employed as a custodian in the school, he actually performs the duties of a truant officer. He is given a list of the truants' names and is supposed to force them back to school for merely one day in September and October respectively in order to secure

additional funding from the state. It goes without saying that these measures do not really help either the children or the school itself to achieve any kind of progress, but instead simply reinforces the status quo. The series further explores the problems of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (succeeded by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015) and the educational malfunctioning of schools brought on by the usage of standardized tests. James Trier quotes Ed Burns, who became a teacher after working 20 years on the police force: „Education is our biggest failure as a society. The inequality in our system disadvantages millions of people. It borders on the criminal” (Burns, in Trier, 2010:190). The topic problematized here are the standardized tests brought on by the No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers, especially in poverty-stricken schools of west Baltimore, are forced to teach the test, not the curriculum. The enforcement of prescribed rules renders teachers unable to teach the curriculum in a way that would allow a particular group of students to easily grasp it – in the series, former cop turned teacher Roland Pryzbylewsky, teaches probabilities through dice, which most of the children encountered on the streets. He manages to catch their attention by employing a different way of teaching which is relevant to their way of life. However, the problem resurfaces when all teachers at the school are forced to teach the exact questions from the language arts test to prepare them for the test, because good results mean continued financing of the school from the state. Once again, the central problem in education revolves around money, not education or children or the teachers.

The fifth and final season deals with the decline and representations of journalism – the focus from divulging correct and relevant information to the public is shifted to journalism as a profitable enterprise and chasing prestigious awards (Scott Templeton pursues the Pulitzer award). The „better” stories – written by Templeton in the series - are often manufactured and

sensationalized: quotes are made up by journalists chasing formal recognition and fame, and their articles are interwoven with fluff and purple prose. Simon brings the decline of journalism into connection with the „Wall Street mentality” in which the newspaper executives’ biggest concern is the maximization of profits at all costs (Simon, in Wilson, 2014:61). For him, the role of journalism was to critique the „unrestrained authority“ of institutions, be they local or governmental, and act as defenders of democratic ideals and social justice: „For a relatively brief period in American History – no more than the last fifty years or so - a lot of smart and talented people were paid a living wage and benefits to challenge the unrestrained authority of our institutions and to hold those institutions to task“ (Simon, in Wilson, 2014:62). The problem of representation is visible in the Templeton/McNulty subplot, where detective McNulty fabricates evidence to create a fictional serial killer, and Templeton is the one reporting on the story. McNulty does this to ensure funding for the police department which he then allocates to the Stanfield case and myriad other cases as a favor to other detectives, whereas Templeton is after the Pulitzer award and sees a chance for winning the award in this story. The whole story is sensationalized and blown out of proportion. The purpose of the subplot is described by Wilson: „*The Wire* calls attention to the ways in which such modes of representation are artificial, obscuring the impact of social institutions upon criminality by relying upon sensationalist escapism” (2014:75).

According to Kim, every character on the show is „exposed to some type of systemic violence and problems brought about by the neoliberal state and capitalism” (2013:190). Those characters that do put up a fight against the system, like detectives McNulty and Freamon, Cedric Daniels, Howard „Bunny“ Colvin, Omar Little, or Michael Lee, find that the resistance does not only come from the system itself, but also from the people of the same social standing.

In *The Wire*, none of these characters come out on top. All of them are beaten by the system. Let us then take a look at major Howard „Bunny“ Colvin, who is arguably the most prominent rebel in the series, and is former McNulty's commanding officer who visibly influenced the younger police officer. Colvin (portrayed by Michael Wisdom) is a major in the Baltimore police department, 6 months away from gaining rights to the major's pension and preparing himself for his retirement from the police force when he is introduced to the audience.

