



Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and Real Empire: The Terrors of 9-11 and After¹

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Abstract What can *Empire* tell us about the world after September 11 2001? A book with such hubris and impact should cast light on the horrific attack on New York's Twin Towers and its interpretive framework should assist analysis of the post 9-11 world. However, although much of *Empire's* repertoire is useful, its analytic and prescriptive capacity is compromised by its tendency to analyse the global political economy as if its telescopic vision is a *fait accompli*. Firstly, *Empire* is written as if all the world's production has been 'informationalised.' Secondly, it renders states irrelevant. Thirdly, it sees all effective resistance to current global realities as postcapitalist. These projections may be tendential but are presently utopian and fantastic. 9-11 and thereafter have reinforced trends against Hardt and Negri's teleology. Their vision is premature, although promising and even inspiring. Their analysis, although provocative, rests on shaky foundations. The world economy is based on commodities more substantial than information. The state — in first and third worlds — is far from dead and many contradictions arise therein. Resistance is as much pre-modern or modern as 'postmodern.' The globe's trajectory is not yet what is predicted — or assumed — in *Empire*.

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Introduction: Are We All New Yorkers?

It is ironic for *Empire* readers that the horror of 9-11 happened in the centre of the empire so vividly portrayed in that book. The Twin Towers symbolised everything *Empire* discussed. From the earth-encompassing power of finance capital, to internet capitalism's connection and compression of space and time, and to the cosmopolitan nature of the workers there, the towers were the epitome of everything *Empire* loved and hated about the world today. Antonio Negri said 'we are all New Yorkers' in an interview after 9-11 (Cocco and Lazarrato 2002) and it is clear that the book he and Michael Hardt produced really does see the whole world as if it was New York. For Hardt and Negri, the global 'multitude' is composed of urban (and urbane) citizens whose autonomy and hybridity make institutions such as states, and ideologies such as religions, evaporate into the mists of the immaterial labour that now drive the world. The multitude's labour is impossible to measure, so all of its members have equal value (cf. Resnick and Wolff 2001; Dyer-Witherford 2001) and they all really want the same thing. Be they waiters in the Greenwich Village cafés, analysts for the currency speculators on Wall Street, or professors at Columbia University – or at similar sites in New York's image anywhere in the world – sometime soon they will all oppose capitalist exploitation and national oppression, replacing them with the joys of being a communist.

The kind of resistance that brought the Twin Towers down, however, forces the irony to take an awkward and bitter twist. Al-Qaeda hardly represents the postmodern enemies of post-imperialism envisaged (for the most part) in *Empire*. *Empire's* sweep is so vast and so fast that religion, nationalism and any of the other forces inspiring Osama bin-Laden and his many followers are in the dustbin. When these forces revisit the postmodern world their aspirations are 'incommunicable' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 54, Hardt and Negri 2001a; Negri 2002): it is as if they have arisen from the dead. Contrary to *Empire*, however, they dealt New York and – more importantly but also almost erased from the book – the *state* within which the city is ensconced a blow that catalysed a form of empire Hardt and Negri thought had disappeared. A 'one state beats all' form of imperial power has arisen from the ashes of Twin Towers. It is now wreaking terror in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq and chilling the hearts of European politicians and United Nations multilateralists – and it inspired 15 million members of the 'multitude' to demonstrate. But the people who guided their passenger-packed planes into the Twin Towers were not 'New Yorkers' in the mold of Hardt and Negri's multitude. Nor were most of those in Iraq on whom bombs rained and American troops shot in March and April 2003. Neither are the Americans who supported the campaign. The actions, beliefs and structures of the world in the post 9-11 era are significantly different from those inscribed in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* – as is the etiology of the event.

There are three ways to assess *Empire's* inability to foresee the world in the wake of 9-11. I list and analyse them in reverse order of theoretical priority (indicated in the abstract) because the spectacle of such an event as 9-11 demands that in this instance the 'epiphenomenal' comes first (Campbell 2001). Firstly, the act of terrorism that destroyed the Twin Towers and killed the approximately 3,000 people within it must be analysed in terms of the way in which Hardt and Negri understand the nature of resistance to global capitalism (or, in their lexicon, 'the informational mode of production'). Their uncertainty about the agents and strategies of resistance lends ambiguity to their thinking about 9-11

and similar events. Secondly, the importance of the ‘state’ as a structure within both core and peripheral components of global society must be re-stated and theorised in the light of *Empire’s* elision of that task. The contradictions inherent in state formation in the third world combined with those of the construction and maintenance of American empire in the current global conjuncture create both the terror of ‘resistance’ from below and ‘régime change’ from above. Hardt and Negri tend to wish these complexities away in their construction of a world full of libertarian flows of desire and capital. The ‘terror from above’ that has been visited on Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of 9-11 suggests the increasing dominance of American state power *qua* state power, instead of the erasure of such authority as predicted in *Empire*. Thirdly – and most critically in terms of structural fundamentals – it is necessary to undertake a foundational ‘political economy’ critique deconstructing Hardt and Negri’s assessment of the nature of the global capitalist system. Their hasty ironing out of the fundamentally uneven development of the global complex of state-society formations is simply unsustainable when one gets down to the ‘nitty-gritty’ of political economy. *Empire* smoothes out all of the contradictions of ‘third world’ development in spite of itself. This myopia regarding the underdeveloped world is at the root of Hardt and Negri’s too exuberant celebration of global cyber-capitalism – and thus also at the centre of their erasure of the state and their misunderstanding of the resistance-terror nexus. This essay will thus reposition empire on the ‘real world’ rather than the ethereal one created in *Empire* – while acknowledging that much of the required rethinking has been inspired by the simultaneously frustrating and stimulating book.

