



# Geographies of the Multitude: Finding the Spatial in Empire and its Counters

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## Introduction

One day after Barak Obama became the President-Elect of the United States, news agencies reported that the U.S. military had bombed a wedding party in Afghanistan, killing at least 40 civilians and wounding another 28 in the southern province of Kandahar (Wafa and Burns, 2008). While the outcome of the U.S. election—what most pundits claimed was the most important U.S. presidential election since the end of World War II—was hailed as a national rejection of the Bush Doctrine (as well as the Reagan-inspired conservatism of John McCain), the news of even more “collateral damage” from the U.S.’s global “war on terror” served as a stark reminder that the ongoing state of war that has underpinned visions of a Pax Americana continues. Indeed, it is the war in Afghanistan that Obama stressed throughout his campaign as central to U.S. security interests—not a war between two states, but a war between a multinational coalition of forces against a multinational “terrorist” network in which Afghanistan is a key front. While the U.S. may reduce its military involvement in Iraq with the shift in administrations, there has been no indication from the Obama Administration that any troop withdrawal from Iraq will equal a reversal of U.S. military involvement in southwest Asia; rather, Obama has continually stressed the need for a troop



surge in Afghanistan to stabilize the country that is falling further into the hands of the Taliban. Hope may abound for more U.S. diplomacy and butter around the world, but the guns will not disappear any time soon.

The reminder—which Obama himself has asserted repeatedly—that the change in U.S. political leadership will not make manna rain from the heavens is a necessary salve to the discourse of change surrounding Obama’s election. While many can (and should) remain hopeful that a U.S. led by Obama will be a more peaceful, diplomatic and cooperative participant in international affairs, it seems rash to assume that there will be any dramatic shift in course in how the U.S. asserts itself on the world stage in order to maintain its position of relative world hegemony. Those sympathetic to traditionally leftist politics can (and should) celebrate the ways in which an Obama White House will be more conducive to protecting workers’ rights, promoting wider access to education, justice, health care and social services, greening economic development, alleviating social stratification across traditional lines of identity and sponsoring careful international relations. Even in the inauguration preparations, the official invitations were produced by a Brooklyn factory chosen in part because it is a union shop and it uses recycled paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (Dworkin 2008). Perhaps there is an inherent contradiction in these proposed changes in domestic policy while the state of war proceeds. Indeed, those sympathetic to these issues should also recognize that we still live in a geopolitical configuration that is largely recognizable by the forces of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called “Empire.”

What Hardt and Negri have argued is that the contemporary form of globalization has given rise to a new modality of sovereign power, one that they term Empire. According to Hardt and Negri, Empire “is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, xii, original italics). As such, they stress that the United States is not the center of global power, and therefore the unfolding organization of life within the system of Empire is beyond a shift of presidential administrations within a single nation-state (even if that nation-state occupies a position of relative privilege within Empire). Empire, in part born out of the globalization of capitalist production and markets, is a global order that organizes relations of power through biopolitics (a mode of power concerned with the production and reproduction of social life; Hardt and Negri, 2004, 13). While Hardt and Negri describe Empire as “global” and a system without an outside, they also posit that the biopolitics of Empire produce the conditions for resistance to Empire. This force of resistance is what they term “the multitude.” Therefore, the totality of Empire is dialectical, and rife with inherent contradictions and tensions. What has been less clear in their theorization is the spatiality of Empire’s globality: what is the scale of Empire, how is it given spatial form, and what are the spatialities of the multitude? It is this set of questions which

has driven many geographers' engagement with Hardt and Negri's ideas as ways to both understand contemporary manifestations of power and comprehend forms of resistance. It is these questions that have set the stage for the critiques of Hardt and Negri that follow in this issue.

The parallel events of Obama's election and the murdered wedding-goers in Kandahar reveal the very real tensions within the conjuncture of Empire. The Bush administration's foreign policy made it clear that Empire rules (from the prisoners with precarious relationships to international law held at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the covert military actions in Pakistan, undertaken without Pakistani authorization). Since 2000, U.S. foreign policy has continually demonstrated the declining significance of national borders amongst the hegemonic nation-states, even while domestic policy has attempted to tighten the U.S.'s own. This was not the first time an Afghan wedding ended in the murder of innocent civilians by U.S. bombs. And yet there have always been clear and potent forms of resistance to the biopolitics of Empire: the images of the world's largest demonstration for peace, with twelve million people in cities all over the world on February 15, 2003, are most vibrant. As noted above, Hardt and Negri recognize that the machinations of Empire produce its own force of resistance: the multitude. But the millions of people celebrating Obama's election around the world paint a more complex picture of the age of Empire. Such a mass celebration of the transfer of power from the Bush Administration to Obama opens up the opportunity to ask: what are the politics of the multitude in the age of Obama? How do we talk about Empire after the U.S. is no longer led by George W. Bush and the world is less directly faced with the jurisprudence of the Bush Doctrine? In recognizing the global embrace of Obama's election, the moment allows us to ask the same question that Hardt and Negri point us towards: "What can the multitude become?" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 105).

