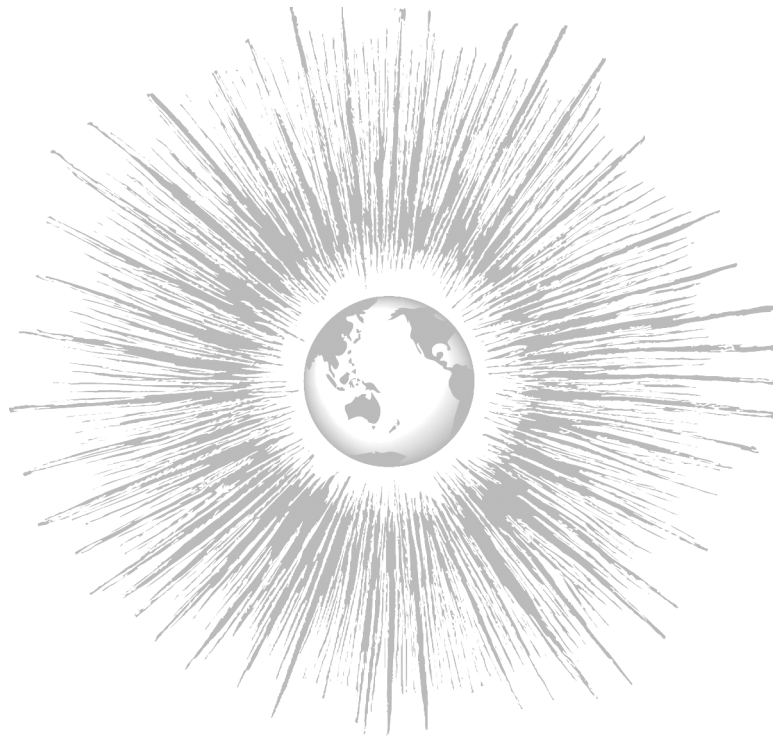


REVIEW ESSAY

Empire and its Multitude: A Review Essay

Steven Sherman
Ganesh K. Trichur



Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri. 2002. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 504 pages, ISBN 0-674-00671-2 paper.

<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/>

Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press. 352 pages, ISBN 1-59420-024-6 hardcover.

<http://www.penguinputnam.com/>

Gopal Balakrishnan, ed. 2003. *Debating Empire*. New York: Verso. 172 pages, ISBN 1-85984-452-9 paper, ISBN 1-85984-530-4 cloth.

http://www.versobooks.com/books/ab/b-titles/balakrishnan_empire.shtml

Paul A. Passavant & Jodi Dean, eds. 2003. *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*. New York: Routledge. 272 pages, ISBN 0-41593-555-5 paper, ISBN 0-41593-554-7 cloth.

<http://www.routledge.com/>

Empire has received attention not comparable to any academic text in recent memory. The two collections of academic approaches to it¹ that we review below are one indication of this. But in addition, the book has been the subject of enthusiastic pieces in *The New York Times*² and *Time*.³ Furthermore, particularly in Europe, it has been influential within the global justice movement. It is the rare book, indeed, that appeals to such diverse constituencies. At the same time, judging by the responses in *Debating Empire* and *Empire's New Clothes*, the work has

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¹ Gopal Balakrishnan (2003) ed. *Debating Empire*. (Hereafter *DE*) Verso. London and New York. Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean (2004) ed. *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*. (Hereafter *ENC*). Routledge. New York and London.

² See "What is the Next Big Idea? The Buzz is Growing" by Emily Eakins, *New York Times*, July 7, 2001.

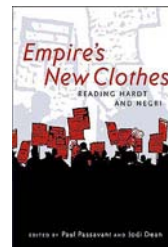
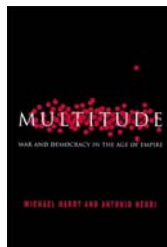
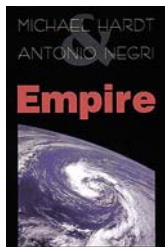
³ "The Wrong Side of the Barricades" by Michael Elliott in *Time*, July 23, 2001.

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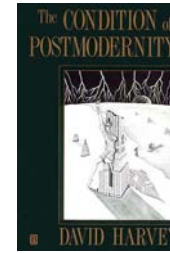
important flaws. Readers from a number of different disciplines and perspectives have highlighted the fuzziness of its categories, its overgeneralizations, its failures to identify contradictions within either Empire or the multitude. The response to *Empire* was not, therefore, simply a response to its intellectual achievement in explaining the world and producing categories adequate to the task it adopted. Instead, the response to *Empire* needs to be seen in the context of three things the text tries to do: first, enact reconciliation between poststructuralist discourses, globalization discourses, and Marxism; secondly, reconcile the US as a utopian project with Marxism; and third, renew optimism on the left. These moves were all so audacious that the text could resonate with wide audiences even if the authors do not really achieve all they had set out to do.

Poststructuralist discourse first became prominent in the US academy in the 1980s (where it has also been described as postmodernism, the linguistic turn, theory, and the cultural turn—the distinctions between these terms need not concern us). It produced research agendas that focused on micro-political struggles around the meanings of words and enactments of power and resistance. It was always strongest in the world of cultural studies, which has spread to colonize more and more of the humanities, while being largely confined to anthropology among the social sciences (with smaller followings in sociology and political science). While cultural studies had a number of Marxian roots—Althusser, the Frankfurt School, the British Cultural Marxists—as it became more institutionalized, poststructuralism became more anti-Marxist. Abetted by the declining status of Marxism as a political project in the wider world, poststructuralists asserted that Marxism entailed the production of a master narrative, which, given the fundamental incoherence and contradictory nature of all language production, ultimately became an act of power. Furthermore, by asserting that a society's economic base, or productive relations explain its ideological superstructure, Marxism was guilty of 'essentialism,' or 'foundationalism,' both mortal sins in the poststructuralist gestalt (both of these critiques resonated to some extent with campus-based activists of the identity movements of the eighties and nineties).

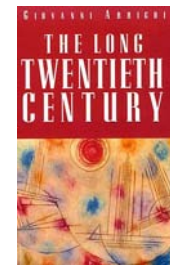


Nevertheless, while the anti-Marxist consensus was consolidated, writers within the Marxist tradition responded to these arguments. In fact, perhaps the two most famous Marxian texts of the 1980s—Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism*⁴ and David Harvey's

*The Condition of Postmodernity*⁵—flipped the poststructuralist argument on its head. While poststructuralists argued that the world was too fragmented to theorize about coherently, and that grounding analysis on an economic base was an error, Jameson and Harvey, in their own ways, argued that this sense of fragmentation was in fact symptomatic of certain dynamics at the economic base—for Jameson, the centrality of consumerism to late capitalism, for Harvey, the experience of a new round of 'time-space compression.' Not surprisingly, these texts were soon denounced for their essentialism and master narrative aspirations. At the same time, they clearly stimulated debate. They superseded earlier Marxist critiques of poststructuralism, which had been content with denouncing the movement for ignoring class, without explaining its historical emergence. On the other hand, despite their Marxist bona fides, it cannot be said that Jameson or Harvey connected with political movements in the world beyond academia.