9-11 Terror as Event of Resistance: Empire’s Ambivalence

Given Antonio Negri’s association (by reputation if not in fact) with anti-capitalist terrorism of days gone by,² the ironies of the relationship between 9-11 and *Empire* accumulate. On its own merits, however, *Empire* forecasts many of the ambiguities of anti-capitalist resistance in the shadow of 9-11. It was published long before September 2001, and written before Seattle’s inspiring 1999 moment for radical global civil society. The book is better at anticipating the latter (indeed, it can be said to have celebrated such moments before they happened) than the former – but 9-11 is not quite off *Empire’s* map. Hardt and Negri’s post-9-11 articulations reflect their book’s ambivalence and uncertainty about how to bring down capitalism. When they wrote together in mid-2001, they celebrated the actions of global anti-capitalists as they marched at Genoa (Hardt and Negri 2001a). After 9-11, when Negri was interviewed alone he condemned the attackers by making them the equivalents to imperialist terror – he was “the enemy of both Bush and Bin Laden” (Cocco and Lazzarato 2002). In another interview, however, he said he was sorry that the severity of the Twin Towers collapse was not matched by the Pentagon’s and that the attackers “missed the White House” (Negri 2001). Such a statement is a tacit recognition that Negri may really believe that the symbols and institutions of the ‘state’ are just as important as those of finance and information capitalism – a belief somewhat against the grain of *Empire*. More importantly, it and other of Hardt and Negri’s post-9-11

² In the late 1970s the Italian state found Negri guilty, based on slender evidence, of involvement in a kidnapping effort. He was also said to be one of the leading thinkers behind the ‘urban terrorists,’ the Red Brigades. He has been in exile in France or under house arrest in Padua since then. See Stille, 2002 for details and Negri’s letter (2003) in response.

statements follow the book's pitfalls in its analysis of anti-capitalist resistance. In short, *Empire's* refusal to acknowledge that some forms of resistance to capitalism may not be congruent with the joyful ideologies of those marching against MacDonaldis and the World Bank makes it almost impossible for them to imagine the world-view and praxis of groups such as Al-Queda.

Empire's sneaking premonitions of 9-11-like events of resistance demonstrate this wavering and uncertain line, as does its uncertainty about their causes and consequences based in its too quick flattening out of what are very uneven modes of resistance. CIA agents eager to find Hardt and Negri ranking with Osama bin Laden at the lectern of global terror might find 'evidence' in *Empire*.³ In the ashes of the Twin Towers, what would defenders of empire make of eerily prescient lines such as the ones promising struggles would "leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 55)? What would they read into the assertion that the many seemingly independent struggles throughout the world are actually linked because as capital becomes more and more widespread, the struggles are objectively anti-capitalist and therefore united whether their participants know it or not? "Simply by focusing their own powers, concentrating their energies in a tense and compact coil, these serpentine struggles strike directly at the highest articulations of imperial order" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 58). *Empire* refuses to recognise a "*hierarchy among the labouring subjects in revolt*" (Hardt and Negri 2001, 241 – italics theirs) because all labour power has been rendered equal by the forces of the information mode of production. All labour is postmodern so all resistance is similarly historicised. Thus, as Mitchell Cohen has pointed out (2002), for Hardt and Negri even the Iranian revolution was postmodern.

This ambivalence about the 'anti-Western' aspects of Islam makes *Empire* sit uncomfortably with 9-11. While celebrating the acts of resistance with which the academics and students reading *Empire* can identify – anarchists smashing MacDonaldis windows, workers striking in the cities of the 'north,' and the revolutionary/reformists such as the Zapatistas in the 'south' – *Empire* seems never to have considered a 'fundamentalist' religious movement in the same category. When Hardt and Negri wrote of 'fundamentalist' Islam they immediately turned to considerations of similarly inclined Christians in modernity's outbacks as if to discredit it (Hardt and Negri 2000, 137-150). But *Empire* takes fundamentalist Islam more seriously than its Christian counterparts.⁴ For Hardt and Negri fundamentalist Islam refuses "modernity as a weapon of Euro-American hegemony:" therefore it is "postmodern" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 149). For them, the Iranian revolution was "the first postmodern revolution" because in a "geopolitical" sense it was "really the refusal of the powers that are emerging in the new imperial order" and "a powerful rejection of the world market" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 149). One does not have to celebrate the Shah's 'modernisation' programme, nor contemplate the possibility that the progression from the Shah to Khomeini could also be a 'blowback' resulting from Mossadegh's American assisted removal from power, to

³ So too would many far-right ideologues: see Celini 2001.

