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Abstract
Extract:
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Keywords
Marxist, communism, movement, Empire, theorists

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Discourses on Empire:

From National Sovereignty to Global Power Distributions in the 21st Century

by Michael Hoy

Marxist theorists, like musical theatre writers, seem to come in pairs. Following the intellectual tradition established by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-eighteenth century, a long lineage of Marxist co-writers has emerged to deconstruct and subsequently reharmonise communist theory in response to evolving circumstances: Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (to name but a few). Notwithstanding theoretical differences between the pairs, each succeeding wave of theorists has been similarly unfazed by the failure of previous Marxist prognostications (be it Marx's 'world revolution,' Guattari's 'psychiatric revolution' or Laclau's 'radical politics') to eventuate, and remains resolutely optimistic about the imminence of some form of proletarian liberation. The widespread collapse of communist and socialist regimes at the end of the twentieth century, however, has presented particular challenges of faith to what Arthur Koestler termed the Marxist "doctrine of unshaken foundations." (Hollander 2002)

Some Marxist groups have responded to this crisis of confidence by attempting to disassociate those failed regimes from communism altogether. Writes David Singer (1997): "We require time, particularly in eastern Europe, to dissociate socialism from the Soviet tank, from the Gulag, from Stalinism, and from guilt by association." Similarly, Paul Paolucci (2004) argues that communist politics were transformed after Marx's death into "a rigid and formulaic dialectic stripped of Marx's flexibility, humanism and concerns over alienation and freedom." This alteration, "rather than Marx's own theories, culminated in the development of an authoritarian bureaucratic state." While such approaches are sometimes valid, they commonly fail to explain how the modern application of Marxist theory would produce a different result.

Other Marxist streams, inspired by Louis Althusser's 'symptomatic readings' of Marxism, have tried to "remove Marxism altogether from the realm of history, politics, and experience, and thereby [rendering] it invulnerable to any criticism of the empirical sort." (Judt 1994) Though such approaches may provide a welcome escape from the despondent reality of post-Soviet politics, they are largely irrelevant to the world of political practice and leadership elites.

The final and most pertinent response to the malaise in Marxist thought during the 1990s has emerged in the form of the Italian *Autonomia*, or New Left, movement. Claiming its intellectual heritage in the works of Antonio Gramsci and the revolutionary activities of the '*operaismo'* ('workerism') movement, the *Autonomia* movement has been most effectively, if controversially, represented in the prolific works of Antonio Negri. As much infamous as famous in his home country and region, Negri's recent collaborations with Duke University professor Michael Hardt (*Empire* 2000 and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* 2004) have brought this newest Marxist double-act mainstream international critical and constructive acclaim. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri describe how the globalisation of capitalist production and exchange, the diminishing divisions between the developed and emerging world, the apparent decline in state sovereignty, and the transition from a *disciplinary society* to a *society of control* has precipitated the emergence of Empire, the "sovereign power that governs the world." (2000: xi) According to Hardt and Negri, the inability of traditional Marxist approaches to comprehend and respond to Empire has been responsible for the recent despondency in Marxist circles. Fortunately for the remaining Marxists, they argue, hope is in sight. In a move reminiscent of Marx's ironical praise for the bourgeoisie for their "most revolutionary part" (in their own destruction), Hardt and Negri present Empire as the greatest enemy to itself. As

Empire matures and subsumes all places in the "general 'non-place,'" (ibid.: 533) it incorporates the seeds of its own destruction in an increasingly disaffected immaterial labour force, re-termed the 'multitude.' Hardt and Negri reach the triumphant conclusion that the multitude, by agitating for the 'humanistic triumvirate' (global citizenship, a global social wage and the reappropriation of public space), will inevitably bring about counter-Empire. In this, Hardt and Negri differ considerably from other critics on globalisation who long for a retreat to the *status quo ante* of a state-centric model: Hardt and Negri's communist utopia is very much on the global scale.

Empire's global vision has made it alluring, if occasionally misinterpreted, reading for commentators across the political spectrum. Hailed by the renowned Slovenian communist Slavoj Žižek (2001) as "nothing less than a rewriting of *The Communist Manifesto* for our time" and the "Next Big Idea" by the New York Times (Eakin 2001), Empire has even been painted (somewhat puzzlingly) by conservative commentators as the long-awaited left-wing acquiescence to globalisation (Leonard 2001).