Colvin „tries to effect positive change the only way he can in such a broken system, by an outright refusal to obey or enforce its dysfunctional brand of discipline” (Potter and Marshall, 2009:58). He creates „Hamsterdam” by transferring all of the drug dealers from all the corners within the districts inside his jurisdiction to three designated zones in which drug trafficking is, basically, legal. Drug abusers and dealers are allowed to freely peddle and consume drugs under the condition that there is no violence. He ensures that preservatives and clean syringes are distributed in Hamsterdam, and the peace is kept via constant police surveillance. The officers are to step in only if violence ensues. The project results with a sharp decline in overall crime in Colvin's districts. Whether Hamsterdam would have a lasting effect is debatable, since the project is quickly dismantled once Colvin's superiors, Mayor Royce, the journalists and the public are acquainted with this project. Mayor Royce saw the positive effect Hamsterdam brought Colvin's districts, and even considered spinning the story in a positive light for a while, but he ultimately caved in and the project was scrapped because the mayor thought it would reflect negatively on his ratings. Because of the United States' rigid approach to the War on Drugs, the status quo is swiftly restored and the dealers are back to slinging on the corners all over the western district. As a reward for his daring approach to the subject, Colvin is rewarded with a forced vacation, relegation to the rank of lieutenant, and ultimately, forced resignation –

„The discipline of the BPD ultimately renders Colvin's heroism – like McNulty's – both wholly ineffectual and ruinous for his career” (Potter and Marshall, 2009:58). In season 4, Colvin gets a job as a field researcher alongside Dr. David Parenti, who is conducting a research to study violent offenders. Colvin and Parenti set up an intervention program at Edward J. Tilghman middle school, where they pick out 10 students who are especially disruptive in their classes and have behavioral issues (Trier, 2010:185-6). Colvin's school project resembles *Hamsterdam*, with the goal of socializing students and preparing them for attendance in regular classes. He manages to exact a substantive change in their behavior by realizing that “the students have to be engaged in ways meaningful to their lives on the streets” (Trier, 2010:188). Despite the fact that the project is fairly successful, it is shut down by the end of the fourth season due to pressure from the city hall.

Where *The Wire* explores the functioning of a neoliberal city, Simon's *Generation Kill* tries to genuinely portray modern warfare and touches upon the neoliberal aspects of the military, which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

### ***Generation Kill* – war and neoliberalism**

*Generation Kill* is a seven-part television miniseries produced in 2008 for HBO. The series is based on Evan Wright's 2004 book of the same name, which revolves around his experience as a reporter during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It was adapted for television by David Simon, Ed Burns and Evan Wright, and follows, for the most part, members of the US Marine Corps' 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. According to David Simon, who adapted the book

for television: „That's the purpose of the story: how war defies classification, how it defies political agenda, how it defies morality and immorality. It refuses to be addressed on simplistic terms” (Simon, in Beck, 2008). The series won 3 Emmy awards, and was lauded by many as a genuine portrayal of modern warfare. The span of the show covers the first three weeks of the American invasion into Iraq in 2003, and takes the marines of the 1st Recon Battalion from Kuwait all the way into Baghdad. For the duration of the show we witness the Fedayeen and the Republican Guard dismantled by the marines, we see innocent civilians put in harm's way, and the camaraderie of the battalion, despite the glaring social differences between the marines. The tasks set forward for the marines in Iraq were different than what they previously encountered. Instead of serving as a stealthy, reconnaissance unit, they are used as America's shock troopers inside lightly armored vehicles.

The Iraq War came about as the culmination of President George W. Bush's War on Terror, in response to the 9/11 attack. The rationale justifying the war in Iraq was a controversial topic. The idea was to topple Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq, which the State Department Bureau of Public Affairs described as: “A regime that developed and used weapons of mass destruction, that harbored and supported terrorists, committed outrageous human rights abuses, and defied the just demands of the United Nations and the world.” (U.S. State Department Bureau of Public Affairs, 2003). The idea that Hussein might have been developing weapons of mass destruction, alongside the 9/11 attack, was the final push, at least formally, which prompted President Bush to start the war. However, inspections by David Kay (former US chief inspector) and the United Nations Security Council made in 2002 and 2003 never found any hidden stashes of such weapons in Iraq, and concluded that Iraq's nuclear weapons program was dormant. There was no evidence pointing towards the development of chemical or biological