⁴ *Empire* fails, however, to take into account how the 'fundamentalist' Islam that has become *political* and sometimes *terrorist* owes so much to American manipulation and a twisting of the 'cultural' into the 'political' form: see Mamdani, forthcoming.

acknowledge a problem here. Whether this predicament is a “symptom” of postmodernists’ fruitless search for a revolutionary cause, having its origins with Foucault’s waxing and waning on the fate of Iran’s in 1979, as Cohen is delighted to record, is one question. A more important one is: does a cautious celebration of Khomeini’s heaven on earth translate to a similar perspective on the Taliban or those once hiding in its midst? Is ‘being against’ Empire enough to rally all ‘anti-capitalist’ causes to *Empire’s* side?⁵ Does this lead to ‘being for’ the men who crashed into the Twin Towers?

In spite of *Empire’s* uncertainty over the connections between Al-Qaeda style terror and other struggles against capitalism, there is enough said in *Empire* and after to illustrate Hardt and Negri’s distaste for resistance based on nationalist or religious essentialism. One wonders, though, what would have been said if the amateur pilots had been members of a revived Weather Underground or Baader-Meinhoff Gang? Without an unequivocal condemnation of any form of terrorism, that question is hard to answer. Perhaps the grounds for appraisal would be based on a consequentialist approach to assess the damage done. Then, it would not matter who were the perpetrators of the Tower’s meltdown and the deaths of approximately 3,000 people (and possibly many thousands more from poison fumes, smoke and ashes, etc., in the aftermath of the crash). They could have been members of a far-right conspiracy hatched from the White House basement to justify the sewing up of the Middle East and Central Asia for the use of the American oil giants (Vidal 2001), or anarchists taking revenge for their comrade’s death in Genoa. If they contributed to imperial overstretch and the downfall of the United States of America, that would be good enough. Perhaps a truly cosmopolitan world would arise from its ashes: a sort of postmodern Woodrow Wilson might finally find his place and build a new League of the Multitude instead of a League of Nations. If instead the crash of the Twin Towers and the smashed walls in the Pentagon lead to a strengthening of Empire – be it state-led or left to its own flows – then they were misadventures, ultra-leftism or ultra-fundamentalism at its worst. It currently looks as if the latter trajectory is unfolding, so both consequentialist and more wholly ethical perspectives can merge comfortably in condemnation.

In the meantime, after *Empire* and after 9-11 all Negri could do was to reiterate the book’s lines about the ‘incommunicability’ of such forms of resistance – but this time he did not assert their ‘objective’ unity. Rather, for him 9-11 constituted a “rupture” with the continuity linking labour’s 19th century struggles with the marches in Seattle, Prague and Johannesburg: it was “a suspension of the process, a setback, a block: it is something that has been imposed” (Negri 2002). However, another paradigm would suggest that 9-11 was much more consistent with Empire’s progress than posited by the book bearing its name. If the horror of 9-11 and its aftermath is seen as part of fundamental processes of peripheral nation-state construction and imperial hubris rather than a sharp break from them, there needs to be more analysis of the political economy of these processes than the political philosophy of cyber-space and the teleology of St. Franciscan consciousness.

⁵ It further complicates matters to remember that at times Hardt and Negri nearly say that even postmodernists are much too close to capital to be considered part of the multitude: Cohen does not notice this, but it makes postmodernists singularly ill-equipped for the multitudes’ revolution. Would they rather shop or take up counter-hegemonic religions?

State Formation and Violence in the Age of Empire

Hardt and Negri's *Empire* develops a very good framework for analysing how the economic, political and cultural/ideological 'regions' of modes of social relations of production⁶ changed from pre-modernity to modernity and the present era of postmodernisation. However, in their haste to move from the former to the latter (A to C), they seem to have forgotten that most of the world is mired within a stalled transition to modern capitalism (A to B). *Empire* is full of examples of the violence of primitive accumulation, state construction, and the articulation of people's 'identity' and autonomy with the halting evolution of national and democratic formation (Moore 2001b, c & d). However, its haste to dismiss nationalism and third world statism à la Luxemburg as "poisoned gifts" because "*domestic* structures of oppression are equally [as] severe" as foreign ones forces it to minimise their contradictions (Hardt and Negri 2000, 97, 132).

Indeed, it is at this nexus wherein Hardt and Negri fortuitously foreshadow the current battle of states in Iraq. In their discussion of 'ethnic' struggles and efforts to contain them they almost foresee the American state's contemporary attempts to create a 'modern' and 'democratic' state in the shambles of Saddam Hussein's rule. For Hardt and Negri, ethnic struggles (by extension, religious ones too) merely "make the fabric of global relations more fluid and, by affirming new identities and new localities, present a more malleable material for control" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 37). They call up forms of military intervention "dictated unilaterally by the United States" but carried out by its allies to "contain ... enemies ... most often called terrorist, a crude conceptual and terminological reduction that is rooted in a police mentality" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 37). However, the USA has gone far beyond 'containment' in this case. As well, contrary to a Kautskyian 'super-imperialist' perspective many of its significant European 'allies' were not pulled into the task. More importantly, though, the current indications of ethnic and religious contradictions in post-Hussein Iraq suggest that Donald Rumsfeld and *Empire* share a certain disregard for 'pre-liberal' political mobilization. They also give short shrift to the precarious – but necessary – constructions of 'modern' state edifices on these social throwbacks. Hardt and Negri's fraternity with Marx's

insistence that Empire is better than the forms of society and modes of production that came before it ... grounded on a healthy and lucid disgust for the parochial and rigid hierarchies that preceded capitalist society as well as on a recognition that the potential for liberation is increased in the new situation (Hardt and Negri 2000, 43)

may place them in an unholy alliance with the Fukuyamas, Wolfowitzs and Perles of this world.⁷ However, both paradigms on the end of history fail to deal with the long and hard

⁶ The rather cumbersome phrase 'modes of social relations of production' is Robert Cox's (1987) attempt to marry Gramscian Marxism to international political economy, signifying an attempt to move away from the economism of much Marxist theory. The notion of 'regions' comes from Althusser and Poulantzas.