How valid are Hardt and Negri's claims, especially in light of new events and trends to emerge since the publication of *Empire* in 2000? This article begins with a brief contextual description of the authors followed by an explanation of how Hardt and Negri's occasionally clouded notion of Empire differs from traditional imperial models. It then undertakes a critical examination of the presented causes and nature of Empire and the succeeding counter-Empire. Finally, the discussion turns to alternative contributions to the globalisation discourse, focusing briefly on cosmopolitanism as a viable alternative to Empire.

From who, to whom?

Before delving deeper into an exploration of Empire, it is necessary to look a little closer at the authors of this polemical text in order to place their ideas in their epistemological and literary context. The somewhat odd pairing between Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri was begun while Negri was teaching in Paris, an exile and escapee from his home in Padua, Italy. Negri had only recently fled from imprisonment in Italy, having been arrested as the suspected secret leader of the terrorist Red Brigades in 1979. In the confounding events that followed, Negri was imprisoned, subsequently released after being elected to parliament as a Radical Party representative, and then stripped of immunity and re-sentenced. Up until his arrest, Negri had been a respected, if controversial professor at the University of Padua where he had first risen to prominence with the Catholic worker movement and had later played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Italian *Autonomia* movement (Bowring 2004). Negri's early Catholic radicalism, combined with his revolutionary readings of a previously relatively unknown Marxist text, the *Grundrisse*, left an indelible mark on his political consciousness, as attested to by his later works on Augustine and Spinoza.

Negri's interpretation of the *Grundrisse* elicits a political Marxist perspective absent from Marx's otherwise objectivist texts (*Das Kapital*, *The Manifesto*). For Negri, where *Das Kapital* "represents the attempt to elucidate the system from above, from the perspective of capital itself, [the *Grundrisse*] is a political insistence on the necessity of a view from 'below.'" (Empson & Bove 2003) Negri combined his lessons from the *Grundisse* with the principle of *autovalorizzazione* ('self-valorisation') to pioneer an Italian counterculture of self-realisation and personal liberation. (Acquaviva 1979) Central to this counterculture was a repudiation of the traditional work ethic:

> Capitalism is a social system with two subjectivities, in which one subject (capital) controls the other subject (working class) through the imposition of work and surplus work. The logic of this control is the dialectic which constrains human development within the limits of capitalist valorization. Therefore, the central struggle of the working class as independent subject is to break capitalist control through the refusal of work. (Negri 1991)

Reflecting this ethic, the *Autonomia* movement, one of two offshoots of the earlier *Potero Operaio* ('Worker Power') movement, was an 'anti-party' made up of "loosely connected groups of students and workers who claimed "autonomy" or independence not only from capitalist society but from the

PCI [Italian Communist Party] and the unions as well." (Sheehan 1979) Swelling Italian university numbers with gloomy employment prospects filled the ranks of the *Autonomia* movement with new countercultures of 'social labourers,' '"metropolitan Indians' and *frichettoni* (freaks)." (Sheehan 1979)

The other *Potero Operaio* offshoot was the extremist Red Brigades, whose militant tactics Negri rejected. Nevertheless, Negri was suspected of secretly leading the Red Brigades and was subsequently arrested for implicit guilt in the Brigade's kidnapping and murder of the prominent Italian politician, Aldo Moro, in 1978.

After four years of 'preventative detention,' Negri fled to France where he became a *cause célèbre* with the French intelligentsia, forming important intellectual relationships with Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. These interactions allowed Negri to combine Italian (*operaismo*) and French progressive thought, producing a "new version of 'post-structuralist' philosophy that is clearly politically engaged." (Hardt 1996) Negri was eventually tried and sentenced in absentia for being "morally culpable" for Moro's kidnapping through his writings, despite Amnesty International's criticisms that the trial contained "serious legal irregularities." In 1997, Negri returned to certain imprisonment in Italy where he remains today as "an independent researcher and writer and [a day] inmate at Rebibbia Prison, Rome." (Hardt & Negri 2000 *Book jacket*) According to Hardt (1996), Negri was motivated to return to Italy to find a "collective political solution for the hundreds ... who remain in exile or in prison for their political activities in the 1970s" and by a desire to bring about a radical, political re-engagement:

> We know many radical intellectuals from the 60s who have settled comfortably into government, university, and business positions. In comparison Negri is an anomaly and a model. He did not remain a 60s radical ... nor abandon his political aspirations - rather he changed with the times, always seeking to reinvent the role of the public and political intellectual. In each era Negri has sought to discover the revolutionary possibilities of the present. (Hardt 1996)

Negri's latest attempt to uncover the "revolutionary possibilities of the present" with the previously unknown Michael Hardt, reflects clearly his desire to engage with a wider sphere of radical politics. Lindsay (2000) goes so far as to call the text a "*theoretical-political intervention* ... [bringing] themes such as immaterial labor, constituent power, class composition, antagonism and subjectivity, to the attention of a wider, English-speaking public" (emphasis added).