In the nineties, poststructuralism retained its institutional strength, particularly as postcolonial discourse incorporated its ideas into a global perspective. But its place as the newest and freshest set of discourses was ceded to a new kid in town: 'globalization.' The notion that something important was happening in the world—in politics, economics, and culture—characterized by heightened interactions across borders rapidly advanced, simultaneously in the mass media and academia. That we live in a world of 'globalization,' where nation-states no longer matter (or matter much less), quickly became a new orthodoxy, stimulating a research agenda in a number of disciplines—notably political science, but also across the social sciences—that highlighted the need to engage with new practices in politics, migration, economics, and so forth. Marxists were quick to respond. They often asserted that all of this rhetoric was mere 'globaloney,' that the nation-states remained crucial to the tasks of governing populations and organizing the global economy. World Systems analysts emphasized the long history of transnational economic interactions. The most accomplished response along these lines was Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century*,⁶ a work that combined insights from world systems, Marxism, and comparative historical sociology to identify cyclical reorganizations and moments of rupture and discontinuity in historical capitalism. A systemic rupture in the early 1970s was highlighted



4. Duke University Press, 1991.

5. Blackwell, 1989.

6. Verso, 1994.

as the beginning of the American ‘financial expansion,’ signaling the latest of the periodic withdrawals of capital from production and trade and into finance. Arrighi was careful to note how each cycle transformed the world system, and concluded that the current phase—with the shift of the productive center of the world economy to East Asia—represented the end of capitalism as we know it, leading perhaps to a post-capitalist world empire or a world market society or even possibly, the catastrophic end of humanity in chaotic wars. Since Arrighi offered little in the way of recommendations for how to move toward one future rather than the others, it is perhaps not surprising that the book failed to find an audience outside academia. Furthermore, since the work did not engage with the issues raised by poststructuralists, there is little evidence that it pierced their consciousness at all.

This provides the intellectual backdrop for Hardt and Negri. Both post-structuralism and globalization theory had posed major challenges to the traditional concerns and practices of Marxism. Harvey, Jameson and Arrighi had, in their own ways, risen to these challenges and produced responses that heartened many Marxists. At the same time, these responses were marginal to the continued production of poststructuralist and globalization works. And they remained primarily academic works, not inspiring activists or political leaders. Hardt and Negri nod towards Jameson, Harvey, and Arrighi, but their strategy is quite different. Rather than displace the concerns of poststructuralists and globalization theorists by refocusing on political economic dynamics, Hardt and Negri attempt to produce a quasi-Marxian framework (dominated by the movement of capital, and new forms of resistance) able to absorb both post-structuralism and globalization.

While they endorse the view of Jameson and Harvey that postmodernity is symptomatic of the current phase of capitalism, they display little of the distance from poststructuralist thought apparent in Jameson and Harvey’s work. Central to Hardt and Negri’s argument are notions drawn from Foucault and Deleuze: disciplinary society, society of control, biopower, smooth space. The biopower of imperial sovereignty operates within the smooth space created by the late 20th century transition from Foucault’s ‘disciplinary society’ to Deleuze’s ‘society of control.’ Largely rejecting Arrighi’s argument (*Empire*: 238–39), they embrace the idea that the current period of globalization marks a totally new phase, uniting the globe homogeneously. Instead of operating through localized nexuses like states, power operates through the global sovereignty of Empire. This allows them to try to explain more or less everything through the concepts drawn from Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault, previously only deployed in local contexts. Whether these concepts explain the world, or whether Hardt and Negri have distorted the social world to fit the concepts,

we will address below. What is notable here, for purposes of understanding the intellectual reception of *Empire*, is that the notion of Empire finesses the concern with local enactments of power and resistance characteristic of poststructuralism, and the concern with global capitalism characteristic of Marxism by claiming power is imperial (i.e. global) even as it produces multiple local effects. Suddenly the poststructuralist community was confronted with a grand narrative that embraced rather than repudiated their concepts, and they weren’t sure they didn’t like it.

Had *Empire* only accomplished this, it certainly would have generated mountains of debate in academia. But *Empire* also inserts itself into wider political worlds. First, it is worth considering the left context of the text. After the emergence of Stalin, and throughout much of the cold war, it was impossible for independent Marxist intellectuals to make compelling political interventions. ‘Western Marxism’ veered into almost mystical terrain, focused heavily on the critique of ideology.⁷ The revolts of 1968 promised a radical renewal. To make a long story short, some radical intellectuals aligned themselves within the ‘new social movements’ of racial, gender, sexual, environmental struggles, while others were drawn to the ‘national liberation movements’ fired up by the defeat of the US in Vietnam. Those close to the new social movements tended to drift away from Marxism towards poststructuralism, with its insights into the construction of identity, while those close to the national liberation movements renewed the critique of imperialism from within Marxism. By the late 1980s, both of these strategies had reached cul-de-sacs as the political movements they were associated with stagnated. The new social movements had been normalized through the processes of commodification (the creation of sellable identities), academicization (the creation of academic disciplines remote from the bulk of the liberatory subjects) and bureaucratization (the conversion of social movements into staid organizations chasing funding). The national liberation movements couldn’t achieve much in a transformed international financial environment, and received a final blow with the collapse of the Soviet Union, at which point virtually all of them collapsed or settled for ‘democratization.’

Negri, by contrast was aligned with the *autonomia* workers’ movement in Italy, which organized outside of conventional trade unions. As many critics note, *autonomia* suffered a terrible defeat in the late 1970s (the jailing of Negri was part of this defeat) which he has never directly acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is less often noted that anarchic squatter movements retained considerable vitality in Europe throughout the eighties and nineties. Negri’s move from the-

⁷ See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Verso 1979.

orizing workers' struggles in the Marxist sense to theorizing the 'social worker' (which could include housewives, drug addicts, practically anybody) fit in well with this trend, since these movements had no real association with wage workers' struggles. They provided the context for Marxist theorizing of a sort, and much of what they talked about and did ('the refusal to work', 'proletarian shopping' (i.e. looting), demonstrations with no demands) bears a striking and not coincidental relationship with the theorizing of resistance in *Empire*. Indeed, for those familiar with this sensibility from 'underground zines' like *Midnight Notes*, reading *Empire* has an uncanny quality: what are these ideas doing in a book published by Harvard University Press? Negri (and Hardt) had, in other words, a connection with a community that retained some real degree of radicalism in the disorienting period following the end of the cold war.

The political context was heightened by events that occurred between the completion of *Empire* ('well before the war in Kosovo,' i.e. March 1999) and its publication in 2000. In December 1999, militant street demonstrations occurred in Seattle at the meeting of the WTO. The convergence of labor, environmentalists, and anarchists who pulled off the demonstrations might be said to constitute a 'multitude' (to use a key phrase from *Empire*), reveling in diversity, rather than the 'people united' of traditional nationalist Marxism. Furthermore, some of the demonstrators were able to project an anti-capitalist message, renewing the need for a theory of global capitalism. Although there were of course precursors, the demonstrations might be said to mark the end of the understanding of the 'new social movements' as primarily concerned with issues of identity. After all, these protests (and the other demonstrations that constituted a wave over the next two years) were held at meetings of world leaders and businesspeople seeking to shape economic structures. *Empire* can be situated as a theoretical moment between Seattle and the first World Social Forum.

Hardt and Negri simultaneously embraced a different aspect of the post-cold war political situation: the centrality of the US as the lone superpower. Antonio Gramsci's argument that 'Fordism' constituted an important new dimension of economic development notwithstanding, Marxists typically glowered when confronted by the global popularity of the US. The US had created a form of capitalism that had clearly not engendered a revolutionary working class. And the collapse of the Soviet Union left the US in a position of seemingly unchallengeable supremacy. At this historical point, Hardt and Negri discovered in the US genealogy a tendency toward constituent, imperial power, i.e. the ability to absorb the post-colonial world into its open-ended network of power. Rather than wait for the giant to stumble, Hardt and Negri would argue that the expansiveness of US power represented a positive historical moment—indeed, that US power immolated itself in the creation of an impe-

rial, not imperialist, sovereignty. This argument helped to generate the positive coverage of *Empire* in much of the US press; it also allowed Hardt and Negri to avoid the gloom that had settled over most radicals in the nineties. It was thus a triple maneuver—the absorption of poststructuralism and globalization into a Marxian framework; the retention of political grounding through association with neo-anarchist movements, and the conceptualization of US imperial power as a progressive political development—that explains the massive attention *Empire* received. It now behooves us to look more closely at the text itself.