⁷ Uday Singh Mehta's (1999) analysis of how the liberals of 19th century British empire condemned India with its 'backwardness,' and how the more conservative Edmund Burke was receptive to difference and criticised empire's brutal efforts of modernisation, is of some relevance

slog involved with the state's role in identity formation and the political economy of modernisation. Saying *deja vu* does not eliminate the problem. Nor can it be sorted out from imperial heights.

A look at the Middle East from a perspective other than that of considering whether 'fundamentalist' Islam was postmodern or not would demonstrate this. From Israel and Palestine to Iraq and Iran, state structures imposed out of the maelstrom of imperialism on 'non-western' social formations at the end of the first imperial moment have led to little but conflict. As the next bi-imperial age led to the 'blowback' that created the Taliban and Al-Queda out of the Soviet and American struggle for Afghanistan, so followed an era of incipient unilateral imperialism that sees American hegemonic aspirations – among other things inspired by the fallout of 9-11 – repeating the mistakes of its Anglo predecessor. It also inspires inter-imperialist rivalry. Hardt and Negri's optimism that all of this could be transcended by a form of cybercapitalism eclipsing all such mundane contradictions by one between 'the multitude' and a few global bankers (with 'states' playing the minor role of policemen) is matched in its fantasy only by the dreams of the 'globalists' behind George W. Bush. The latter at least realise that it will take more than a few policeman to perform the task – and that the role of the American state will be increased, rather than diminished.

These pages in *Empire* also indicate the difficulties Hardt and Negri have in dealing with the political and institutional management of their empire. The above phrase about the relationship between the USA and its allies in terms of who manages peripheral 'enemies' contradicts a later one. At first, Hardt and Negri say that the USA 'unilaterally' – and successfully – calls on its allies to contain or repress an "enemy of Empire" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 37). This is congruent with its actions *vis a vis* Al-Queda (the welter of states' paranoiac anti-terrorism legislation is testament to this) – and certainly it 'tried' to bring the whole 'western' world in on its Iraqi crusade. Later, however, they say that the USA is "called to intervene" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 181) by the global conglomeration of states and international organisations – a situation reminiscent of Kosovo, not Iraq. This is indicative of the ambiguities in the book about whether the new Empire is led by the USA or managed multilaterally. To be sure, the most hawkish of the leaders of the new empire follow Hardt and Negri's script when they invoke an "omni-crisis" and "just war" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 189, 12) in the wake of 9-11 and the seeming success of their Iraqi takeover bears some of *Empire* out. Surely, however, American invocations of "international justice, *not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right*" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 180; emphasis theirs) are now wearing a little thin.

If anything, the Iraqi invasion has negated Hardt and Negri's assertion that the end of the Vietnam war "might be seen as the final moment of the imperialist tendency and thus a point of passage to a new regime of the Constitution" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 178-9). With that claim and the 'materialist' addition of 'network power,' Hardt and Negri opine that 'imperialism' has died. In its place, the freedoms of the American constitution have become "imperial:" they are "constructed on the model of rearticulating an open space and reinventing incessantly diverse and singular relations in networks across an

unbounded terrain” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 182). No wonder modern day Henry Luces raved about *Empire*.

If *Empire's* prognoses were accurate, the wars against al-Qaeda (and later Iraq) would have been waged for and by the freedom loving people of the world. In the first few days after 9-11, some of the discourse in reaction to the tragedy appeared to be going in that direction. Intimations of global freedom and secularity held up for ransom by religious ‘fanatics’ were heard. Some talk of an ‘international’ crime, and the courts for such ensued. Even anti-corporate globalisation activists postponed their marches against the World Bank in Washington. James Wolfensohn’s kind of globalisation (already softened somewhat with a ‘post-Washington consensus’ veneer after the East Asian financial crisis of 1997-98) seemed better than global *jihad* and perhaps the advocates of more and better aid for the ‘third world’ would be able to make their pleas heard (Bretton Woods Project, 2001). Malcolm Bull – reviewing *Empire* in the context of 9-11 – did not sound completely off the wall when he opined:

If the US wants to make the world a safer place, it will eventually have to offer, or force other governments to provide, the population of the entire world with the means to participate in global society. This will involve real constraints on the operation of the market, particularly finance capital. Tuesday, 11 September 2001 may prove to be the date at which Neoliberalism and globalisation parted company (2001).

The reaction to the Twin Towers crash could have added to the cosmopolitan call of global capital and its constitutional twin (Archibuigi, 2001). The ‘civilisational’ call to arms might not have seemed so cynical (Bowden 2002). However, a nationalist/imperialist response – the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq – soon overwhelmed the elements of internationalism that might have been compatible with *Empire's* trajectories. As Robin Blackburn (2001) has put it, the fact that “both attackers and victims were of many nations, and the world-wide revulsion at its devastating consequences, could have been used to mount a multilateral response. But that would have been contrary to the administration’s every instinct and inclination.” The new Emperor’s multilateralist, cosmopolitan, and welfarist clothes have disappeared. Naked superpower ambition has taken over, and it only rarely attempts to cover itself.