Negri's desire to reach out to the "wider, English-speaking public" partly explains his choice in involving Hardt. As an astute and dutiful protégé, Hardt has been responsible for the translation of several of Negri's Italian texts into English. In this case, however, Hardt serves more than a purely cross-linguistic purpose. Hardt's presence as a post-modern U.S. academic transforms *Empire* from the writings of a disgruntled Italian radical into palatable reading for the international and, most importantly, U.S. mainstream market. Empire is undoubtedly a "book for the Left, [though] it probably appeals to a much wider audience as its astounding popularity attests." (Kapferer 2002) *Empire's* mainstream popularity has provoked virulent criticism from both the right (see, for example, example Peyser 2002) and left (Abu-Manneh 2003). It is to the nature of Empire and the more valid of these criticisms that the discussion now turns.

Empire? Which Empire?

It has become common practice amongst left-wing theorists since Michel Foucault to explore and argue theoretical concepts through the use of common terms redefined for the purposes of the investigation. Foucault's redefinition of 'power' and Derrida's development of 'deconstruction' spring to mind as important examples of such *semantic recontextualixation*. Done appropriately, recontextualising common terms allows theorists to push the boundaries of conventional thought using commonly understood terminology. To paraphrase Jacques Lacan, attaching a new

'signified' (definition) to the original 'signifier' (word) may create an insightful new 'sign.' (Torfing 1999: 305) There is, however, an alluring and dangerous appeal in creating fresh 'signs.' Redefining terms prior to theoretical engagement may allow theorists to, either deliberately or negligently, construct definitions that verify their arguments, rather than the rightful reverse: arguments that validate definitions. Having *a priori* established the unassailability of their theories, such writers are often tempted to assume an interrogative (rather than affirmative) form of enquiry based on the subliminal question: "This is so, is it not?" (Brennan 2003) There are also implicit dangers of falling prey to *fallacies of equivocation* between the original and new signified, by extrapolating the qualities of the original signified to the new signified. Worse still, theorists may offer *multiple or vague definitions* for the one signifier to obfuscate the debate and shield the argument from analytical criticism.

To embark on an analysis of Hardt and Negri's 'Empire' by accusing them of all three faults may seem unduly and prematurely severe. It is important to be aware of such dangers, however, in order to approach a theory which professes an undeniably grand vision but whose terms are often cloudy.

To begin with, Hardt and Negri choose as the centre of their argument a signifier ('Empire') which is loaded with historical and modern context. 'Empire' at once conjures up images of ancient imperial grandeur and servitude alongside present-day condemnations of U.S. 'neo-imperial' global hegemony. These images and common understanding of Empire ("an extensive group of states or countries under a *single* supreme authority") emphasise the Manichean conflict between the imperial 'inside' (rulers) and 'outside' (ruled) constituencies. Under traditional and new imperialism, this conflict was expressed in the imperial desire to deterritorialize colonised spaces of their sovereign, cultural, juridical or ideological identity and reterritorialize them in a standardised role, in this case, the imperial 'outer.' Importantly however, Thucydides, Tacitus ("They make slaughter and they call it peace") and Machiavelli all argue that the imperial agenda must appear publicly to be a necessary conflict-solving mechanism, bringing stability and peace, albeit at a sovereign price, to conquered territories.

Modern theorists such as Lenin, Karl Kautsky and Gramsci have considered the relevance of these traditional descriptions of imperialism to Industrial Age capitalism. Lenin's (1916) description of imperialism as the self-destructive 'monopoly stage of capitalism' was written largely as a counter to Kautsky's theory of 'ultra-imperialism.' On the eve of Russia's entry into the First World War, Kautsky (1914) mused that the end of hostilities would bring about a 'cartellization' of foreign relations between strong countries (not unlike strong companies in an monopolistic oligopoly) resulting in a "holy alliance of the imperialists." Lenin rejected this "utopian" and "lifeless abstraction" because it ignored the inherent "combined and uneven development" within domestic and international capitalism. (Abu-Manneh 2003) Instead, Lenin envisions imperialism as a "decaying, *moribund* capitalism" which would enable a revolutionary transition to socialism:

> The 'composite picture' ... Lenin draws of the capitalist system in the era of imperialism is therefore one of global rivalry among national capitals over repartitioning the world market, resulting in colonial oppression abroad and increased domination and opportunism at home: . . . a universal dialectic of development and destruction, progress and stagnation, only to be overcome in socialism. (Abu-Manneh 2003)

This is the tradition to which Hardt and Negri claim a direct theoretical pedigree (2000: 232-234). Yet in placing Empire as the logical successor to imperialism, their perspective exhibits an obvious bias towards Kautskyian 'ultra-imperialism': "What used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has ... been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right." (ibid.: 9) Hardt and Negri conveniently slip Empire into the Leninist analysis (ibid.: 230) despite Lenin's categorical rejection of the possibility of ultra-imperialism (or Empire) after imperialism. (Abu-Manneh 2003)

It is at this point that Hardt and Negri's use of 'Empire' as a recontextualised tool becomes expedient. Hardt and Negri use 'Empire' as a contextual smorgasbord, picking and choosing amongst the

characteristics of traditional imperialism discussed above, through a myriad of definitions. They thus reject the traditional imperial dualism between those inside and outside of Empire:

> Empire is characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire's rule has no limits . . . The concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire 'civilized' world. (ibid.: xiv)

> Empire is a smooth space across which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict; (ibid.: 198)

Likewise, they differentiate Empire from previous imperial structures with a single sovereign centre of power (such as Rome or London):

> Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers; (ibid.: xii)

> Empire can only be conceived as a universal republic, a network of powers and counterpowers structured in a boundless and inclusive architecture; (ibid.: 166)

> Empire is an *ou-topia,* or really a *non-place*; (ibid.: 190)

Hardt and Negri liken Empire to traditional imperialism, however, for its attempts to reterritorialize all constituent components with a uniform identity:

> Sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire. (ibid.: xii)

> Empire is ... a global concert under the direction of a single conductor, a unitary power that maintains the social peace and produces its ethical truths; (ibid.: 10)

Similarly, Hardt and Negri argue that Empire presents itself, like the empires described by Thucydides, Tacitus and Machiavelli, as a self-validating, conflict resolution mechanism:

> Empire is formed not on the basis of force itself but on the basis of the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace. All interventions of the imperial armies are solicited by one or more of the parties involved in an already existing conflict. Empire is not born of its own will but rather it is called into being and constituted on the basis of its capacity to resolve conflicts. (ibid.: 15)

Thus, Empire lacks both a centre and an 'outside,' but seeks to perpetuate itself by imposing a homogeneous identity on all members in return for a conflict-free environment. Just this brief cross-section of descriptions, however, demonstrates that Hardt and Negri's definition of Empire can be as fluid and self-contradictory as the concept it proposes. How is Empire at once an unreal "*ou-topia/non-place*" and a very real "universal republic" that "rules" through the "interventions of the imperial armies?" How does a "network of powers and counterpowers" reconcile its internal differences to produce "national and supranational organisms" which seamlessly become one "unitary power?"

This is not to suggest that Hardt and Negri have set out to intentionally or carelessly mislead readers. *Empire* is a densely argued and complex work. Hardt and Negri's, however, seem to have forgotten Aldous Huxley's maxim that several definitions (like excuses) are less convincing then one. (It has nevertheless allowed them a degree of flexibility in dealing with critical responses to the text. See, for example, Hardt & Negri 2003). To gain a clearer picture of Empire, it is necessary to turn to its main themes: the global market, globalisation, sovereignty, disciplinary society and society of control, biopower, immaterial labour and the multitude.

What Empire?

As mentioned earlier, Hardt and Negri suggest several fundamental trends in post-modernity that support the existence of Empire: the international liberalisation of production and exchange leading to a world market, shrinking gaps between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds combined with declining state sovereignty, and the shift from a *disciplinary society* to a *society of control* based on the new *biopolitics*. None of these apparent developments are particularly unique to *Empire*. Hardt and Negri, however, use their unique fusion of U.S. post-modernism and continental radicalism to bring a fresh perspective to these unfolding events.