Empire seeks to produce a theory of the allegedly new form of sovereignty of the globalized world. It is structured around two dichotomies: Immanence/Transcendence, Multitude/Empire. There are further dichotomies added to this picture: multitude/people, disciplinary power/biopower, nation-state/empire. Immanence is a way of postulating meaning as grounded in the really existing world. Transcendence shifts the focus to some otherworldly force, such as god or the laws of nature. Immanence is conceptualized as a highly democratic form of understanding, while transcendence is related to structures of power based on removing decision-making from the multitude.

Empire embeds these concepts in a history of the emergence and transformation of the modern world. Immanence is (re?) discovered in medieval Europe and flourishes in the context of Renaissance humanism. This is associated, in unspecified ways, with the emergence of the multitude. To rein in the multitude, transcendence is affirmed, first in the form of the state, an authority ruling above the multitude, then in the form of 'the people,' in which the multitude is reduced to a uniform national identity. Colonialism further affirms the boundaries of the transcendent forms of sovereignty. When colonialism is resisted, it is typically replaced by a transcendent state affirming the sovereignty of a 'people.' Thus anti-colonial nationalism is a 'poisoned gift.'

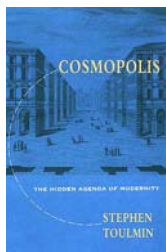
Transcendence is first challenged by the United States, where the constituent power of the revolution is reined in, but in some senses continues to exert a vision, and then later by the world revolt of 1968. The world revolution of 1968 marks a rejection by the multitude of the nation-state's disciplinary forms of production (fordism), and what remains of colonialism. It thus creates the context for a placeless, global, imperial (not-imperialist) power (Empire) based on US constituent power (but not reducible to the US), in which production is organized through dispersed, decentered aspects of 'biopower' (sometimes described as the culture of surveillance) rather than disciplinary institutions.

Absorbing the new forms of subjectivity and productivity developed by the counterculture, *Empire* also marks a shift to immaterial labor, labor which produces stuff that cannot be grasped (texts, relationships, services). Having abandoned the transcendent state, colonialism, and disciplinary production,

deconstruction of the binary oppositions that structured these also becomes irrelevant, and thus postmodernist deconstruction is conceptualized as fighting last century's battle. "Although many of the various postmodernist theorists are lucid in their refusal of the logics of modern sovereignty, they are in general extremely confused about the nature of our potential liberation from it—perhaps precisely because they cannot recognize clearly the forms of power that have today come to supplant it" (p. 142).

Ultimately Hardt and Negri are extremely optimistic that the multitude can overcome Empire. Nevertheless, they are quite unsure what sort of political forms this will take. Thus, at one point, they celebrate the 'incommunicability' of such revolts as the Zapatistas, the L.A. Riots, and the workers' uprisings in France and South Korea (p. 54). They argue that it is a virtue that these revolts don't cohere as a revolutionary wave. At other points, they place a lot of weight on the resurgence of migration in the contemporary world. Finally, they conclude with three demands—global citizenship, a social wage, and the reappropriation of the means of production—that have an ambiguous relationship to actually existing struggles.

Readers aware of world systems literature will find much that is familiar in *Empire*, particularly in relationship to Wallerstein, Arrighi and Hopkins' analysis of anti-systemic movements and Wallerstein's analysis of geoculture (Wallerstein appears in *Empire* only as a representative of the view that capitalism has always been global, which is promptly dismissed. Arrighi is treated even worse). Much like the authors of *Empire*, world systems analysts have insisted that the struggles of anti-colonialism have had the paradoxical effect of strengthening the system. Wallerstein faults the culture of the modern world system for separating the search for the true from the search for the good; an



idea that has some parallels with what Hardt and Negri mean by 'transcendence.' His description of the effort to create a 'value-free' perspective from which to produce authoritative knowledge echoes Hardt and Negri's concern with the way 'transcendence' denies the complexity and instability of 'immanence.'⁸ This analysis also parallels that of Stephen Toulmin in *Cosmopolis*,⁹ who insists that modernity began in the sixteenth century. Toulmin clearly believes the modern

perspective developed during the Renaissance—grounded and skeptical—is preferable to that which triumphed with Descartes (universalism and certainty). Nevertheless, Toulmin's work altogether lacks the revolutionary frisson of Hardt and Negri, since he attributes the preferable modernity to a handful of aristocratic intellectuals like Montaigne, rather than to 'the multitude.'

Hardt and Negri explicitly repudiate world systems, however, by declaring that capitalism is far more globally integrated today than ever before, and that notions of core, periphery, and semi-periphery are irrelevant in a world of blurred borders. They offer little real evidence for these claims, and, indeed, one wonders what evidence they have that the leading sectors of the present world economy—biotech, telecommunications, multimedia entertainment—have much presence in large portions of sub-Saharan Africa or South Central Asia, or for that matter, that the instance of these industries in semi-peripheral countries like Brazil can effectively compete with the core powers of the US, Europe and Japan. Hardt and Negri also write a highly Eurocentric history, oblivious to efforts by scholars like Janet Abu-Lughod, Giovanni Arrighi, and Takeshi Hamashita to integrate agency on the part of non-Western areas of the world. Instead, the Roman Empire gives way to Medieval Europe, from which springs the Renaissance. The non-Western world briefly appears as the colonized other, but then, in the present, these issues of West and non-West are no longer an issue. Islam makes no appearance in *Empire*, either as the dominant force in West Asia between its emergence and the fifteenth century, or in its present resurgence, although fundamentalism is briefly noted, to be dismissed as an inadequate understanding of the present. The histories of China and points east are also irrelevant, while those of indigenous peoples annihilated and fenced in by colonialism are lumped together with slaves and other instances of colonial power in a sort of miscellaneous category.

But can the global present in fact be adequately understood if only the West and its discontents are granted agency and history? Why is the vision of a global *Umma*, or the creation of a global market by Chinese merchant Diasporas, any less relevant to the contemporary world than the assertion of global Empire by the US and its allies? A position that universal scientific reason has rendered local history moot is not entirely indefensible, at least from a modernist perspective (although Hardt and Negri's repudiation of transcendence would seem to rule this out). Nor would be a claim that, given their European status, Hardt and Negri are particularly interested in bringing the legacy of European philosophy to bear on contemporary questions. But they take neither of these stances. Instead, in an entirely under-theorized manner, they simply presume that a dialogue between Spinoza, Polybius, and contemporary Italian radical thought is sufficient to explain the global situation.

⁸ See Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentricism and its Avatars" in *New Left Review*, 226, December 1997, 93–107, and Wallerstein, "Social Science and the Quest for a Just Society" in *The Essential Wallerstein*, New Press, 2000.

⁹ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Free Press, 1991.

Although this question is not taken up at any length in the two volumes *Empire's New Clothes* and *Debating Empire*, similar questions haunt most of the critiques, focusing on the inevitable oversimplifications and exclusions in the creation of such a master narrative as *Empire*. Indeed, the similarities of these two collections of essays are striking, given the differences in their focus. *Empire's New Clothes*, for the most part, collects the work of authors who are comfortable writing in the Deleuze/Foucault idiom that Hardt and Negri use (Neo-Marxists Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes might fit in better in *Debating Empire*). On the other hand, *Debating Empire* is dominated by writing in a more Marxian idiom. It is not entirely unfair to attribute a somewhat defensive posture to the latter. Although Hardt and Negri's critics score many points, few can match the visionary élan of the authors of *Empire*.