Empire's first pages, wherein Hans Kelson’s Kantian projections about the global power of a United Nations-like body are accorded more weight than most materialists would grant, betray Hardt and Negri’s cosmopolitan hopes and their reliance on a jurisprudence model that would make any international human rights lawyer proud (Hardt and Negri 2000, 5-6, 8, 15). Again, they jump over content with form. If they had not, perhaps the USA’s jump into unilateralism would not be seen as a ‘rupture’ invoked by 9-11. The most basic ‘materialist’ analysis would have given pause to Hardt and Negri’s ethereal projections of flattened globalisation. The American economy now makes up thirty-one per cent of the global economy and it spends nearly as much on its military as its NATO partners, Russia, and China combined (Lobe 2002): the state that emerges from such bare indicators is not going to disappear in favour of a nebulous ‘global capital’ for quite some time (cf. Robinson 2001).

States on the periphery of global capitalism do not seem likely to disappear soon, either. Nor do they promise an end to violence. From states throwing up the likes of Mugabe and Mobutu to Saddam and Suharto, in Cold War times and thereafter we have seen and will see horrific combinations of tragic terror amidst conspicuous consumption. Perhaps now the era of state consolidation is over, before it even started to get off the ground. It is being replaced by warlordism in places like Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, connected tightly to the global circuits of coltan and debt-collection (Reno 2003; Duffield 2001), fragmentation in places like Indonesia, and semblances of populist-cum-'liberal' democracy in 'semi-peripheral' but grossly unequal social formations such as Brazil and South Africa. Far from ironing out transitions from pre-to-post modernity, the ultra-globalising neo-liberal moment exposes the violent and crime-ridden nature of stalled processes of peripheral primitive accumulation and state construction – processes that were protracted enough in their original 'western' manifestation (Perelman 2000), but appear to be never-ending, and even more intricately wrapped up in the state, in the 'third world.'

Hardt and Negri only hint at the possibilities of ameliorating such contradictions with global forms of Keynesianism⁸ – but be they economically 'interventionist' or merely 'failing' and taking many with them as they fall, 'third world' states will not be sucked up into the vacuum of the informationalised mode of production. The question is, *why* are the combinations of authoritarianism and uneven accumulation in the 'third world' intractable? To return to the Middle East, the USA's main allies – Saudi Arabia and Israel – epitomise states based on the denial of basic democracy and the retraction of international norms of post-colonial sovereignty. American support for Saudi Arabian feudalism is key to the survival of that state (and also, in a roundabout way, is the ultimate source of Al-Queda sorts of resistance). Yet in Iran between the times of Mossadegh and Khomeini, a state-fed 'modernisation' was the preferred mode of empire consolidation. In Iraq the state-secularist Saddam Hussein was supported for a considerable time: now potentially more pliable puppets are seduced while contracts for 'reconstruction' are signed with the occupying power (Leigh and Whitaker 2003; Black 2003). In all cases, authoritarianism (be it 'modernising' or 'feudal') has been the result of American foreign policy. *Empire*, however, is predisposed to ignore this. Hardt and Negri may be invoked to see a new empire in the making, but it is very much planned to give priority to *American* business, and it will be firmly guarded (for a number of months, in any case) by the monopoly of force that all states need, be they imperial or not.

When one addresses the question of what sort of resistance is thrown up within these 'third world' states, Hardt and Negri offer little but the dismissal of the results of anti-colonial 'liberation' struggles. The uneven development of the 'middle class' and its intelligentsia is not investigated, so the rise of people such as Osama bin Laden is not understandable – unless he is fitted into a paradigm suggesting he has been unconsciously sucked into a broader mode of hegemony than were his colonial predecessors (Hardt and Negri 2000, 133-4). The only mode of resistance Hardt and Negri choose for the 'third

⁸ Neither Hardt and Negri nor this paper pay any attention to the role of the state in the development of the East Asian 'tigers' and its relations to the 1997-8 financial crisis. Such a discussion is necessary in any consideration of the role of the state in 'third world' development.

world' is the humanitarian movement. True to their contradictions, though, they cannot decide whether its members are scouts for military intervention, hygienists keeping the 'west' clean, or the vanguard of the Franciscan revolution (Hardt and Negri 2000, 35-7, 136, 312-14, 412-13). In any case, their choice of 'agent' for the 'poor' in the third world is morally solipsistic (Hyndman 2000; Rieff 2002).

To fully understand the relationship between 'empire' and various modalities of state power, however – and to see how Hardt and Negri skirt over these issues – a closer look at empire's *political economy* is called for.

Empire's Political Economy and Empire's Mirage: The Foundations of Hardt and Negri's Illusions

The main problem with *Empire's* political economy is that it is based on a subjective notion of what the ultimate form of resistance to global capitalism would be instead of a precise calculation of global capitalism's relations of production. Because Hardt and Negri want 'the poor' to constitute the

common denominator of life, the foundation of the multitude ... the very possibility of the world ... the field of immanence presented, confirmed, consolidated and opened ... the center of the political and productive terrain [and the only force with the potential for] World Possibility (Hardt and Negri 2000, 156-7)

they have to force their analysis to fit that utopian mold. Thus, even though the coltan diggers in the DR Congo, the hair-dressers in Cologne, the sex-sellers in Chicago and the cocaine harvesters in Colombia are not 'proletarians' they are equal in their production of value. As for the other members of the 'multitude,' they may be professors or computer technicians, but as long as they march against the IMF they may as well be home-'factory' owning clothing assemblers in Cape Town or street-kids in Casablanca. It is not easy to build a 'political economy' on such foundations, but *Empire* tries, so it is imperative to attempt to grasp its formulations.