Global Market, Globalisation

Hardt and Negri's description of the unprecedented liberalisation of capitalist production and exchange nevertheless starts off conventionally enough: "The primary factors of production and exchange - money, technology, people, and goods - move with increasing ease across national boundaries." (ibid.: xi) From the outset, however, Hardt and Negri position their view of globalisation in contradiction to the "world-systems perspective" offered by theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi (though Arrighi 2002 rejects this label) who argue that "capitalism was from the beginning an affair in the world-economy." (Wallerstein 1979: 19) Whilst acknowledging the "universalizing dimensions of capitalist development," Hardt and Negri (2000: 8) argue that the present global political economy is the result of a unique "rupture ... in contemporary capitalist production and global relations of power":

> Far from being "unidimensional, the process of restructuring and unifying command over production was actually an explosion of innumerable different productive systems. The processes of the unification of the world market operated paradoxically through diversity and diversification but its tendency was nonetheless real." (ibid.: 252)

The primary motivation behind this move to unification, Hardt and Negri argue, was the revolution in communication technology and networks (ibid.: 32). The "computer and informational revolution" has allowed speculative and financial capital to go:

> ... where the price of labor power is lowest and where the administrative force to guarantee exploitation is highest ... Countries that still maintain the rigidities of labor and oppose its full flexibility and mobility are punished, tormented, and finally destroyed by global monetary mechanisms. The stock market drops when the unemployment rate goes down ... [or] when the social policies in a country do not completely accommodate the imperial mandate of flexibility and mobility. (ibid.: 388)

There are certainly countries (Argentina and Indonesia are among the most tragic examples) that have suffered recently for not adhering to the 'imperial' mandate of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank. Nevertheless, Hardt and Negri's unique view of economics oversimplifies the business decision making process, failing to take account of comparative advantage (a concept Marx understood well) and differences in marginal labour productivity. Moreover, their analysis of the emerging 'world market' fails to make the important distinction between openness, integration and interdependence (Panic 1995) or between trade, capital flows and foreign direct investment. (Akyüz 1995) This has important implications for Hardt and Negri's assumption that the current globalisation phenomenon is unprecedented. Indeed, of the four variables most commonly used by trade economists to monitor globalisation (trade in goods and services, immigration, investment flows and portfolio capital flows), only portfolio capital flows are at all time percentage highs. (Krugman & Obstfeld 2003: 12-13; Sachs & Werner 1995) Moreover, Hardt and Negri fail to mention that 'globalisation' has often been short-hand for 'regionalism' (Beeson 2004 in Ferguson 2004) as regional integration agreements (RIAs) surpass multilateralism as the preferred form of economic integration. This does not necessarily deny the current trend towards greater international economic integration but certainly questions its exceptionality and, by implication, its relevance to Empire.

'First' World - 'Third' World, Sovereignty, Neoliberalism, U.S., NGOs

The second important trend leading to Empire focuses on the "scrambling of the spatial differences" between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds and the declining importance of the nation-state. The combination of these phenomena is to produce the 'smooth space' mentioned earlier "across which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict." (ibid.: 198) Gliding subjectivities explain why, according to Hardt and Negri, "we continually find the First World in the Third, the Third in the First, and the second almost nowhere at all" (ibid.: xiii):

> Workers who flee the Third World to go to the First for work or wealth contribute to undermining the boundaries between the two worlds. The Third World ... enters into the First, establishes itself at the heart as ghetto, shantytown, favela, always again produced and reproduced. In turn, the First World is transferred to the Third in the form of stock exchanges and banks, transnational corporations and icy skyscrapers of money and command. Economic geography and political geography both are destabilized in such a way that the boundaries among the various zones are themselves fluid and mobile. (ibid.: 254)

Likewise, Hardt and Negri contend that as national boundaries have disappeared "the distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow." (ibid.: xiii) The 'smooth space' left behind provides ideal habitat for the global market which thrives on such "uncoded flows, flexibility, continual modulation, and tendential equalization." (ibid.: 327)

Yet the reader with even the faintest familiarity with the current political landscape cannot help but notice the incongruity between *Empire's* jubilant descriptions of the end of the nation-state and the empirical evidence to the contrary. As the U.S. settles in for another four years of obstinate behaviour in the United Nations, as China flexes its imperial muscle in Tibet and Taiwan whilst perpetrating widespread human rights abuses without rebuke, and as Australia tries to assert itself as a dominant South-Pacific power, claims that nation-state sovereignty has ended seem justifiably absurd. Hardt and Negri justify their claim by identifying the nation-state with the long-term interest of the "collective capitalist," (ibid.: 304) as stressed by the famous epigraph to the first chapter of *Empire*: "Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state." (ibid.: 3) A world market (immanently neoliberal) is thus opposed to such state protection, because it restricts the free movements of goods, services and factors of production. Thus Hardt and Negri assume that any moves towards a global economy qualify as an implicit rejection of the nation-state:

> As the world market today is realized ever more completely, it tends to deconstruct the boundaries of the nation-state . . . Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, . . . contends that "as almost every factor of production . . . moves effortlessly across borders, the very idea of a [national] economy is becoming meaningless." In the future "there will . . . no longer be national economies, as least as we have come to understand that concept." (ibid.; 150-151)

Reich is probably almost right. National economies in the majority of developed countries are, excepting regulation and taxation, increasingly beyond the control of the state. National structures, however, retain an important place in the collective subjectivity. Indeed, growing concerns about the social and environmental costs of rapid economic liberalisation have created the need for increased government regulation of labour and environmental standards. On the other hand, placing the neoliberal global market agenda in opposition to national governments ignores the fact that neoliberalism is currently the dominant ideology within many national governments. Neoliberal models such as the Washington consensus (Williamson 2000) or the Augmented Washington consensus (Rodrik 2001) have gained popular support amongst national and supranational bodies. Thus, by focusing on the role of the nation-state as solely a prop to the national economy and ignoring the intrusion of neoliberal thought into domestic politics, Hardt and Negri lose sight of the many alternative functions that the nation-state serves in a post-modern environment.

Once such role is dealing with growing internal and external disparities, especially between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds. Hardt and Negri correctly observe the presence of elements of the 'First' world in

the 'Third' and vice-versa. The recent completion of the world's twelfth biggest shopping mall in Bangladesh, with a per capita GDP of USD 1,900 and 35% of people living below the poverty line, is one such sorrowful example. (BBC 2004) However, such dislocated subjectivities, when they occur, do not produce any seismic shifts in the composition of a nation-state other than to increase internal disparity. Thus, the new 'icy skyscrapers' in Dhaka will not allow the majority of Bangladeshis to 'glide' across the 'smooth space' to a 'First' world identity. Neither will the presence of ghettos in the U.S. produce a mainstream subjective affinity with members of the 'Third' world. Indeed, the empirical evidence does not point to any decrease in the wealth differentiation between the North and South:

> All available evidence shows an extraordinary persistence of the North-South income gap as measured by GNP per capita. Suffice it to mention that, in 1999, the average per capita income of 'former Third World' countries was only 4.6% of the per capita income of 'former First World' countries, that is, almost exactly what it was in 1960 (4.5%) and in 1980 (4.3%). (Arrighi 2002: 7)

Hardt and Negri make matters worse by adding that now, at least, there were "no differences of nature [between countries], only differences of degree" (2000: 335), sounding suspiciously like a neoliberal justification of global income disparity.

Hardt and Negri's thus fail to produce a valid case for fading national sovereignty or shrinking disparities between the 'First' and 'Third' worlds. It is worth briefly considering, however, their unique theory on supranational justice and the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Assuming that nation-states have dissipated into the general 'non-place,' Hardt and Negri argue that the period in which "individual sovereign states or the supranational (U.N.) power intervene[d] only to ensure or impose the application of voluntarily engaged international accords" is finished (ibid.: 18). Instead, Hardt and Negri propose that under Empire:

> ... supranational subjects that are legitimated not by right but by consensus intervene in the name of any type of emergency and superior ethical principles. What stands behind this intervention is not just a permanent state of emergency and exception, but a permanent state of emergency and exception justified by the appeal to essential values of justice. In other words, the right of the police is legitimated by universal values. (ibid.: 18)

Though the U.S. is far from a supranational subject, it is imaginable some congruency between the above description and domestic U.S. justifications for the so-called 'War on Terror.' The 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington have been used to stress the 'exceptionality' of the current U.S. condition, laden with both a long-term sense of 'emergency' and a 'just cause' to eradicate terrorism. However, in making the international case for an attack against Iraq, the U.S. lacked a strong liberal or democratic justification. Thus, a "moral discourse of right and wrong had to be imported into international relations" (Abu-Manneh 2003) providing a new form of 'moral intervention' which Hardt and Negri describe as the new "frontline force of imperial intervention." (2000: 36) In a somewhat controversial move, Hardt and Negri label humanitarian NGOs as the 'forward scouts' for military intervention who play the fundamentally important role of recognising "the enemy as sin." (ibid.: 36) Hardt and Negri do not, however, deny the positive potentialities contained within the vast body of NGOs: "What they really represent is the vital force that underlies the People, and thus they transform politics into a question of generic life ... on the terrain of biopower." (ibid.: 314-315) It is to Hardt and Negri's ideas surrounding 'biopower' that the discussion now turns.