Both collections are well written and edited. Apart from Saskia Sassen's essay in *Empire's New Clothes*, which looks like an essay on immigrants' citizenship status with a few pages about Hardt and Negri tagged on, all the work in both books appears to have been produced specifically to engage with *Empire*. Many authors call attention to Hardt and Negri's political optimism as a major strength of the work: Žižek points out that in the context of a contemporary political task—that of rethinking the leftist project “beyond the alternative of ‘accommodation’ to new circumstances and sticking to the old attitude”—Hardt and Negri's *Empire* takes up the challenge ‘to break out of this debilitating deadlock’ (*ENC*:254). In an otherwise critical reading of *Empire*, Laffey and Weldes point out that Hardt and Negri make “a real contribution to contemporary political action, not least because it offers a positive and liberatory vision of globalization” (*ENC*:138). Arrighi is also complimentary of the authors' dismissal of nostalgia for the power structures of an earlier era of capitalist development (*DE*:32). In the strongest statement of this position, William Chaloupka welcomes *Empire* as an effective and much-needed critique of Left practices, which, in the realm of environmentalism, often take the form of self-righteous posturing. He suggests that Hardt and Negri may learn from the greens ways in which the local can be utilized as a space within which the global itself could be figured (*ENC*:210–211). On the other hand, Alex Callinicos is much more skeptical. In a useful if tendentious introduction to the history of Italian extra-parliamentary movements, Callinicos suggests that the chaos at the G8 meeting in Genoa indicated that the Italian left/Negri had learned little from the repression of Autonomia in the late 70s. For Callinicos, groups like “The White Overalls” (later celebrated in *Multitude*) reveal a continuing preference for ‘exemplary action on behalf of the masses’ rather than ‘the real task of revolutionary politics—the political conquest of the majority of the working class’ (*DE*: 121–143).

Although Hardt and Negri's expansive political vision is generally welcomed, most of the authors in the two volumes are critical of Hardt and Negri's silences and glosses. Taken together, they present a ‘multitude’ of concerns inadequately addressed in *Empire*: politics (Laclau, and Shapiro, both in *ENC*), Africa (Dunn, *ENC*), cultural narratives (Passavant and Dean, *ENC*), gender (Quinby, *ENC*), East Asia and North/South relations (Arrighi, and Mertes, *DE*), the role of the state (Meiksins Wood, *DE*) international organizations (Aronowitz, *DE*). A number of authors—both Meiksins Wood and Rustin, for starters—pour scorn on the romanticized image of the US in *Empire*. These should not be taken as ‘special pleading.’ Most of these authors in fact demonstrate that in their inadequate engagement with these topics, Hardt and Negri's representation of the world is seriously distorted. For example, Arrighi notes that the world economy is increasingly centered in East Asia, so East Asian lineages, as well as those of Western Europe, may play a major role in shaping any future world empire. Dunn's focus on Africa shows that, far from producing a ‘smooth’ world, contemporary political economic changes are strengthening the boundary between Europe and lands to the south. Furthermore, the focus on Africa reveals that the role of multinational corporations as semi-sovereign institutions has not changed so dramatically in recent decades. Taken together, these essays suggest that the world is much more complicated than as painted by Hardt and Negri; that political processes are more uneven and contested than indicated. Furthermore, social change does not emerge as the multitude spontaneously becomes aware of its power, but instead requires cultural and organizational work to weld together coherent political subjects. Laclau, Fitzpatrick, Passavant, and Žižek question the nature of Hardt and Negri's political program, one that ends strangely in a language of rights and demands (that have to be recognized by states) that in effect takes recourse to the legal discourse of rights-claiming—the invocation of rights to constitute a politically viable multitude suggests in short the indispensability of the order of representation.

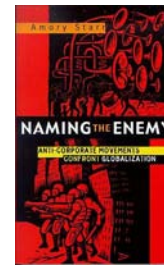
Lee Quinby's critique is more devastating in its effects—she points out (as does Bill Maurer) the ‘prophetic’ streak in Hardt and Negri, one that subordinates both historical as well as genealogical analysis to prophetic visions. The prophetic mode in which the authors write also makes them apocalyptic, a not uncommon sign of millenarianism. The Millennialist pulse that beats in *Empire* makes for a ‘presentism’ that appeals in the figures it elects—the militant poor, the migrants, the nomads, the new barbarians—to bear the cross of the multitude. Such imagery, Quinby argues, not only does enormous violence to empirical realities, it also demonstrates a powerful gender-blindness that structures the entire text, one that remains oblivious to the tendential feminization of poverty in our globalized world. Further, the privileging of ‘resistance as pri-

mary,' she argues, is misplaced—primarily because domination and resistance are necessarily *relational*—just because one chooses to see resistance first does not imply that resistance everywhere comes first. Moreover, the complexity of lived circumstances of exploitation makes for strategies of resistance at variance with the rather naïve notion of 'exodus' that the authors embrace. At the same time, for the most part these critiques lose the utopian panache of Hardt and Negri. Is this an inevitable tradeoff? Is it necessary to do serious violence to an accurate representation of the world to retain utopian clarity?

A few of the articles build on, or reframe aspects of Hardt and Negri's argument in suggestive ways. Several authors specify the way the contemporary state system works, and the way new or not-so-new forms of sovereignty are integrated into it. Ruth Buchanan and Sundhya Pahuja, for example, suggest that shifts in the discourse of the World Bank away from the advocacy of minimalist government ('the Washington Consensus') and toward 'good governance' and 'building social capital' legitimizes the expansion of the bank's gaze (and imperial power) into numerous aspects of life in client countries. They thus show how a careful examination of international institutions can strengthen Hardt and Negri's argument about the emergence of a new form of sovereignty, even as they dispute the way *Empire* obscures the role of both states and international institutions. Ellen Meiksins Wood, in an article largely critical of Hardt and Negri, highlights a different way to understand the contemporary state-system. Like citizens in bourgeois democracy, states in the contemporary world have formal equality. But as in the case of bourgeois democracy, this provides ideological cover for existing power relations by obscuring tremendous inequality in access to resources and inegalitarian informal networks of power. Laffey and Weldes take the critique one step further arguing against the enormous theoretical investment made in the 17th century Westphalian ideas of sovereignty, by pointing out the resiliently imperialist character of the global system, which flies in the face of this model, for over three hundred years. The U.S. Constitution and U.S. Republicanism is no exception to this imperialist tendency—in fact as Passavant, Fitzpatrick, and Michael Rustin point out in different ways, the emergence of the U.S. multitude at the high moment of U.S. Republicanism was also the moment of the systematic exclusion and extermination of indigenous populations.

Much has happened in the world since the publication of *Empire*. Despite their celebration of the incommunicability of struggles in the nineties, during the first few years of the new millennium, a reasonably coherent global 'movement of movements' emerged.¹⁰ While confounding *Empire*'s claims about

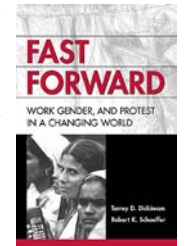
¹⁰ Tom Mertes (2004), *A Movement of Movements*, Verso, NY.



'incommunicability,' this movement might on a deeper level be said to confirm *Empire*'s claim about the new relevance of global sovereignty. Although the global justice movement has generated some exciting work, such as Amory Starr's *Naming the Enemy*¹¹ and the Notes from Nowhere Collective's *We Are Everywhere*,¹² these works lack the theoretical expansiveness of Hardt and Negri.