weapons either (Nichols, 2004). There were some who surmised that the US invaded Iraq for economic reasons. Michael Klare advanced the idea that the invasion was “an attempt by the U.S. to secure Middle Eastern oil and investment opportunities for itself, offset the decline of its hegemony and resurrect the U.S. empire in the face of competition from Europe, China, and other rivals” (in Baker, 2014:122). The war in Iraq ended in December 2011, when President Obama withdrew all American soldiers from the invasion. Iraq was in disarray and violence quickly ensued once more. In September 2014, Obama announced that the US military forces would be returning to Iraq, and they are still there in 2020.

Ever since its conception, the United States has participated in wars, through which they have also gained their independence. However, the war in Iraq differs from other wars the US has been a part of. Yousef Baker states that “The occupation regime attempted to formally integrate Iraq into the global economy by imposing a hyper neoliberal legal framework and policies that effectively transnationalized the Iraqi state and facilitated the development of new transnational accumulation circuits in Iraq” (2014:121).

The invasion, the first stage of the war, lasted from 19 March 2003 until 1 May 2003. Lieutenant Colonel Ferrando, referred to by the soldiers as „Godfather,” describes the type of warfare employed by the US military in the following words: „And lest we forget, maneuver warfare is America's warfare for the 21st century. It is all about the violence of action” („Stay Frosty“). Maneuver warfare is a military strategy, the point of which is “to attack the enemy “system” – to incapacitate the enemy systemically. Enemy components may remain untouched but cannot function as part of a cohesive whole. Instead of attacking enemy strength, the goal is the application of our strength against selected enemy weakness in order to maximize advantage” (U.S. Marine Corps, 1997:37-38)

Just like other institutions in the USA, the military has been subjected to marketised, neoliberal principles. After the events of 9/11, President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, went about reforming the United States government through implementation of market-based principles. Rumsfeld was critical of Pentagon's bureaucratic system which moved along slowly and advocated an entrepreneurial approach to this particular situation, turning Pentagon into a venture capitalist machinery, reliant on „outsourcing and privatization intended to incorporate private-sector logic into the operations of the Pentagon apparatus” (Ettinger, 2011:755).

The United States military was the first military in the world which employed private military contractors. Ettinger pinpoints 1985 as this year, when General John A. Wickham first signed LOGCAP (Logistics Civil Augmentation Program), which outlined the policies for using private military contractors during wartime conditions (2011:754). The point of LOGCAP was to free up military personnel from dealing with non-crucial military tasks. These activities were distinguished between in three categories: „functions directly linked to warfighting and best performed by the federal government; functions indirectly linked to warfighting capability that must be shared with the private sector; and functions not linked to warfighting and best performed by the private sector” (Ettinger, 2011:757). The 1985 LOGCAP was used “to plan for outsourcing selected services to civilian contractors in wartime conditions” (Ettinger, 2011: 753). In 1992, LOGCAP I was reorganized in such a fashion as to provide “a single worldwide planning and service contract. It was awarded to Houston-based Brown and Root, now Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) and ran until 1997 under the management of the US army corps of engineers at a total value of \$811 million.” LOGCAP II was awarded to DynCorp from Virginia between 1997 and 2001. LOGCAP III, which was awarded shortly after the 9/11 attack to the

Halliburton subsidiary KBR. It was controversial because of its cost-plus-award-fee system, which led to accusations of abuse and fraud (Ettinger, 2011: 754), and because Dick Cheney, who served both as the U.S. Secretary of Defense and the Vice President of the United States, was the CEO of Halliburton. LOGCAP IV was awarded to three companies in 2011 – DynCorp, Fluor Intercontinental, and Kellogg, Brown and Root (Ettinger, 2011:754-5). The number of contractors employed by the government has been growing, especially after 9/11. In 1991, during the time of the Gulf War there were 50 state soldiers for every military contractor. Almost twenty years later, in 2010, the ratio of contractors to uniformed American personnel was about 1.6:1 (Ettinger, 2011:746).