Disciplinary Society - Society of Control, Biopower, Immaterial Labour, Multitude

The final trend noted by Hardt and Negri in the transition to Empire contains the most interesting, if complicated, elucidations. Between modernity and post-modernity, Hardt and Negri trace an apparent Foucauldian evolution from a global *disciplinary society* to a *society of control*. Hardt and Negri (2000: 23) use Foucault's disciplinary society to describe the condition of modernity: "social command is constructed through a diffuse network of ... apparatuses [for example, the Prison, the

Factory] that produce and regulate customs ... and productive practices." They see the end of modernity and the beginning of post-modernity as the repudiation of the disciplinary society and the enunciation of a new society of control:

> . . . in which mechanisms of command become ever more 'democratic,' ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens . . . Power is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity. (ibid.: 23)

Thus, whereas in a disciplinary society power was achieved through jurisdiction over the physical 'apparatuses' of life, power in a society of control rests in "the production and reproduction of life itself"; *biopower*, or *biopolitics*, in other words. (ibid.: 24) According to Hardt and Negri, the transition from a disciplinary society to a society of control has allowed capitalism to finally realise the "the increasingly intense ... mutual implication of all social forces" (ibid.: 25) it has always aspired to. In other words, as Empire has utilised a society of control to reinforce its biopower over the state and its constituents, capitalism has evolved from a formal description of the relationship between investing and producing subjects, into a real subsumption of life itself.

Into this mix Hardt and Negri add *immaterial labour*. The empirical emergence of immaterial (service-sector) labour has already been extensively validated elsewhere (see, for example, Reich 1991). Hardt and Negri, however, provide an insightful breakdown of the three types of immaterial labour: informationalised manufacturing, analytical or symbolic tasking, and "labour in the bodily mode." (ibid.: 293) Immaterial labour differs from traditional labour by its immanent need for cooperation, social interaction and creativity. Thus, immaterial labour rejects the traditional Marxist descriptions of labour as "variable capital" that only achieves purpose and coherence through capital. (ibid.: 294) Immaterial labour is capable of using its own immanent cooperative and creative abilities to engage in acts of self-valorisation and collective subjectivity, much in the spirit of the original *Autonomia* movement. Hardt and Negri describe how self-valorisation will produce a new age of labour mobility or mass worker nomadism based on a rejection of the traditional work ethic.

The net result of Empire's new society of control, biopolitics and mobile, immaterial labour is to produce a revolutionary 'tear' in the 'smooth space' of Empire in the form of the *multitude*:

> The multitude is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it. (ibid.: 103)

The question for Hardt and Negri thus becomes how to organise the heterogeneous "destructive capacities of the multitude" (ibid.: 214) in order to "push through Empire to come out the other side." (ibid.: 218) *Empire* largely fails to address this question (as Hardt admits in Fakin 2001) or to explain how disparate and diverse groups of immaterial labourers could ever unite. Indeed, empirical experience shows that labour power exhibits "far greater potencies for driving larger social changes when it is highly localized, ... especially when it is coordinated around a singular productive mode." (Kapferer 2002) Nevertheless, and with a nod towards Hegelian determinism, Hardt and Negri remain convinced that the multitude, if inspired by the appropriate materialist teleology (a Spinozian concept), will inevitably overthrow Empire and establish a counter-Empire (ibid.: 65):

> Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them. (ibid.: 395)

Empire's triumph thus plants the seeds of its destruction in the form of the multitude and counter-Empire.

Hardt and Negri's vision of counter-Empire is unsurprisingly based in the Italian political tradition:

"We would cast our political vision [of counter-Empire] in line with the radical republican tradition of modern democracy." To this vision they attach three necessary conditions: global citizenship ("*Papiers pour tous!*"), a social wage ("To each as he needs") and the reappropriation of public space previously totalized by Empire.