That is, they stop short of trying to integrate theories about the nature of these movements with theories of the evolution of social production in general. The same is true of works which, from within the world systems camp, attempt to theorize the global working class, specifically *Fast Forward* by Tory Dickinson and Robert Schaeffer¹³ and *Forces of Labour* by Beverly Silver.¹⁴ These works are much more empirically precise than Hardt and Negri, but they go nowhere near the philosophical/historical speculation that makes the latter's works so appealing.

While the global justice movement could ultimately be conceptualized as the emergence of the 'multitude' outlined in *Empire*, the second major world historical development is more difficult to reconcile with their framework. This is the rift that emerged between Europe and the United States, particularly over the US invasion of Iraq. This widening rift seemed to suggest that Hardt and Negri's declarations of a decentered imperial-not-imperialist sovereignty had been premature. The US appeared to be acting much like a conventional imperialist power, following closely in the footsteps of British imperialism as Rashid Khalidi¹⁵ points out. In fact, the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq triggered a tidal wave of literature across the political spectrum about the contemporary prospects for *Empire*, although here the term was intended to indicate similarities between the current American project and 19th century empires or even the



¹¹ Zed press, 2000.

¹² Verso, 2003.

¹³ Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

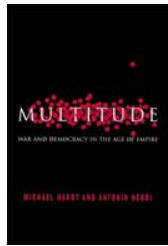
¹⁴ Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁵ See Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, Beacon Press (2004)

Romans, rather than Hardt and Negri's deterritorialized form of postmodern sovereignty. Works with titles like *Sorrows of Empire*, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, *Incoherent Empire* proliferated, not to mention at least two works titled *Empire* and two more titled *American Empire*.¹⁶ But like the work on the global justice movement, these works generally do not integrate broad theories about contemporary production with their theories of empire.¹⁷ More typically, at times somewhat ahistorically, they assess the US's prospects as one of many actors with geopolitical empire-building ambitions.

Multitude's declared intention is to provide a theory of the postmodern political subject, just as *Empire* provided a theory of postmodern sovereignty. In this respect, Hardt and Negri compare themselves to Hobbes, who first theorized the bourgeois subject and new forms of citizenship in *De Cive*, and then followed with a theory of the new form of sovereignty, *Leviathan*. They invert this order (first theorizing sovereignty, then the subject), because while Hobbes believed a new form of sovereignty was necessary to contain the new subject, they believe the new form of sovereignty (Empire) in our age only acts as a parasitical constraint on the new subject (multitude). At the same time, they seek to incorporate into their framework the ways the world has changed since they wrote *Empire*.

There is no doubt that *Multitude* is an ambitious sequel to *Empire*, retaining much of its visionary intensity. Those who like strong meta-narratives may be impressed by the architecture of the text. It has multiple inserts and three insightful excursions—into Marx's method, the need for a left multitude, and the state of contemporary geopolitics—that demonstrate the breadth of the authors' familiarity with the disciplines that organize our knowledge system. The proliferation of networks is a central organizing theme of the text—from the distributed networks of insurgencies to the growing immaterial webs of the



¹⁶ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, Metropolitan Books 2004, William Odom and Robert Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire*, Yale 2004, Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire*, Verso 2003, Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492–1763*, Henry Holt 2003, Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, Basic Books, 2004, Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire*, Harvard 2002, and Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*, University of California Press, 2003.

¹⁷ A partial exception is *Globalization or Empire?* by Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Routledge (2004). Like Hardt and Negri, Pieterse emphasizes the centrality of networks to both recent economic and military developments.

multitudes, to the networked futures of global democracy. War, production, and resistance are all increasingly taking on the form of distributed networks (i.e. networks in which any node may link to any other). In their excursus on Marx's method, Hardt and Negri point out that they are merely following 'in Marx's footsteps' (pp.140–153) in making a case for new theories that are accommodative of new realities, and new concepts like multitude, to address the changing socio-economic composition of all those who labor under the command of capital. In particular, they identify four primary elements of Marx's method to guide the construction of their text: (i) The first is 'the historical tendency'—in *Multitude* this refers to the long-run tendency of immaterial labor to dominate all other forms of labor and to recast them in the image of immaterial labor. (ii) The second is 'the real abstraction'—Marx argues in the first volume of *Capital* that all labor becomes labor in the abstract, all the different kinds of (concrete) labor can be reduced to one homogeneous (abstract) form, given the general tendency of industrial production to dominate all the other kinds of production (like agriculture). For Hardt and Negri, the contemporary epoch is dominated by "biopolitical production" and all production is increasingly taking on this form. (iii) The third element is 'antagonism'—which today is no longer confined to the factory, but is present everywhere, because of the global expropriation of the common, by finance capital. (iv) The final element is 'the constitution of subjectivity'—in which 'the poor' (not the industrial proletariat) are the paradigmatic form of subjectivity. Hardt and Negri argue that "we are the poors", because the global common that belongs to all of us is being expropriated by finance capital. Such a general condition of poverty however co-exists with the richness of infinite possibility (the multitude as the global poor will emancipate itself by bringing about global democracy). *Multitude* is structured around three different but related parts.

The *first part*—titled "War"—is the exposition (*Darstellung*) of the current state of global war which the authors—in line with the argument in *Empire*—interpret as an imperial civil war, a war within a single imperial sovereignty that spans the smooth space of the capitalist globe. The exercise of imperial biopower, or, 'the tendency for sovereignty to become power over life itself' (p.334)—a concept taken from Michel Foucault¹⁸—constitutes the war-form of Empire. The authors recognize the primacy of insurgencies to show the work of

¹⁸ See among other texts by Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*. Picador 2003. Foucault refers to biopower as the 'the power to make live and let die.' Foucault's use of biopower is quite different from Hardt and Negri's.

history-making from below.¹⁹ This part of the text traces the *formal* differences between centralized armies, polycentric guerilla bands, and distributed networks as different forms of resistance that mark the passage from modern sovereignty to imperial sovereignty. On the side of Empire, the authors highlight the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA): RMA technology in postmodern warfare has “decorporealized” war, by ‘casting the economic figures of production into the field of battle.’ RMA ideology produces a new type of soldier who is both a killer and a dictator of cultural, legal, political, and security norms of life: his ‘blood and brains’ incorporate the range of activities of biopower, and hence represent a valuable investment that imperial sovereignty seeks to preserve at all costs (p.44). The significance of the RMA is that the military is becoming a full matrix, distributed network (p.59). Hardt and Negri point out the suicide bomber as a symbol of the ontological limit to the exercise of imperial biopower, i.e., full spectrum dominance and the repudiation of war becomes “the most important task for resistance today” (p.63). At times the authors seem to be indicating a rejection of US policies (like most of the world, they seem to have fallen out of love with the US between the publication of *Empire* and the writing of *Multitude*, i.e. during the Bush administration), while at other points the authors seem to be arguing that war is a more general state and concept in Empire that transcends the US. Arguing that all great powers today should become networked, the text notes how the US today not only alternates between an ‘imperialist’—in its human rights justification for intervention in the Balkan wars of 1999—and an ‘imperial’—in its attack on Afghanistan and the police-work accomplished there—role, it also combines the two—in the 2003 war on Iraq. In fact, in *Empire* the authors had already conceptualized US foreign policy as alternately ‘imperial’ and ‘imperialist.’ However, they clearly anticipated that the former had triumphed over the latter. Hardt and Negri also seem to be suggesting that social movements must avoid getting sucked into armed conflicts that can be used to relegitimate Empire, although this appears to run counter to some of the rhetoric in both *Empire* and *Multitude*.