The participation of non-military personnel is touched upon in the series. They are usually referred to as POGs (personnel other than grunts) and the marines in the series look down on them. When an officer POG arrives to the marines' camp and calls soldiers to join a mass, Brad Colbert has this to say about POGs: „We're out here, 40 clicks into enemy lines. And this man of God here, he's a fucking POG. In fact, he's an officer POG. That's one more layer of bureaucracy and unnecessary logistics. One more asshole we need to supply MREs and baby wipes for. And worst of all, – it should be tight – worst of all, the motherfucker doesn't even carry a weapon. When push comes to shove, even Rolling Stone picks up a gun. But this fucking shill of God... he can't cover a sector. He'll never hump ammo or claymores. This is a fucking war. And we're here as warriors. So on top of everything else that's expected of us do we really need to drag him along and engage in this make-believe bullshit?“ („Combat Jack“). On a different occasion, Colbert again mentions military bureaucracy and the incompetence of officers in a negative context, as something that unnecessarily slows down the pace of war actions and brings about more problems to worry about for professionally trained soldiers: „The individual

who needs his head examined is the man responsible for taking arguably the best damn independent recon operators of any military in the world, and dropping us in Humvee platoons to lead a parade of POGs, officers, and heavily-armed subhuman morons like Casey Kasem across Mesopotamia. How much does Uncle Sam spend on us? Jump school, dive school, mountain warfare, ranger school, S.E.R.E. That's a million dollars on average to train up 0321s like us. And here we are, perfectly-tuned ferraris in a demolition derby” („A Burning Dog“). The series points out how the relationships within the marine corps function, as well as how the marines themselves, who have their families and lives back home, have to function in war. These topics are brought up by Sergeant Antonio „Poke” Espera. They point to the fact that marines look down on POGs because they are not trained nearly as well, they are not fit to participate and withstand combat and the psychological stress that comes with it, and that they do not share the same mentality.

When speaking of marine mentality, Espera says: “All we do is fight for position in the pack, dawg. All that training we do – the martial arts, to grappling – is for practice, but it's also for real, to achieve dominance over a motherfucker. We do the same thing mentally. It's prison rules, dawg. We probe for any fucking weakness we can find – family, race, brains, looks – anything you have on a motherfucker, you wear it the fuck out“ („Stay Frosty“). There is no place for weakness in war, any racial, social or cultural issues between two people or groups of people are subjected to combat camaraderie. As for the functionality of a marine, a human being with their own lives and thoughts and emotions, Espera reads what appears to be the beginning of a letter he's writing to his wife: „I've learned there's two types of people in Iraq. Those who are very good, and those who are dead. I'm very good. I've lost 20 pounds, shaved my head, started smoking, my feet have half rotted off, and I move from filthy hole to filthy hole every

night. I see dead children and people everywhere, and function in a void of indifference. I keep you and our daughter locked away deep inside, and I try not to look there” („A Bomb in the Garden“). The quote speaks to the desensitization of the troopers to both the circumstances of war and their personal lives.

The process and the development of the privatization of the military can be analyzed through the Quadrennial Defense Review, an analytical report on perceived necessary military objectives and potential threats to the national security of the United States. Starting with 2001, the QDR emphasized the need to re-organize the Department of Defense. What was proposed was the switch to the market principles used in the private sector and the integration of civilian resources (Ettinger, 2011:756). In the subsequent 2006 QDR, there already was some criticism of „inefficient business practices,“ but the private sector contracting was integrated into the Department of Defense's organizational logic (Ettinger, 2011:757). However, as soon as 2010, QDR called for the re-evaluation of private military contractors with the emphasis on reducing their numbers and increasing the number of state military staff, and for the clarification of the position of private military contractors within the United States Military (Ettinger, 2011:758).