There are no simple answers to these questions, and it would be naïve to claim that the election of Obama represents a key victory for the multitude in some global struggle between the two camps. Just because a lot of people were out dancing in the streets does not mean that there is an evident expression of the multitude or its representative in the White House. As Hardt and Negri suggest, the multitude is a conceptual set of relations, rather than a concrete political body, and does not have a simple manifestation in "the people" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, xiv). Indeed, following the theorization of Hardt and Negri, it is not even clear that there are two definitive and antagonistic sides, Empire against multitude. Rather, there are different productions of biopolitics, diagrammed into different geometries of power and concretized into different (and continually unfolding) manifestations. But we can begin to unravel the increased complexity of the relationship between Empire and the multitude, particularly as networks of global political economy and international relations respond to the current financial crisis. This analysis seems to be particularly pressing at the dawn of the Obama era, at a moment when it is too

easy to dramatize the ways in which his historic election might represent a revolutionary pinnacle in the global power of the multitude (especially as so much stress was given to his experience as a community organizer, use of the global space of the internet to rally “the people” or the international embrace of Obama by people across the world). Indeed, it seems necessary to pay careful attention to the ways in which we still live within the geopolitical configurations of Empire and the ways in which the multitude converges and unravels in temporary orderings of resistance.

The three essays that follow offer different critical interventions into the conceptualization of the multitude and the biopolitics of Empire, especially in how Hardt and Negri posit a flat plane of Empire’s “global” space. None were composed in response to the present conjuncture or in the post-election euphoria, but the events of early November 2008 and Obama’s inauguration only highlight their continued significance. In the remainder of this introduction, I will trace out the evolution of these essays as part of a larger discourse to map the multitude. Indeed, these essays hope to advance the theoretical usefulness of the concept in comprehending modalities of power, rather than blindly sing the praises of a nebulous democratic force for good, or decry Hardt and Negri as too aspatial to be of any conceptual use. In doing so, I will further clarify the core notion of the multitude as put forth by Hardt and Negri as a descriptive and theoretical concept that elucidates how power works in the contemporary moment. Ultimately, this introduction will set the stage for these interventions and highlight the need for ongoing deliberation on the issues that they raise.

### **The Development of these Essays**

The essays that follow are a small collection from a larger group of papers delivered at two paper sessions entitled “Geographies of the Multitude.” These sessions were part of the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Denver, Colorado, in 2005. While the two sessions provided a specific space to explore the ways in which contemporary forms of collective resistance could be expressed and given critical spatial attention (parallel to more traditional social movement approaches), the lively discussions stemmed from an ongoing discourse amongst academics and activists about power, resistance, and collectivity. This larger discussion has at times been specific to particular participants within Anglophonic academic geography; at times has been pushed by intellectuals in the Global North across a variety of disciplines; and at times has been advanced by the writing and action of activists around the globe, especially those participating in the various World Social Forums and related alternative globalization movements.

The initial seed for the paper sessions for which these essays were initially composed came out of several conversations between Mark Bonta, John Protevi,

Paul Kingsbury and others at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Association of American Geographers (SEDAAG) in Lexington, Kentucky, in 2001. Bonta and Protevi had presented work related to their then-forthcoming book-length work *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* in a paper session on the geographies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I served as a co-discussant for the session, and subsequent conversations turned to the broader philosophies of potentiality in comprehending modalities of collective power (such as those of Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and Manuel DeLanda). As these conversations made their way out of the conference room, they shifted to the more general concerns of conceptualizing the geographies of resistance, especially in recognition that the conventional sites of power to which resistance has been directed have become increasingly diffuse and operational in everyday life, perhaps more so than many critical geographers had readily accepted. Ultimately, like many others, we were engaging in a series of conversations amongst ourselves and with other colleagues, students, texts and events that sought to understand how the world was unfolding around us. We hoped to contribute to envisioning what we would consider to be a more just, peaceful and vibrant planet in the face of biopolitical productions of global power, which seemed increasingly violent and detrimental to human and environmental flourishing, especially from our perspective in a U.S. that was beginning to see the foreign and domestic policies of the Bush Administration and its ongoing expansion of neoliberalism, free market capitalism and “preemptive” war across the world (Kirsch, 2003a; Nussbaum 2000, DeLanda 1997).