The *second part*—titled “Multitude”—is the author’s research (*Forschung*) into the war-form. Just as Marx takes the reader into ‘the hidden abode of production’ to reveal the mystery behind the commodity form in which capi-

¹⁹ Quinby (2004) argues that Hardt and Negri misinterpret Foucault when they assert that resistance is always primary. For Foucault, resistance and dominance are in an interdependent relationship—just because one notices resistance alone does not therefore mean that resistance comes first. Foucault’s genealogical analyses focuses upon the *relational* character of domination and resistance

tal appears, the authors take the reader into the realm of biopolitical production to reveal the content of Empire in the class figure of the multitude. As in *Empire*, the concept of immaterial labor plays a central role in this conception. Hardt and Negri argue that exploitation today is the expropriation of the global common²⁰—the expropriation of all that we produce together, the product of shared, collaborative work (i.e. immaterial labor) across the entire planet, with the lines of ‘global apartheid’ running above and below national boundaries.

In this section they implicitly respond to critics who noted that Empire left unspecified the legal mechanisms shaping the global economy.²¹ The *new topography of exploitation* shows different levels at which an interplay between global market forces and legal or political institutions takes place—the first level is characterized by emerging forms of private authority outside the control of nation-states (the new, global form of *lex mercatoria*, or “law merchant”); a second level with the WTO and other states working in concert toward a global economic order; and a third level where the combination of the IMF, and the World Bank, and other supranational agencies have reformed themselves in accordance with the rules of the newly emerging global economic order. Aronowitz has pointed to the absence of any discussion in *Empire* of the institutions of world government.²² The incorporation of the different levels of global governance in *Multitude* may therefore be welcomed as an analytical improvement.

Hardt and Negri also argue that with the common as the locus of surplus value, ‘the profits of financial capital are probably in its purest form the expropriation of the common’ (p.151). This reference to finance capital is one of several scattered and somewhat incoherent references to an epochal shift in the mode of capital accumulation, which along with their summary dismissal of the role of East Asian accumulation, is one of the weakest parts of their overall argument. For Hardt and Negri, the contemporary financial globalization

²⁰ Callinicos argues that Hardt and Negri’s concept of the multitude in *Empire* ‘identifies the oppressed and the exploited as an anonymous, amorphous mass without any definite social location’ (*DE*: 138). In identifying the global common as the topography of exploitation, *Multitude* does not make the identity of the exploited any less anonymous or any more concrete, though by conceding the growing gaps between North and South, the authors are much more sensitive to these geographical divides. As an improvement over *Empire*’s formulations, this concession in itself still leaves unaddressed many of the questions raised by Arrighi in his review of *Empire*.

²¹ See Ruth Buchanan and Sundhya Pahuja, “Legal Imperialism: *Empire*’s Invisible Hand?” *ENC*: 73–93.

²² Stanley Aronowitz, “The New World Order”, *DE*: 19–25.

summarizes an “obscure logic by which the traditional characteristics of capitalist production fall away and yet capital still manages to exert its control and extract wealth” (p.151). *Multitude* points, incorrectly, to the decline of the East Asian region in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis—the crisis, they claim, struck these countries so hard, that “their star fell in the global hierarchy almost as fast as it had risen” (p.165). Empirical data clearly contradicts this interpretation—as Alice Amsden (2001:255) records, “three years after disaster struck in East Asia, rapid economic growth had resumed.” In fact, the financial globalization of the late 20th century is not only intimately related to the rise of East Asia as the emerging center of global accumulation processes, it also testifies to the indubitable resilience of the East Asian region in the aftermath of the financial crises. This resilience is an outcome of the structured coherence of the East Asian region, on which there is a vast and growing literature,²³ and which also, paradoxically, appears to point the way towards a future, but in ways that Hardt and Negri clearly do not anticipate. To the extent that, as they argue, finance points towards the future, the two spaces it is presently pointing to (i.e. flowing into) are East Asia and the U.S. This bifurcation in some ways parallels that between Empire and the multitude, again in ways not clarified by Hardt and Negri. After all, East Asian development is the product of ethnic groups, states and diasporas historically marginalized by the capitalist world system.

To understand how the contemporary exploitation of labor is different from earlier exploitative forms, Hardt and Negri argue that the new *topology of exploitation*, the sites where ‘acts of refusal and exodus, resistance and struggle arise,’ has been dramatically shifting over the last twenty five years (p.102). Differences of kind that used to divide labor no longer apply, as there is a tendency today for the various types of labor to communicate, collaborate, and become common (p.107). The 19th and 20th century hegemony of industrial labor is tendentially giving way to the hegemony of ‘immaterial labor,’ labor that creates immaterial products like knowledge, information, communication, and affects (p.108). Immaterial labor is increasingly central in the dominant coun-

²³. The source they draw upon, T.J.Pempel (1999) ed. *The Politics of the Asian Financial Crisis*, actually presents quite a different picture. Pempel emphasizes the networked nature of the East Asian success and he attributes the collective nature of the East Asian crisis to the same networked structure of the regional economy. The structured coherence of the region however, has demonstrated remarkable rebound and recovery in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis. See for instance Alice Amsden (2001) *The Rise of ‘the Rest’*, Oxford; and Peter Drysdale ed. (2003) *Reform and Recovery in East Asia*, Routledge; as well as Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden eds. (2003) *The Resurgence of East Asia*, Routledge.

tries, in the fastest-growing occupations like food servers, sales persons, computer engineers, teachers and health workers. Moreover, other forms of labor and production are adopting characteristics of immaterial production. Third, the growing immaterial forms of property like patents and copyrights produced by immaterial labor are another register of its pervasive presence. Finally, the distributed network form that is typical of immaterial production is springing up throughout social life (pp.114–115). The distinction between work time and leisure time, which was central to the industrial paradigm, has collapsed with the advent of “informatization” in post-Fordist types of production. Hardt and Negri argue that agriculture is also increasingly ‘informationalized’ through the control and production of plant genetic information (p.113).

Hardt and Negri have a reductive, stereotypical approach to the peasantry, believing that it starts to become politically active only when it gives up its ties to the soil and its traditions, only in short when it starts to engage in ‘communication’ with the emerging figures of the multitude. Furthermore, “In the same way that the figure of the peasant tends to disappear, so too does the figure of the industrial worker, the service industry worker, and all other separate categories. And in turn the struggles of each sector tend to become the struggle of all” (p.125). The disappearing figure of the peasants is set alongside the increasingly conspicuous figure of migrant laborers. Hardt and Negri argue that global metropolises are magnets for migrants who need their labor ‘to power their economies.’ Their description of the contemporary world of labor glosses over the two most striking developments noted in the sociology of global work over the last two decades—the proliferation of sweatshops (rapidly centralizing in greater China) and the expansion of tedious service work epitomized by Wal-Mart. Both of these workforces are notably feminized, another angle largely neglected in *Multitude*.