According to Steven Staples, globalization allowed for the development of conditions and circumstances which perpetuate and support conflict, new wars and the rise of a socio-economical gap (Staples, in Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000:4). This situation makes the continuous weapon production and investments into the growth of military justifiable, because these weapons can then be used as a way to „protect the investments of transnational corporations and their shareholders” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000:4). Ever since World War II, the United States have been in the state of a permanent „war economy,“ and the Pentagon has become the „largest, busiest, and the most successful company“ in the country, so much so that

the military-industrial complex (term coined by President Eisenhower) has been referred to as the „corporate-military complex“ by Staples, indicative of the emerging neoliberal system and relationship between the state and the corporate industry (in Kirk and Okazawa Rey, 2000:5).

A well-known example of the connection between corporations and the state in maintaining the status quo of the war economy lies in the relationship between the largest weapons developer in the world, Lockheed Martin, and the United States government. For example, the government paid out a total of 32.6 billion dollars to Lockheed Martin in 1999: “The Company received over \$18 billion in U.S. government contracts in 1999, \$12.6 billion from the Pentagon and over \$2 billion from the Department of Energy for nuclear-weapons activities,” and in turn, Lockheed gave around \$1.6 million in Political Action Committee contributions and additional \$500,000 to Democratic and Republican Party committees between 1997 and 2000, as well as spending \$10.2 million on lobbying in 1997 and 1998 (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000:5). In 2019, Lockheed Martin and The Pentagon announced that they have concluded a \$34 billion contract for the delivery of 478 F-35 fighter jets (Macias, 2019). In *Generation Kill*, when the marines in humvees are sent to pass across a potentially mined bridge, the reporter asks why aren't tanks sent instead, to which corporal Ray Person responds: „That's exactly why they're sending us. I mean, come on, dude. You don't want to risk a five million dollar tank when you can send a piece-of-crap Humvee” („A Burning Dog”). The scene shows the readiness of the military for sacrifices, but also a readiness to, so to speak, examine the economic value of their action, and choose a cheaper option.

In terms of new workplaces, Kirk and Okazawa-Rey state that a single donation of one billion dollars opens up much less positions in the military than it would in other spheres of life. A billion dollars would amount to around 30.000 workplaces in transportation, 41.000 in

education, and 47.000 new positions in the health-care industry (2000:10). Military industry is capital-intensive, and thus does not provide much in the way of jobs when compared with other branches of work.

Similarly to the characters in *The Wire*, the marines in *Generation Kill* have to contend with incompetent and inadequate leadership, which in their branch of work leads to unnecessary casualties, be they civilian or military. The chain of command is even more strictly enforced in the military, so the more rebellious characters had to find different ways to circumvent orders. In one instance, sergeant Eric Kocher, who serves under Captain Dave McGraw, referred to as „Captain America“ between the marines, simply takes his squad off the radio network after McGraw suggests a questionable choice of action. On another occasion, First Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick tries to physically stop Captain Craig „Encino Man“ Schwetje from executing an artillery attack on a position 200 meters away from the battalion by grabbing the phone Schwetje was holding and questioning his order. Schwetje does go through with his order and puts the entire company into considerable danger more than once in the series. As a result, Schwetje gets a medal and a commendation for his perceived aggressiveness, and Fick faces potential repercussions for his disrespect to the concept of chain of command. Just like in *The Wire*, the characters who try to exact change find that their opposition to the chain of command is quickly crushed by the institutions they too are a part of. In addition, in the grand scheme of things, Schwetje’s unnecessary usage of artillery is what justifies the furthered production and consumption of weapons and ammunition.

## Neoliberalism and the Trump administration

„Make America Great Again” was President Donald Trump's slogan during his presidential campaign. He was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States of America on January 20, 2017, winning the election against the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton. Before his presidency, Trump was a well-known businessman and a reality television personality (he hosted a reality television program *The Apprentice* for fourteen seasons). During the elections, there was an atmosphere of disillusionment concerning US politicians present among a big number of voters and many Trump voters stated that they would vote for him simply because he was not a politician. Donald Trump is definitely one of the most controversial American presidents: confirmed Russian interference in the 2016 elections, Trump's insistence on building a wall on the border of United States and Mexico, the assassination of an Iranian General, Qasem Soleimani, the alleged pressuring of the Ukrainian President Zelensky in order to attain a positive effect for his 2020 re-election campaign and the consequent impeachment process, the utterance of falsehoods and inaccuracies in his public appearances and speeches, and his lackluster approach to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 in its early stages. Trump's actions during his presidency have played into the neoliberal agenda, boosting the status of rich industrialists and making life harder for the common man. The reason for addressing Trump is because his administration has shown the tenacity of the neoliberal conjecture.