Like many others seeking to understand the collective resistance to the World Trade Organization’s meetings in Seattle in 1999 (the so-called “Battle of Seattle”) as well as the emergence in 2001 of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in response to the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, we wanted to know how these configurations of collectivity were actually organized and structured as something different than traditional leftist conceptions of class-oriented politics. Like others, we wanted to take these convergences of power seriously as ways to imagine a world different from the one being shaped by institutions such as the WTO, the International Monetary Fund and NATO’s military. Like many others, we were interested in seeing how these new forms of resistance were more than a collection of militant particulars caught in their own incommensurable local discourses, yet productive of something different than a global proletariat seeking to overthrow the chains of global capitalism. From our conversations with ourselves and others, we increasingly became drawn to the work of Hardt and Negri, especially in their work *Empire*.

In this widely influential book (Michael Hardt was subsequently invited to speak at the World Social Forum), which was promoted as the *Communist Manifesto* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the authors worked out a lucid account of how the current geopolitical configuration came to be organized around a postmodern (and

post-nation-state) system of empire. The immanent plane of Empire's power, they claim, is biopolitical in nature. That is, as noted above, the power of Empire is constitutive and manifest in control over the production of life at a total, global scale.

What struck several of us, like many others, was the incredible popularity of this book (especially for a work of political philosophy heavily influenced by the authors' readings of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza). But more so, as scholars attentive to our own geographical imaginaries (and those of various discourses about globalization), we, like many others, were intrigued by the limited spatial imaginary presented by Hardt and Negri's analysis. While this particular book became increasingly identified as the key theoretical text to comprehend globalization (and then, therefore, allegedly the key text needed to be understood to challenge globalization), we started to explore how the geography of Empire could be better articulated. As our conversations unfolded, we turned our attention to the brief articulations of Empire's other: the multitude (and its promise of global democracy). While we each pursued our own projects and interests, we continued to come back to the idea of the multitude as coalescing many of the ideas we were struggling to articulate and coming across in the academic and political world.

After this initial meeting in 2001, we reassembled in formal and informal ways at the next annual meeting of SEDAAG in 2002 (this one a joint meeting with the Mid-Atlantic Division of the Association of American Geographers in Richmond, Virginia). At a paper session entitled "Nostalgia, Community, Desire: Geographies of Civilization and Discontentment," we reconnected our discussions to the philosophical work from which our initial conversations sprang to tease out the affective nature of these modalities of power (and their biopolitics), as well as expanded the reach of our deliberations. Moreover, the spatial structure of Empire and the concept of the multitude continued to haunt our discussions, both undertheorized and needing greater critical attention to help us express the emergent (and temporary) manifestations of community inherent in both.

As our discussions evolved, so did the biopolitics of Empire around us, as well as the critiques and responses to its force. Not only did we gain more clarity about what the world after the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks would look like through the Bush Doctrine, but we also saw increased organizations of the multitude as resistance to war and Empire took place across traditional lines of differentiation. Indeed, understanding the biopolitics of Empire seemed more pressing to understand the world as well as how to change it. Additionally, we wanted to connect further with the many others who were writing, thinking, deliberating and acting through the same concerns as we had been. We expanded our conversations in many ways, but we gave formal attention to extending the ways in which Anglophone geographers could help articulate the

spatiality of Empire and the multitude through the convergence of spatial and social theory. Our initial effort in this was to organize two sessions at the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2003. One was a panel session focused on space and scale, and Empire as a theoretical and empirical concept. This session, “The Spatiality of *Empire* and the Politics of Scale,” allowed for a vigorous debate about the existing spatiality of Empire, ways to conceptualize it, and ways to imagine its limits, fissures and resistances. The exchange was particularly vibrant with the two perspectives presented by Neil Smith and Julie Graham who pushed each other (and the rest of us) to explore further the spatial form of Empire and the coherent totality of any system, also opening up avenues to move beyond a simple, bifurcated debate between “local” versus “global” power (so as to avoid falling into an endorsement of blasé “glocalism”). This panel session was followed up by a two-part session focused on the philosophy of Deleuze, with an expressed hope to ground Deleuzian philosophy into a concrete spatiality—a project that overlapped greatly with the critical examination of Empire. At the heart of the formal and informal conversations was the growing capacity to express how the vital force of life collects into expressions of resistance to hegemonic biopolitical productions in necessarily and complexly spatial ways. This opened up further opportunities to examine both the territorializations of Empire as well as the de/territorializations of the multitude as a new (and newly libratory) politics of life (Kirsch 2003b).