Hardt and Negri see strong democratic possibilities in the unfolding *project of the multitude*. Immaterial labor, they claim, contains within itself the means for achieving this project. Immaterial labor is associated with certain ‘negative developments’ arising out of the blurring of the distinction between work time and non-work time—and its increasingly part-time or temporary or contractual conditions of work make for the precariousness of its position. The tendency for immaterial labor is to be flexible (to accomplish several tasks) and mobile (to move continually among locations). However, two ‘enormously powerful’ characteristics of immaterial labor make possible the democratic project of the multitude. Firstly, immaterial labor not only tends to dominate ‘the limited realm of the strictly economic domain’; it directly produces social relationships by engaging in the general production and reproduction of global society. Global society today is formed and maintained through the production of ‘ideas, knowledges,

and affects.' Immaterial labor is biopolitical because it is oriented toward the creation of forms of social life. 'Who we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other are all created through this social, biopolitical production.' Secondly, 'immaterial labor takes the form of networks based on communication, collaboration, and affective relationships—immaterial labor can only be conducted in common; and increasingly, immaterial labor invents new, independent networks of cooperation through which it produces' (p.66). In short, immaterial labor is tendentially totalizing in and through its distributed network form. Could a more nuanced view of labor—one that allows for a persistent peasantry, and the radical differences between, say, work in a sweatshop producing clothes and work in an advertising firm—be reconciled with Hardt and Negri's vision of an expanding 'common' produced by 'immaterial labor'? How would this vision be elaborated if the growing feminization of the world proletariat were acknowledged? Similarly, Hardt and Negri identify 'the poor' as the paradigmatic subjective figure of labor today—they are full of potential 'which always exceeds what capital and the global political body can expropriate and control.' Their viewpoint thus has universal implications. How would this perspective be transformed if Hardt and Negri considered the global feminization of poverty? And since war intrudes in this text in a way it did not in *Empire*, it would be worthwhile to consider the masculine character of virtually all armies and patriotic war drives. The failure of Hardt and Negri to integrate the gendered character of the workforce and warfare into their framework should be considered against their continuing tendency to draw on militaristic metaphors to describe the multitude's struggle against Empire (see Quinby: 231–251: *ENC*).

It is in the context of describing the potential of the multitude that Hardt and Negri introduce the concept of performance from the queer theorist Judith Butler, the main example of the intellectual incorporation process that was more evident in *Empire*. They see the process of performing replace that of habit: "the political significance of the recognition that sex along with all other social bodies is produced and continuously reproduced through our everyday performances is that we can perform differently, subvert those social bodies, and invent new social forms" (p. 200). While most writers in a Marxian idiom would find Butler hopelessly anti-structural, and, in any case, exclusively concerned with culture, Hardt and Negri immediately relate this concept of performance to the production of the common. The context of 'performance' is also a rethinking of left politics as 'monstrous, excessive, and unruly' (193) rather than the nostalgia for community popular in most remnants of the old left. Here again, the expansive, optimistic vision that makes their radical politics so unique, is in evidence.

The limits of biopower in appropriating the surplus production of the multitude are explored in the *third part*—titled "Democracy"—which seeks to outline the possibility of democracy on a global scale, 'emerging today for the very first time' (p.xi) (whatever else they've learned from the critiques of *Empire*, Hardt and Negri continue to write in the 'presentist' idiom, in which everything has just changed, a point well criticized by Quinby in *ENC*). Hardt and Negri maintain that imperial geopolitics has 'no center and no outside'—there are only relations internal to the global system. As *Empire* forms, geopolitics itself enters into permanent crisis, pitting the biopolitical potentiality of the multitude against the biopower of Empire. In the gatherings after Seattle, protesters have continued to transform the summit meetings of the institutions of global governance—the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, the G8²⁴—into an 'impromptu global Estates General [the comparison drawn here is with the Estates General called in France immediately before the revolution of 1789] and, without being asked, present their list of grievances' (p.288).

Hardt and Negri point to 'biopolitical grievances' as the fundamental category in which all of the other grievances—grievances of representation, grievances of rights and justice, and economic grievances—are mutually implicated. From these grievances, three common points appear as conditions for any project of a new, democratic world: (i) the critique of existing forms of representation; (ii) the protest against poverty; and (iii) the opposition to war (pp.269–270). Ecological grievances, feminist struggles, antiracist struggles, and struggles of indigenous populations, are all biopolitical grievances—all facets of life are immediately involved in them, they implicate legal, cultural, political, and economic issues (pp.282–285). Instances of biopolitical grievances that the authors refer to—the 1980s *Narmada Bachao Andolan* that began as a movement in India against the World Bank-sponsored dam across the Narmada River; and the privatization through the use of patents, of seeds, traditional knowledges, genetic material and life-forms, by transnational corporations acting in concert with nation-states in the global South—may be seen as issues over the use and control over technology (as well as issues of representation), and struggles over the control of indigenous knowledges (pp.282–84). The grievances of rights and justice (pp.273–277) reflect the absence of an adequate international legal infrastructure to enforce human rights in the face of an imperial law that prioritizes the interests of multinational capital and dominant capitalist countries (p.277).

²⁴. They cannily note that the UN, alone among major international institutions, has not been the target of major protests.

Economic grievances are in turn really biopolitical—Hardt and Negri note the growing global inequalities of wealth between the richest twenty and the poorest twenty countries has doubled in the past forty years (p.278). They see a diseased system that reproduces global poverty—despite the ostensibly heroic efforts of NGOs, UN agencies, and supranational agencies like the World Bank (p.299). With the global majority ‘excluded from the primary circuits of economic production and consumption’ (p.319), it is not difficult to see that ‘the construction of the global market and global integration of the national economies has not brought us together but driven us apart, exacerbating the plight of the poor’ (p.278). These are welcome remarks and welcome departures from the ‘smooth politics’ (Malcolm Bull in *DE*) that dominates the pages of *Empire*. They indicate that the authors have reconstructed some key aspects of their arguments in *Empire*.

In an excursus on the crisis of the Left, Hardt and Negri argue that the eroding social base of Left political parties in labor unions and the industrial working class is accompanied by a conceptual deficit on the part of the Left concerning its future. To resurrect and reform the Left, new practices, new forms of organization, and new concepts are needed (p.220). The authors ultimately reject all of the proposals floating around about institutionalizing democracy on a world scale through global parliaments and the like, on the grounds that such gigantic institutions would reproduce the distance between represented and representatives endemic in the contemporary political world. At the same time, they share none of the globophobia or technophobia typical of much of the global justice movement. They do not advocate an exclusive focus on the local as an alternative to alienating modern national and international institutions.

Hardt and Negri argue that a transformative and emancipatory politics today can only be conducted on the basis of the new concept of the multitude because it challenges the political theory of sovereignty that ‘only the one can rule, be it the monarch, the party, the people, or the individual’ (p.100). The multitude comprises ‘all those who produce in common, and share a common potential to resist the domination of capital’ (pp.106–107). It is global; there is only one multitude. The concept of the multitude is also important in its relation to the concept of *desire*—‘a desire for the multitude’ is a desire for ‘a world in which race and gender do not matter, that is, a world in which they do not determine hierarchies of power, a world in which differences express themselves freely’ (p.101). The multitude transposes the exclusive and limiting logic of identity-difference into the open expansive logic of singularity-commonality. In other words, they wish to transcend the two familiar paths of the left—either demanding everyone unify behind a single identity, or else going separate ways as women, racial minorities, indigenous movements, greens, etc. Instead, they

argue that singularities (unique identities) should be embraced as different but valued responses to our common starting point (the contemporary global situation). They end with a vision of a ‘democracy of the multitude’ as a sort of giant global brain, an ‘open-source society...whose source code is revealed so that we all can work collaboratively to solve its bugs and create new, better social programs’(p.340). In this they converge somewhat with cybertopians (whose politics are often anti-left and libertarian), new age advocates, and, strangely, advocates of traditional economic liberalism who, since von Hayek, have argued that the market acts as a distributed processor computer, rapidly identifying shortages and surpluses.²⁵

Multitude is engaging in its idealism and in its boldness. It attempts a synthesis of Marx, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, and seeks to cut through the boundaries that mark the disciplines of political economy and political philosophy. Its over-ambitious, visionary calling attracts, the style of writing is often exhilarating, and a mobile army of metaphors accompany the journey of the emerging multitude out of global wars into the possibilities of global democracy. The discussion about the spiral, symbiotic relationship between the production of subjectivities and the production of the common is quite insightful, and their vision of global democracy does appeal.