Peripheral Production

Empire's category of 'immaterial labour' joins what used to be called the proletariat with peasants and the petty-bourgeoisie – across the divide of 'first' and 'third' worlds – to create 'the poor' and 'the multitude.' Labour – once divided into a clearly defined and largely industrial proletariat under the power of the bourgeoisie (but according to Hardt and Negri, forcing its innovations upon the bourgeoisie and thus propelling expansion, even to Empire) – is now a universal and equivalent force. Slaves and professors along with sugar-cane cutters and computer nerds are part of this radical multitude: they only have to further realise their power, and communicate a bit better, to continue their role of making history and to take it to unparalleled heights. In the 'third world' this is dependency theory taken to its limit: there is no more articulation of modes of production to worry about. The multitude is divided only by poverty or relative wealth⁹

⁹ *Empire* never remarks upon the income disparities of many members of this 'universal'

not by differential relations to the production process and those – in and out of states – who control it. The value of the labour of those who do not own the global means of production is the same. All they have to do is take over.

Hardt and Negri condemn dependency and world systems theory because they do not think it is possible to ‘de-link’ from today’s global market, a stance they simplistically attribute to Samir Amin and company (Hardt and Negri 2000, 258, 283-4; cf. Surin 2001). They also think it is harder to move from ‘periphery’ to ‘semi-periphery’ in this age of informationalised capitalism than does (or did) Wallerstein (Hardt and Negri 2000, 286-89, 334-35). The core of their approach to the ‘third world’ and its relationship to dominant forms of global production is more contradictory than their critique of *dependência* and world systems theory, though. Perhaps deliberately confusing past and present tense, they state that “the productive relationship with the ‘dark continents’ serves as the economic foundation of the European nation-state” and “the *central* motor for the creation of capitalists ... came from outside England, from commerce – or really from conquest ...” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 115, 257: my emphasis). Yet at other times, *Empire*’s emphasis on processes of primitive accumulation, proletarianisation (the real subsumption of labour to capital) and what could be called multitudinisation and biopoliticisation in the ‘core’ of the world economy seems to recognise that these processes – not trade, commerce and conquest – are largely responsible for the productive power of capitalism and its subsequent stage(s) (Hardt and Negri 2000, 25). Hardt and Negri recognise irreconcilable *differences* between ‘pre-capitalist,’ ‘capitalist’ and ‘postmodern’ relations of production – even though capitalism in the core is reliant upon and can even invent peripheral modes of labour and social reproduction (Hardt and Negri 2000, 120-3). However, they do not want to directly privilege one’s productivity over another. They do not even want to recognise the difference between absolute and relative surplus value *within* capitalism, let alone the different means of value extraction in the unevenly mixed modes of production scattered over the ‘third world.’

Hardt and Negri arrive at this universalisation of value and productivity through a complicated fusion of theories based on Marx’s classical notion of primitive accumulation, circulationist dependency formulations (Brenner, 1977), and the latest notions of post-industrialism and information capitalism. Thus we read that American slavery was “internal to capitalist production” and also that those desiring to “flee the relationship of command” pushed capital towards its particular forms of freedom (Hardt and Negri 2000, 125). Today, the ‘third world’ forms of labour can be analysed as “postmodern primitive accumulation,” a process by which “a certain accumulation of information is necessary before capitalist production can take place.” Given that this form of social accumulation is more and more immaterial, the object of labour is becoming equally universal. There is no ‘before and after’ to this new process of primitive accumulation. Nor does it have internal and external dimensions. Furthermore, because “informational accumulation ... destroys or at least destructures the previously existing productive processes [and] immediately integrates [them] in its own networks” it “generates the highest levels of productivity.” More than “*simultaneity of social production*,” we are pointed in the direction of a “new

social mode of production” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 258-9, also 52-3; emphasis in *Empire*). Presto, we have globalised information workers.

One wonders if the coltan diggers in the eastern Congo shovelling the essential mineral for cell-phones, Sony play-stations and NASA space-stations under the guns of Rwandan-backed warlords, are ‘conscious’ of their new power, and whether their subjectivity was the force behind this constellation of extraction, production and consumption. More traditional analytical techniques than *Empire’s* would inscribe their ‘objective’ position in the global division of labour with less certainty. Or in Zimbabwe, one might ask: who constitutes this segment of universal labour, the horticultural workers spraying flowers to be exported to Holland, or the so-called ‘war veterans’ (in alliance with a very visible state) doing a little *primitive* primitive accumulation on their own? Is this the emergence of a hybrid of feudalism, primitive accumulation, and its postmodern, *informatisation*, relation? Hardt and Negri try to have their cake and eat it too: they alert us to the complicated mix of peripheral production relations but then get caught up in the homogenising space of the internet, wherein we are all cyborgs.