In 2017, Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which included reduced tax rates for businesses and individuals. The changes were positive and tangible for corporations and wealthy individuals, less so for the common man – the lowest earners are probably going to „pay more in taxes once most individual tax provisions expire after 2025“ (Floyd, 2020). One of the most



meaningful changes introduced concerns corporate taxes, which permanently dropped from 35% to 21%, a whopping 14% tax reduction which will benefit shareholders, most of whom are already high earners. Alternative minimum tax was reduced for individuals and completely eliminated for corporations which resulted in a smaller number of estates which were impacted by the estate tax – again playing into the hands of those who own many estates. TJCA also „reduced the taxes levied on pass-through income (70% of which goes to the highest-earning 1%). It does not close the carried interest loophole, which benefits professional investors” (Floyd, 2020). Standard deduction rates were increased, whereas itemized deduction was made less beneficial. The Act further permanently removed individual mandate which is important for the Affordable Care Act and is „likely to raise insurance premiums and significantly reduce the number of people with coverage” (Floyd, 2020). The TJCA was theoretically supposed to provide an economic boost for the workers due to the massive tax reduction for corporations. Emily Stewart quotes analyses from The Wall Street Journal and Just Capital performed in 2018, according to which only 5% to 15% of corporations were investing their tax profits toward increasing their employees’ salaries, whereas a much larger piece of the cake went to the shareholders (Stewart, 2018). In 2019, two years after the enactment of the TCJA, its effects did not appear positive: „Two years later, however, business investment is actually declining. Factory closings and mass layoffs have not ended. Wage growth is tepid, despite the continuation of the economic expansion that began 10 years ago, and gross domestic product (GDP) growth is slowing and projected to revert to its long-term trend or below. Meanwhile, budget deficits are higher due to revenue losses – which have largely been triggered by the massive corporate tax cut at the heart of the TCJA” (Hendricks and Hanlon, 2019). Furthermore, the Congressional Budget Office predicted that tax revenues for 2018 and 2019 would be around 668 billion

dollars, but the corporate tax revenue came in at 435 billion dollars instead (Hendricks and Hanlon, 2019). Trump's tax cut did not meet its expectations and for now seems to be coming up short, the common citizen of the United States has not yet felt any tangible financial improvement, and their financial situation might become even worse to handle come 2025.

In connection to removing individual mandate for the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare), by repealing its imposed tax, Trump's actions regarding American health-care system will potentially make health-care insurance premiums even higher: „It removes the incentive for healthy people to get insurance. The CBO estimated 13 million people would drop coverage as a result” (Amadeo, 2020). With less people using health insurance, monthly premiums are likely to go up for those who opt to insure themselves. Furthermore, in 2018, the Trump administration proposed a prolongation of short-term health insurance plans; the idea is to allow these policies to last for a year, instead of 90 days as mandated by the Obama administration – but it should be noted that short-term plans do not provide the same amount of coverage as long-term plans, which makes these plans preferable for the younger population and which is likely to result in more expensive premiums for long-term health insurance (Amadeo, 2020). Obamacare has been a thorn in President Trump's eye from the beginning of his presidential term, and he has since taken steps to weaken and repeal the act. On 12 October 2017, Trump cut off government subsidies for „reimbursing insurers who waived deductibles and copayments for 6 million low-income customers.” In turn, insurance companies raised their premium fees for 20%, while some states like Kentucky, Mississippi, and Virginia raised the premium prices for 25% (Amadeo, 2020). On 11 January 2018, „the Trump administration allowed states to impose work requirements on Medicaid recipients” (Amadeo, 2020), a decision which at that time did not affect a great number of recipients, but is indeed a scary prospect at the