There are however important limitations to the text, not least of which is its inadequate historical sensibility, and its strong Eurocentrism, both of which combine to present a misreading of contemporary dynamics of global political economy. This misreading is most evident in the scant attention paid to East Asia, along with the claim that the constitutional model of the European Union with its multi-levels of decision making could contribute to a stable global system. The repeated appeals to an enigmatic 18th century revolutionary republican tradition that are traced to Europe and North America— Ireland is never mentioned in this context—are made to express the multitude’s desire for absolute democracy. East Asian lineages, besides the Chinese revolution embedded in the narrative of people’s armies, are scarcely considered. Chinese ‘middle class democracies’ are mentioned in the context of a possible ‘Asian centered globalization,’ but without any of the attention it deserves. In particular, the emergence of working class movements in the mushrooming sites of industrialization in China is completely ignored, though there is considerable scholarship

²⁵. See the discussion in *America’s Inadvertent Empire* by William Odom and Robert Dujarric, Yale (2004).

in this area.²⁶ Were they to focus here—on sites of migrant, industrialized, impoverished labor—their conclusions about the political priorities of the multitude might be quite different. It is difficult to read the authors' interpretation of contemporary geopolitics as anything other than skewed out of proportion to the unfolding empirical realities.

There is a lot that is hyperbole and the multitude remains invitingly mysterious. The discussion of biopolitical grievances and the democratic project of the multitude resonate strongly with the project of cosmopolitan localism popularized by Wolfgang Sachs, which challenges the assumptions of uniformity in the globalization project and affirms the necessity of alternative cultural traditions for the plurality and diversity of the species. The exemplary instance of cosmopolitan activism is the Zapatista peasant revolt in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas.²⁷ Hardt and Negri mention the Zapatistas often in their discussions—for instance when they discuss the search of the (Italian) White Overalls for a 'new politics' which they find in the jungles of Chiapas (p.266)—but they do not appreciate the ways in which the Chiapas movement really traces its vibrant democratic struggles to the late 19th century *campesino* movement that culminated in the early 20th century Mexican revolution.²⁸ They create a simplified (never-true) ideal type of peasant life, cut off from direct contact with the world market, to facilitate claims that the contemporary world has no peasantry. A reductive approach to this awkward class is perhaps part of the reason they have little to say about South Asia and China. They do not seem to realize that China and South Asia continue to be the heartland of the peasant world and contemporary peasant struggles continue to be quite different from Marx's 19th century conceptualization ('potatoes in a sack of potatoes').²⁹ In their desire to see them disappear and join the figures of the 'multitude,' Hardt and Negri unfairly attribute to them 'incommunicability' and passivity. The authors celebrate the ostensible end of the peasantry—Hardt and Negri are

^{26.} See for instance Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden eds. (2004) *Chinese Society: Conflict, Change, and Resistance*. Routledge. See also Beverly Silver (2003) *Forces of Labor*. Cambridge.

^{27.} See P. McMichael (2004) *Development and Social Change*, pp.270–277. Pine Forge Press.

^{28.} See for instance the work of John Womack (1968) *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. Vintage.

^{29.} See Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. International Publishers.

quite modernist in this regard—despite the fact that the peasantry continues to be an enduring reality in large parts of the global South. Indeed, understanding the process by which specific peasantries have been decomposed and reconstituted in the context of the capitalist world economy provides a suggestive critique of the teleologies of modernist state-building that one would think the authors would be open to.

"Migrants demonstrate (and help construct) the general commonality of the multitude by crossing and thus partially undermining every geographical barrier" (p.134). Such sweeping statements scarcely illuminate the travails of migrants, the ruthless border sweeps and the innumerable casualties at the borders. Nor do Hardt and Negri have much to say about the way both wealthy and poor states encourage migration, the former to replenish their workforces, the latter for remittances. As was the case in *Empire*, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether Hardt and Negri are anticipating revolutionary change, or claiming it has already occurred.

Like *Empire*, Hardt and Negri's *Multitude* scarcely connects with the realities of Africa. They are quick to reject the nation-state as a possible defense against neoliberal globalization (nor do they consider the role the state might play in fostering space for social movements—Hugo Chavez, for example, is completely absent from *Multitude*). They do not even consider the effects of the withdrawal of the state in Africa—in particular they ignore the ways in which state failure in different parts of Africa has created the context for an expanding informal sector, and the ways the practices that produce such a sector might be conceptualized as resistance.³⁰

Nor does their analysis resonate much with contemporary dynamics in the Middle East. There, a belief system, Islam, neither modern nor imperial, retains much of its salience, and indeed, seems to be growing in importance as the idiom in which post-national solutions are thought through. For that matter, the decline of the (inter)national order seems to have released Christianity with renewed force, particularly in the U.S. The role of Christianity in the U.S., both in terms of its relationship to US idealism and as the incubator for fundamentalism³¹ is ignored in both *Multitude* and *Empire*, despite the lengthy

^{30.} On informalization as a means of resistance in the context of state failure in Tanzania, see Aili Mari Tripp (1997) *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania*. University of California Press.

^{31.} See for instance M.Mamdani (2004) *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, a text that traces the roots of modern fundamentalism to the U.S.

investigation into the genealogy of U.S. power in the latter. The belief that the nation-state system would simply give way to a world unified (either as Empire or as Multitude) seemed tendentious at the time *Empire* was published. Now it seems even more difficult to imagine. The problem is ultimately that the world is so uneven economically and diverse culturally that it is difficult to see how the multitude could communicate without the mediation of national and/or regional institutions. There is an implicit, under-theorized recognition of this in *Multitude* itself. In contrast to *Empire*, rhetoric about 'subordinate' and 'dominant' countries, global south and north has slipped in. This in some ways better brings their analysis in line with the wider world. But the authors do not explicitly explain why they have shifted from a view that so emphasized the 'smoothness' of the world economy, and it is difficult to see how this shift in framework does not nullify considerable amounts of their theoretical apparatus. Although Hardt and Negri are more aware in *Multitude* of the role states play in constituting the 'Empire' system, they remain dogmatically uninterested in the roles states or international institutions might play in the struggles of the multitude. Instead, they appear to adhere to a purist politics in which the multitude can commune unmediated by any institutions that might recognize differences.

Hardt and Negri's works occupy a prominent place in contemporary debates because of their visionary quality, because of the boldness of their political intervention into debates on the Left, and because of their attempt to synthesize different philosophical and social science currents into their theoretical apparatus. Their attempt to fuse global historical analysis with the political philosophy of Guattari, Deleuze, and Foucault, is arrestingly novel. Likewise their synthesis of contemporary developments in the technologies of global governance with emerging figures of new global subjectivities, presents provocative challenges to the Left. Whatever the limits of the concepts of 'Empire' and 'multitude,' the authors' effort to historicize modern concepts of sovereignty and resistance is admirable and necessary to fully understand the possibilities of our own historical moment.

At the same time, the over-generalizations in both works undermine their political and analytical utility. Their peremptory declarations regarding the irrelevance of states, historical cultures, peasants, and north-south divides, undermines the strength of their visionary appeal in the face of hard empirical realities that continue to structure central political questions of the present. A failure to respond to gender concerns represents another missed opportunity. Work that does incorporate these aspects—as many of the writers in *Debating Empire* and *Empire's New Clothes* point out—may arrive at quite different

responses to questions about the transformation of sovereignty after the end of the Cold War and the possibilities of resistance in the present. Such work, however, will have to engage with Hardt and Negri's visions for the future of political economy in the 21st century.