The following year, the English version of *Multitude* was published as an explicit attempt by Hardt and Negri to clarify both the spatial form of Empire as a total system as well as the collective resistance to it. Recognizing the success as well as the limitations of their previous volume, Hardt and Negri purposefully set out to explain the multitude and to do so for a general audience. In this text, they stress the collective subjectivity of the multitude as distinct from conventional terms such as the people, the masses or the working class. Seeking a more universal and ontological category, they assert the importance of the notion of the multitude (a term which has import from the political philosophy of Aristotle through Spinoza). Thus they draw attention to the ways in which (in both actuality and potentiality) the multitude becomes “a social multiplicity” which communicates and acts in common “while remaining internally different” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, xiv). This parallels the post-Heideggerian concept of community put forth by Jean-Luc Nancy of “being singular plural”—of having a collective existence that functions singularly without necessitating unification. What Hardt and Negri clarify in their analysis of the multitude is how the multitude requires particular spatial expression: the common (Hardt and Negri, 2004, xv). It is the creativity opened up by the space of the common that allows for the territorialization of the multitude to become a force, and it is in the fostering of these spaces of the common that ultimate resistance to Empire (and its permanent state of war) resides.

While Hardt and Negri moved to articulate further that the multitude requires and brings forth a particular spatialization, what still needs clarification is the content of that spatialization. Hardt and Negri point to what many others had explored: that the spatialization of the multitude and the common (the space of becoming in common) is a dynamic and temporary ordering of spatial networks. It seems as if they were simply re-articulating what was becoming common knowledge in critical geography (and had been pithily summed up by Massey *et al*'s notion of "meeting places" (Massey, Allen and Pile, 1999)). Indeed, while the ontology and sociology of the multitude had come into greater focus, there was still a need to sharpen our understanding of the geography of the multitude (both in its spatial territorializations and in its use of space to produce commons). It was out of this perceived lacuna in Hardt and Negri's own work (as well as in response to the surge of work by others to follow suit) that we organized the aforementioned sessions on the geography of the multitude, which ultimately presents one way to conceptualize and represent the emergent and potential geographies of the common. Following Hardt and Negri, the participants in the paper sessions in Denver in 2005, and the selections from those sessions presented in this issue of *ACME*, seek to explain the spatiality of the multitude, because it is within those spaces that resistance to Empire and new forms of (potentially libratory) biopolitics and democracy reside. Understanding these spaces in both actual and potential enhances our capacity to help these spaces proliferate. Whether the millions of people celebrating in public places (in organized and spontaneous fashions) to commemorate Obama's election is a territorialization of the multitude is beyond the scope of these papers; yet driving each is a desire to eradicate the spaces of war in which celebrations of becoming singular plural (as potentially expressed in a wedding) become Empire's violent geographies and spaces of death (Gregory 2004; Gregory and Pred, 2007). In doing so, these papers hope to contribute to an ongoing deliberation about the contours of the multitude, one that proceeds with critical scrutiny and careful, even if hopeful, engagement. Hopefully these selections convey the energy, excitement and productive discord in which several of us have been privileged to participate over the last several years.

### **Three Ways to Give the Multitude Space**

Dominic Corva's piece begins the series with an examination of the biopolitics of the U.S.'s war on drugs. In "Biopower and the Militarization of the Police Function," Corva engages mostly with the aspect of Hardt and Negri's theorization of Empire in order to reassert the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics and biopolitical production in the work of both Empire and the multitude. In doing so, Corva attempts to give additional attention to the modes of governmentality that organize power within Empire and, in particular, the ways in which the police function of the state is militarized through foreign policy directives aimed at bringing order not to "specific people and places but abstract categories of



dangerous abnormality” (p. 164). Building from the analysis set forth by Hardt and Negri in which the subject of Empire’s state of war is the terrorist, Corva shows the overlapping discourse between the terrorist and those bodies organized into visible subjects through the war on drugs. He does so by tracing this discourse and its emergence with the development of the “crimefare state” (a term he takes from the work of Peter Andreas) as a specific manifestation of state power. Ultimately, Corva works to show the ways in which a global war on drugs has allowed for the production of new transnational subjectivities as well as new forms of legitimated violence across the domestic criminal justice system. It is Corva’s attention to space within his analysis that becomes especially interesting within the present issue, as he argues that “Hardt and Negri’s focus on the normalization of the war function leaves unattended an analysis of the uneven globalization of sovereign power” (p. 163).