This may be but a way to dispense with a predicament *Empire* recognises for Marx, too, in his severe warnings for India: imperialism is a nasty process, but it is better than nasty feudalism, primitive communalism or ‘Asiatic’ modes of production and it is the only way to the future (Hardt and Negri 2000, 118-120; Hutnyk 2001, 125-28). *Empire* never solves this conundrum, but by collapsing it into the world’s ‘highly productive’ new mode of production ignores it in two ways. Firstly, its readers are told to believe the subjects of these different modes are united by their universal labour – this immaterial labour that makes all the workers of the world produce the same value. Secondly, *Empire* assumes that the trials of primitive accumulation, nation-state formation, and democratisation are either completed – been there, done that – or are so banal as to be written out of history. (Of course, they could be ‘stalled,’ but Hardt and Negri pull them out of their ‘primitive’ state by making them as productive as full-blown capitalism). Their assumption is that the whole world is ‘there’ – we have reached the end of history, as another popularisation of global processes has it. What they have done is added a new mode of production and identity to a world system in which all the old ones are still trying to be born, and very unevenly articulated. What they *think* they have done is created a theory in which all the subjects of these different modes are united by their universal labour. This is philosophical and sociological sleight of hand. It either puts us back into the ‘stages of growth’ trajectory of Walter Whitman Rostow or a ‘tough love’ Menshevik stance towards the ‘third world.’¹⁰

Hardt and Negri’s reply to criticism based on a ‘complexity of modes of production’ point of view is that the immaterial labour of which they speak is “hegemonic,” permeating all the other forms even if it has not completely taken them over “quantitatively.” One could say that this is not new: the intellectual labour of cartography has always been a key component of capital’s expansion, as has the agronomic knowledge of plantation production. They go on to say “recent transformations of labour and production have tended to destroy the separate conditions of the production of value”

¹⁰ Radhika Desai made the ‘tough love’ comment in a review of this paper’s first draft for *Acme*.

(Hardt and Negri 2001b, 241). This does not make the “conditions of workers ... homogenous,” but the “spatial relation” of the “dominant and subordinate regions of the world” has changed such that “they are now one within the other ... The internalisation of the ‘outside’ seems to us the fundamental characteristic of the becoming of imperial globalisation.” Rather than “attenuating” exploitation, this intensifies it – without “flattening, neutralisation or homogenisation of the different conditions of labour, wages, or life of the proletariat” (Hardt and Negri, 2001b, pp. 240-1). It appears, then, that in spite of the many *forms* of labour in the world, labourers are indeed *proletarians* (now truly separated from their means of production?) ruled as much by impulses from cyberspace as the heavy hand of sweatshop bosses and plantation foremen. There are “no differences of nature, only of degree,” between the ‘third world’ and the core of the system” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 335). One is not sure how the ‘informal sector’ that is so much a part of the urban ‘third world’ fits into this scenario, let alone the completely unemployed urbanites or the rural residents permanently straddling subsistence farming and casual work for others.

As noted in the section on resistance, this suppression of difference within relations of production leads to a similar termination of variety within modes of resistance. The Taliban to the Socialist Workers are united by their new relations to cypercapiatalism. They *really* are together – if only they could think about it for a little bit.

Communications and Core Commodities

Third world’ labour is not the only ‘political economy’ problem Hardt and Negri have. By ignoring the role of ‘hard’ commodities such as oil in the economy of the United States, for example, *Empire* can make the global economy appear to be held together more by ideology than by real goods – and make the problem of unilateral imperialism more easily surmountable than it is. Hardt and Negri’s ‘informational’ bias posits that “the nature of the common enemy” can be “clarified” – indeed it is an “essential political task” to do so – if only a “new type of communication that functions not on the basis of resemblances but on the basis of differences: a communication of singularities” can be found (Hardt and Negri 2000, 57). In other words, if an ethereal global capital can be blamed for the multitude’s discontent – and a way can be worked out to equitably distribute the wealth it has accumulated – disagreement is alright about everything else, ranging from women’s’ rights to university curricula and who is or is not God, or if there is one. This may be little more than a left-wing version of Isaiah Berlin’s liberal pluralism, but it still does not tell us how to get there (Ignatieff, 1999).

However, this ‘communicational’ approach has more fundamental problems. Even if all the world’s workers toiled within the same ambit of production relations and all believed there was no God, what would happen if one ‘community’ of them consumed gluttonous amounts of a scarce commodity and feared their pleasure was threatened by members of another ‘community’? They might quite easily be led to believe that one man who was seen to have a lot of that commodity was responsible for the destruction of one of their symbols of singular communication (apparently well over fifty per cent of Americans believe that Saddam Hussein was responsible for the events of 9-11). If American oil consumption, and Iraq’s role in it, is examined such considerations take on importance.

The United States imports over 10 million barrels of oil per day, well over half of its total consumption. That oil now costs the consumer less than it did in the 1950s (Cumings 1999). By 2020 the USA will be importing nearly 17 million barrels, or 65 per cent of its supply (Klare 2002). Since 1973, American oil consumption has increased by 12 percent, including 42 per cent in the transportation sector, and oil imports have risen three-fold since 1985, both absolutely and as a share of domestic production (Espinaza, 2002). Some analysts state that thirty per cent of American oil imports come from the Persian Gulf region – including 19 per cent from Saudi Arabia (and the USA does not like relying too much on this state), nine per cent from pre-invasion Iraq (with potential approaching Saudi Arabia), and three from Kuwait (Ahrari 2002).¹¹ Forty per cent of the USA's energy needs are provided by oil, and the Persian Gulf holds about two-thirds of the world's untapped oil (Klare 2003, 135). Such figures do not predominate in *Empire*, but they do indicate the precariousness of *American* empire even as it dominates the world system. It takes more than finance capital and the internet to simultaneously keep its consumers happy and rule the world.