The portrayal of counter-Empire is undeniably grand and a welcome change from traditional critiques of globalisation that long for a return to a more parochial power structure. Their central concept of the multitude, however, requires further development. Hardt and Negri fail to explain how disparate groups alienated from Empire will agree upon a common oppositional subjectivity, especially when they openly admit that "struggles have become all but incommunicable." It is difficult to see how disparate protest groups such as the Marxist Zapatistas in Chiapas, Islamic separatists in the Thai province of Narathiwat, or nostalgic Soviets in the breakaway Moldovan region of Trans-Dniester constitute a common rejection of Empire, let alone a unified alternative vision. Hardt and Negri argue that all struggles have become biopolitical struggles, breaking down the traditional barriers between political and economic struggles. Additionally, they contend that such groups, though each rooted in local conditions, use their shared flexibility to go directly to the "global level and [attack] the imperial constitution in its generality." This is an obvious leap of faith and it begs to be asked whether or not Empire can use the same flexibility (its presence "every and nowhere" ibid.: 190) to destroy or alienate such protests, as perhaps demonstrated in Seattle, Genoa and Cancun? Furthermore, where does militant Islam, whose conservative agenda rejects both modernity (Westernism) and post-modernity (Empire), fit in? These unanswered questions undermine the optimism that *Empire* projects.

Hardt and Negri freely admit that their predictions regarding the collapse and replacement of Empire, having not yet occurred, are *subjective*. Their assumption that Empire already exists, however, is based on their so-called *objective* description, whose fallacies (the non-exceptionality of economic integration, flourishing state sovereignty, persistent inter-nation disparity, separation between the economy and the nation and the difficulty of constructing the multitude) have been demonstrated above. Having thus answered Hardt and Negri's interrogative form of Empire ("This is so, is it not?") in the negative, it becomes difficult to remain optimistic about the possibility of counter-Empire, whatever its form.

It is debatable, however, whether we really need to traverse the full distance from modernity to Empire to counter-Empire in order to find a more peaceful and equitable world order.

Alternatives to Empire

Recent ideas such as myth theory (Sweezy 1997 & Magdoff 1992), 'soft' or 'virtual' capitalism (Thrift 1997), cosmopolitanism (Carey 2003 & Ferguson 2003), network theory (Slaughter 2004) and "placed" politics (Drainville 2004) all offer critical evaluations and alternatives to globalisation. Though there is not space in this discussion to consider all such alternative theories, it is worth identifying briefly the idea of cosmopolitanism as an alternative to Hardt and Negri's Empire.

In its most basic level, cosmopolitanism describes an international and sophisticated state of being, as expressed by the Diogenes' claim to be a "citizen of the world." Supporters of cosmopolitanism argue that cosmopolitan governance can provide a "new model for democracy in a globalizing world, and a source of universal human values based on dialogue and tolerance." (Ferguson 2003: 18) Given the continued dominance, to Hardt and Negri's chagrin, of the state-centric model, however, notions such as 'embedded' or 'rooted cosmopolitanism,' which "combine loyalties to co-nationals with moral obligations to the members of other societies," (Carey 2003) offer a more practicable solution than the traditional ideal of 'impartialist cosmopolitanism.' The latter sounds suspiciously similar to a utopian counter-Empire. Contrary to *Empire*, cosmopolitanism sees the introduction by NGOs of a "nascent moral layer" to international politics as a wholly positive contribution. Combined with the appropriate conceptual tools (Ferguson 2003 suggests reflexive homogeneity, adequate representation, dispersal of authority, deliberative democracy and reflexive cooperation) NGOs have the potential to bring

about an inclusive and respecting cosmopolitan society. Cosmopolitanism is thus a useful alternative theory that explains and assuages the harsher processes of globalizations.

Conclusion

For all its faults, *Empire* provides a detailed and innovative account of the global paradigm at a time when, as sociologist Stanley Aronowitz notes, there is "crisis in the humanities, which has reached the point where banality seems to pervade the sphere." (Eakin 2001) Thus its usefulness is not so much in its political descriptions of Empire or its revolutionary concept of labour, but rather as an attempt to rescue the Marxist discourse from its post-Soviet malaise. Despite Hardt and Negri's confusing and self-contradictory definitions of Empire, their pre-emptive attempts to write-off the nation-state, and their failure to describe how unrelated groups of immaterial labourers will inevitably bring about the collapse of Empire and what will come after, the popularity of the book is a demonstration of its need. Marxist theory has an important contribution to make to the current globalisation discourse, alongside and in conversation with alternative theories such as cosmopolitanism. Hardt and Negri's, with their unique combination of U.S. post-modernism and continental radicalism, have the potentiality to dominate the Marxist contribution. To do so, however, they will have to aspire less to Empire and more to the conquering of the contemporary Realpolitik.

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