moment. The current situation with the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in massive layoffs in the United States, making life for those people even more precarious with the possibility of losing the health-insurance privileges. Since the pandemic spread in the United States, around 33 million people lost their jobs (Rushe and Aratani, 2020): „If trends continue, up to 43 million people could lose their employer-sponsored insurance, according to one estimate from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, raising the demand for ACA exchange and Medicaid coverage“ (in Pifer, 2020). At the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak in the United States of America, Donald Trump took a dismissive stance and often downplayed the severity the virus could represent for the US. When the first case of the virus was diagnosed in the US, Trump stated that the situation was under control and urged the people not to worry about the potential outbreak (Qiu, 2020). From January to May of 2020 Trump has downplayed the danger coronavirus posed to the United States, suggesting that the coronavirus is no worse than the common flu, relativized the topic by giving inaccurate information about the ebola virus and the Spanish flu pandemics, promoted unproven treatments against the virus, and shifted blame on the Obama administration for the lack testing and medical supplies (Qiu, 2020). He has since changed his rhetoric, denied the things he said, compared his government's response favorably against the response of the Obama administration during the H1N1 epidemic in 2009, and overstated the degree of testing undertaken in the US as compared to other countries (Qiu, 2020). According to worldometer, as of 18 May 2020, the United States of America had a total of 1,530,249 cases of the coronavirus and 91,036 deaths, being by far the hardest hit country in the world when talking about the spread of the coronavirus. Russia, which held the second place in coronavirus cases, numbered 290,678 cases at the time.

Trump's opposition to Barack Obama's policies during his presidential term is visible in other areas of politics. As it was already mentioned, Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris agreement, which the US entered during the Obama administration. In 2019, President Trump revised the NAFTA deal and signed The Agreement between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada (abbreviated as USMCA) since NAFTA was, in Trump's words „the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere, but certainly ever signed in this country” (Gillespie, 2016). The United States under President Trump also pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, UNESCO, the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Universal Postal Union, the Treaty of Amity with Iran, and the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Trump's presidency has been marked by his trade war with China, in which both the United States and China imposed „tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollar worth of one another's goods,“ because Trump sees China trading practices as unfair (BBC, 2020). United States imposed tariffs on around 360 billion dollars of Chinese goods, with tariffs ranging from 10% to 25%, China responded in kind and put tariffs on American goods on a 5%-25% range (BBC, 2020). The trade war has not left the consumers unscathed and has reflected on the prices of these goods, making them more expensive. President Trump also threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican goods, to pull the US out of the World Trade Organization, and withdrew his signature for the ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. When speaking of domestic affairs, Trump once again takes a very different stance than his predecessor. There was a period when Trump wanted to ban all Muslims from entering the United States, and extended that wish to pertain to all refugees – as a result, October 2019 was a first month in the history of the United States when no refugees resettled in the US (Tierney, 2019). Another famous example of Trump's aversion towards refugees and immigrants is to build a wall along the American-

Mexican border, expanding the Mexico-United States barrier. The goal for 2020 was to build 500 miles of the wall, but only 110 miles of the wall has been built up to this point, and the construction has been slowed down by the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic (Miroff and Blanco, 2020).

President Trump is not very concerned with environmental regulations and instead pushes for increased factory production. He announced that United States will be withdrawing from the Paris agreement whose purpose is to mitigate greenhouse-gas emissions. Furthermore, he deregulated a variety of existing regulations dealing with environmental protections. During the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump administration decided to roll back some regulations concerning „the release of mercury and other toxic metals from oil and coal-fired power plants” (Friedman and Davenport, 2020). Mercury emission is connected to brain damage, and release of other toxic metals is generally connected to a shorter life-span. It should be noted that the regulation of reduced emission of mercury into the atmosphere was put into place by the Obama administration because it was „estimated that the rule would prevent 4,700 heart attacks, 130,000 asthma attacks and 11,000 premature deaths each year” (Friedman and Davenport, 2020). „Over the past three years the administration has weakened rules to cut planet-warming carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired power plants, restrict coal companies from dumping debris in streams and claimed falsely that President Trumps has revived the dying coal industry. Over the past weeks as the nation struggled with the coronavirus, the administration has also rushed to loosen curbs on automobile tailpipe emissions, opted not to strengthen a regulation on industrial soot emissions and moved to drop the threat of punishment to companies that kill birds incidentally“ (Friedman and Davenport, 2020).