Furthermore, these resources are not 'shared' among other members of Empire. The USA prefers to have control over the Persian Gulf area so that it can control the supply of oil to Europe, Japan and China (Klare 2003, 134). The American state's interest in securing access to the means by which a good majority of its citizens can aspire to a Pajero is structural, as well as meeting the 'instrumental' desires of men such as Vice President Dick Cheney, former chief executive of the rather large Halliburton oil company, and still close to the inheritors of his position. Both interests entail letting the rest of the world know that the United States is willing to use force to maintain its supplies.

On top of the USA's vulnerability regarding its many SUVs, its \$2.2 trillion debt – only slightly less than the 'third world's' \$2.6 trillion – is sustainable only with a 'dollar hegemony' that ultimately rests on global military dominance (Frank 2002, Greenhill and Pettifor 2002, Petras 2002, Stiglitz 2002). If it is true that Iraq started accepting Euros for its oil in late 2000, and that other OPEC states were thinking about it, it is no wonder that at that time the US's oil-military complex took the country more seriously than ever before (Clark 2003).

Empire considers such mundane material matters as beneath contempt, but they call into question the ability of 'Americans' to participate in the construction of a global

¹¹ American Petroleum Institute Statistics as of July 2002 are slightly different: they cite imports making up 56.9 % of American oil consumption, with over thirty per cent of those coming from Canada and Mexico. Saudi Arabia registers at 12.3%, Iraq is at 2.7%, and Kuwait at 2.2%, with the Persian Gulf as a whole making up 17.7%. With Venezuela at 13.9% it is no wonder that for the American régime Hugo Chavez ranks somewhere close to Hussein as being in need of replacement. According Cambridge Energy Research Associates in 2001 the world's total oil consumption was in the range of 66 million barrels per day, meaning that the USA consumes nearly a third of that total. Americans are rumoured to consume twice as much of all energy sources as France or England, and 60 per cent more than Japan. Is energy consumption, then, a problem with 'empire' or with 'America'?

multitude that may not be able to consume as many petroleum products – or anything else – as do the leaders of the free world.¹²

Conclusions

None of the above criticisms suggest *Empire* is beneath contempt. Its audacity simply inspires a rather ‘conservative’ response, especially when the events and processes in and around 9-11 seem so contrary to *Empire’s* exuberance. It should be noted, however, that Hardt and Negri often come close to foreseeing the current imbroglio. For example, they briefly stop ignoring states and actually criticise ‘big government,’ wondering why neo-liberals, who would not survive without it, condemn it. They ask: “today where would imperial capital be if big government were not big enough to wield the power of life and death over the entire global multitude?” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 349). Such notions nearly throw all their illusions of networked and biopowered governance to the wind. They also suggest that when the new “notion of right” emerges globally and “presents itself as capable of treating the universal, planetary sphere as a single, systemic set” the “state of exception” and “the techniques of the police” must be assumed (Hardt and Negri 2000, 26). This is what has happened since 9-11, except that the ‘civil war’ they predicted seems to be turning into a classical imperialist action, and instead of multilateral state apparatuses taking on the task of global police, the US state is doing the job with its own army. Yet in spite of its language of nationalism and old-style imperialism, the United States of America is taking on the shape of a new global co-ordinator. Furthermore, if it destroys itself in the process there will be all the more need for a new global regulator. This will be a big government indeed and will raise the question: is it ‘big government’ *per se* that Hardt and Negri should condemn, or is it, much more prosaically, ‘what kind’ of big government?

If indeed the 9-11 attack and its progeny have forced the world to ask such questions, perhaps we should not be surprised if in the future Al-Qaeda will be considered as the equivalents to the “new barbarians and the rebellious slaves” who contributed to the fall of “ancient Rome in its decadence” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 20). Whether Al-Qaeda represents a “new notion of right” or its anti-thesis, it could have triggered the start of a new world. If so, reality holds more contradictions than *Empire* supposes. Reality’s ‘ruptures’ should not be as surprising as *Empire’s* seamless teleology would leave one to believe. As Hardt and Negri say, we should expect the “processes that construct the new imperial relationship of right” to be “complex ... [and] contradictory” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 20). One can only hope that the “completely different ethical and ontological axis” upon which that relationship will rest will diverge sufficiently from both al-Qaeda and the George W. Bush regime. By the looks of things, it will take a lot longer, and follow a much more uneven path, to get there than *Empire* is prepared to admit. In the meantime, whether change goes in that direction or its opposite rests on whether or not a gas-guzzling unilateralism can be restrained before it shocks and awes the rest of the world into a

¹² This issue brings up an issue studiously ignored in *Empire*: the question of the environment. The world’s carrying capacity is unlikely to allow the multitude to consume like Americans, and much of the ‘energy’ of Hardt and Negri’s book seems to rely on the American joy of consuming.

'regime change' that takes it much further away from Hardt and Negri's utopia than one would want to be.

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