It is at this juncture that Corva’s work extends the overall project represented here: to give a richer spatial theorization to the analyses of contemporary modes of power and to do so with nuance and care in the complex scalar constructions that facilitate the extension of those networks of power into a biopolitical force. In stressing the Foucaultian basis of Empire and pointing out the uneven spatiality of this process, Corva raises important questions about the capacity for anti-capitalist politics to be a source of effective resistance. While he leaves the question largely unanswered in this paper, he does point to some important issues for a biopolitics of resistance to the narco-crimefare state’s war, especially in noting the ways in which the definition and governmentality of illicit substances are fundamentally biopolitical in moral and corporeal terms. As such, he posits that the biopolitics of resistance must necessarily reconcile the uneven geographies of power’s territorialization.

Pierpaolo Mudu shifts the focus of this issue towards the multitude itself, wondering about the real materialization of the multitude, especially as it comes to be understood as a functional category of political analysis. In doing so, Mudu hones in on the work of Negri, of which *Multitude* is but one part in a long career of political writing and activism. In providing a rich analysis of the Italian left from the 1970s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Mudu maps out the development of the ideas that appear to take form in both of Hardt and Negri’s books. But Mudu’s real concern is to elucidate how the multitude can function as an open network constituted by and constitutive of a singular multiplicity, particularly as this category comes to be understood as having a particular spatialization. To draw this out, Mudu turns to the Genoa demonstrations against the Group of Eight meetings in 2001. Mudu claims Hardt and Negri’s spatiality is “problematically undertheorized” (p. 211), especially when considering the actualization of this multitudinous force during that convergence of resistance to Empire. While much of Mudu’s analysis hinges on a fascinating, thick description of the organizational networks that led to the protests, what Mudu accomplishes is most pertinent to the

overall project to give space to the multitude. Not only does he show the spatiality of the discourse out of which the more general political category of the multitude emerges (and hence reminds us that what the multitude looks like in one place may not be what the multitude looks like in another), but he effectively pushes the limits of the multitude as a political category in how it produces its spatial form: the common (especially revealing the limited engagement Hardt and Negri have with Doreen Massey's idea of the politics of place). He shows the conceptual distance between Hardt and Negri's ontological status of the multitude and its territorialization in actual spaces of resistance. In doing so, he clarifies what he identifies as a threefold definition of the concept of the multitude and raises caution in conflating these conceptual and real categories.

The final paper in this issue on the multitude, by Mark Bonta, explores how the multitude comes into being most readily through conspiracy theories. In providing this analysis of Empire's own discourse of resistance, Bonta posits that Empire's biopolitical regime reinscribes its own legitimation through the notion of an invisible yet ever-present rogue force of resistance. As such, Empire presents itself as the defensive response to a wily multitude that is always digging deeper into the rhizomatic tunnels and is visible through its own biopolitics of violence (such as suicide bombings and other forms of terror). Bonta attempts to clarify the spatial form of this logic and in doing so, moves to question the ways in which it becomes possible to imagine actual resistance to Empire's biopolitics in the contemporary moment. He points to the ways in which the biopolitics of the multitude is territorialized through localized scalar configurations, which can connect into a more complex spatial form through the networked common of the multitude. Without claiming that Empire is "global"—and therefore so must be the multitude—Bonta notes how the biopolitical production of community through the multitude generates an alternatively—as opposed to antithetically—"global" space of resistance.

In each of the papers that follow, we hope to convey the wide scope of intellectual terrain that Hardt and Negri's work has opened up for us, especially in terms of extending our geographical imaginaries to the modes of resistance possible today. In looking back over the years of discussion and deliberation, of which these papers represent a small part, it is notable how our (along with many others') work to give space to Empire and the multitude has overlapped with key debates in critical geography over the past several years, especially on the articulation of scalar configurations, the affective politics of place and the geographies of collective subjectivity through productions of the commons. We hope that these pieces serve to be sources of additional discussion on these topics, as we sort out what spaces of the multitude exist in actual and potential form. We remain hopeful that the spaces of the common will proliferate. We thank the editors of *ACME* and the anonymous reviewers for providing the opportunity to share

these pieces, and look forward to continuing the conversations with colleagues, students and peers in- and outside of academic geography.

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