In 2020, President Donald Trump submitted the military budget of \$740.5 billion for the fiscal year 2021 to the congress, the largest budget since WWII, with emphasis on „building more nuclear weapons, preparing for exotic flavors of warfare, and expanding America's global military presence“ and ensuring \$69 billion for „Overseas Contingency Operations,“ base maintenance, weapons and machinery maintenance (Kaplan, 2020). It should be noted that the USA has been contributing much more to the defense budget since Trump became president. In 2017, the budget request was \$582.7 billion. Nuclear weapons expenditures are increased by 19% in the new budget (Kaplan, 2020). Furthermore, the money from the defense budget was allocated from other spheres of public life: “federal student loan programs will be cut by \$6 billion, Medicaid and children’s health programs will be cut by \$8 billion, and cuts in welfare programs – which the White House labels “reforms” – will be cut by \$20 billion” (Kaplan, 2020). It is still unknown whether these budgets cuts and allocations will be validated by the White House and the Senate, but what is certain is that private corporations included, such as Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics, have greatly increased their margins of profit over the years of collaboration with the government.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, there is one certainty to say about neoliberalism. Money is its central element. While it is hard to dispute the power and the necessity of money in the modern era, placing profit as the fundamental goal to which everyone should aspire to has made the system rotten. Neoliberalism works well when circumstances allow it to do what it does best – accumulate

capital. However, the problem today is the distribution of wealth. Despite the growing corporate profits, workers were fed crumbs in terms of salary raises. Neoliberalism as it is perpetuates and supports the growth of social-economic inequality as evidenced by the growing number of both millionaires and of low-income earners, and does not operate towards closing that gap. It also appears impractical and ineffective as a mode of federal governance due to the high amount of paper-pushing bureaucracy included in the system. Neoliberalism requires restructuring; a more equal market in terms of economic differences between its participants and a reduction in focus on profit, which is mainly reserved for the CEOs, partners, and other high earners. The contemporary United States is still embedded in neoliberalism and its machinations, and the country might reconsider shifting their absolute dedication from amassing wealth into the hands of the few to ‘humanizing’ the system and allocating more of the funds to the working class by lowering the the share of the high earners’ profits. As it stands now, neoliberalization looks like it was supposed to restore the power of the elite class, instead of benefitting everyone. It brought about a number of impoverished areas and communities – compare Manhattan to other boroughs of New York, or a capital city and the rest of a country. Wealth is, for the bigger part, concentrated and shared between a small group of people. It is not merely an economic project, it has political and social implications. Hopefully, this paper has served as a competent analysis of neoliberalism and will allow more readers to understand the process of neoliberalization, how it manifests itself in our daily lives and who its beneficiaries and malcontents are.

## Abstract

Contemporary United States of America follows the neoliberal doctrine. Whereas neoliberalism managed to elevate capitalism to a new level and establish the United States as the most powerful country in the world, it also had adverse effects on ordinary people. Economic gap between the rich and the poor has never been as substantial as it is now. This paper aims to determine what neoliberalism is and how it functions in various spheres of public life by examining the prominent institutions of the United States such as local government, the police, and the military, through the work of David Simon. The study will include an overview of neoliberalism, the manner in which a neoliberal city functions, a closer look at David Simon's career as a journalist as well as his work on HBO, an analysis of neoliberal aspects in his series *The Wire* and *Generation Kill*, and an examination of the current administration of the USA, led by President Donald Trump.



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