

Empire and the multitude

A dialogue on the new order of globalization

Antonio Negri and Danilo Zolo

Danilo Zolo For a long time I resisted the calls, from many quarters, to publicly debate *Empire*, the book you co-authored with Michael Hardt, which has prompted a debate of exceptional scope and intensity on both sides of the Atlantic. I was inhibited by a sense of impotence before such a complex, ambitious and extensive work. To attempt a critical evaluation of a work of this kind – you define it as ‘widely interdisciplinary’ – entails to some extent sharing the theoretical ambition that moved you to write it. I overcame my initial hesitations, however, because I became convinced that after September 11 it would be irresponsible not to take seriously a book such as *Empire*. It is a book that, whatever one thinks of it, invests a large quantity of intellectual resources in the attempt to offer a contribution to understanding the world we live in and denounces the atrocities and risks of the present ‘global order’ and tries to indicate ways of overcoming it. If for no other reason *Empire* deserves, in my view, the international success it is enjoying.

Antonio Negri Thank you. The fact remains that now, alongside the sheen of ‘banality’ the book had from the start (it appears almost as if it were a film rather than a book), it is already growing old with respect to the pace of events. The ‘grand narrative’ that was responsible for the success of the book – facilitating its reception on American campuses in the wake of Seattle, and subsequently all over the world, especially in Germany – well, this grand narrative was what people had been waiting for. After the 1980s, after the defeat of various struggles, after the triumph of ‘weak thought’, a jolt was needed: *Empire* provided it.

DZ *Empire* is a difficult book not only because of its size and its thematic breadth but also because its philosophical and politico-theoretical syntax is extremely original. It is a syntax that transfigures some fundamental Marxist categories by interpolating them with elements taken from a great variety of Western philosophical traditions: classical, modern and contemporary. In this transfiguration of concepts, a leading role is played by the post-structuralism of authors such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and especially Michel Foucault. However, my impression is that a careful and exacting reading of *Empire*, a reading the book surely deserves and inspires one to, leads inevitably to controversial interpretative results. Despite its often prescriptive and assertive tone, it is a book that risks transmitting more in the way of theoretical uncertainties than certainties.

AN I like that. In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and I had no desire to reach hard and fast conclusions. After all, the processes constituting empire are still largely open. We were interested in underlining the need to change register: the political philosophy of modernity (and the institutions with which it interacted) is over. The theory that goes from Marsilio to Hobbes and from Althusius to Schmitt is finished. *Empire* marks a new theoretical threshold.

DZ The philosophy of Marx and that of Foucault – to put it in a very summary way – are divergent theoretical vectors: Marxism prefigures a solid, egalitarian, disciplined, organic society, whereas Foucault is an acute and radical critic of disciplinary power in the name of an individualist and libertarian anthropology.

AN We have kept Foucault and Marx together. Or, rather, as far as my own development is concerned, I can say that I ‘rinsed my clothes’ in the Seine, hybridizing my *operaismo* – my workerism – with the perspective of French post-structuralism. I had already begun this operation during my years in prison (between 1979 and 1983) while working on Spinoza, who proved the ideal element for this ontological encounter. Then, with Hardt also in Paris, we deepened this analysis and immersed ourselves in that common ‘aura’ that had, since the end of the 1960s, though largely unacknowledged, linked *operaismo* with post-structuralism and with tendencies in the broad field of subaltern studies and other postcolonial approaches. For me, at least, it was a crucial moment when I realized that Italian *operaismo* was anything but provincial. By publishing a collection of subaltern studies in the 1980s, Spivak provided unequivocal proof of this. Deleuze and Guattari already recognized this influence in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Within this framework, we take Foucault’s reading of Marx, in which he extends the genealogy of the processes of exploitation from the factory to the social, to be fundamental. In our interpretation (which differs from yours), Foucault is the author of an anthropology that is certainly libertarian but not individualistic; he constructs a biopolitics within which it is no longer the individual but the subject that is moulded (and with such singularity!). As far as we are concerned, in Paris, between the 1980s and the 1990s, we became aware of being in postmodernity, in a new epoch. Moreover, we were, and still are, convinced that Marx can be put to work within the analytical methodologies of postmodernity. There is always a point when the decision upon the new and the strong erupts. There is such pleasure in being able to finish with the pale fictions of the modern, with Rawls or Habermas. And with enormous enthusiasm we can now assert with Machiavelli (and all the others) that class struggle, *mutatis mutandis*, rules thought...

DZ Before discussing the central themes of *Empire*, I must make another confession. The idea of confronting a treatise whose authors are self-proclaimed ‘communists’ still causes me unease, especially when they declare that they have adopted Karl Marx’s *Capital* as one of their models of exposition. I personally have enormous respect for what theoretical Marxism was in the last century, less so for the experiences of ‘real socialism’ that claimed allegiance to it. However, I am not inclined to look favourably today on returns to or re-foundations of Marxist philosophy, regardless of how innovative and critical in form they may be. Personally, I settled my accounts with theoretical Marxism almost thirty years ago – I remember debating it intensely with you too – and I think I did it sincerely. I took my leave of Marxism because I could not share its three theoretical pillars: the dialectical philosophy of history with its ‘scientific laws’ of development; the labour theory of value as the critical basis of the capitalist mode of production and as the premiss of communist revolution; the theory of the withering away of the state and the associated refusal of the rule of law and of individual rights. Your communism, despite the richness of its motivations, still seems constrained by Marxist orthodoxy.

AN Many things have changed since the debates of thirty years ago. However, if we could reduce Marxism to the three theoretical pillars you mention, I would not be a Marxist (and I do not think I would have been thirty years ago either). However, it seems to me that you throw away the baby with the more or less dirty – often it has even been filthy – bath water. In contrast, I want to reclaim Marxism, which is for me synonymous with modern materialism, understood as the expression of a critical trend that has traversed modernity and that has always been attacked by it: this is the path that leads from Machiavelli to Spinoza and on to Marx. For me the recovery and renewal of Marxism have the same powerful significance that the patristic apologetics had in the first centuries of the history of Christianity: it consists in

a 'return to principles', in the sense that Machiavelli gave this *dispositif*. In order to proceed in this direction we must advance some essential points of Marxist theory: we must construct, against the dialectics of history, a non-teleological theory of class struggle; beyond the labour theory of value, we must further the analyses of valorization through the notion of the *general intellect* in the period of the (complete) real subsumption of society by capital; so far as the theory of the state is concerned, it is a question of grasping, in the critique of sovereignty (as the point of coincidence of the economic and the political), the central moment of the exercise of exploitation, of mystification and of the destruction of subjects' rights. Despite proposing to do so, Marx never left us a book on class struggle, or – and especially lacking – a book on the state. In fact the book on the state, missing from *Capital*, could only have been written once the space of sovereignty had become as extensive as the world – that is, once it was possible to confront empire with the multitude. The only nation-state Marx could have spoken of was that muddle of elements from the Middle Ages and modernity that even capitalist development had difficulty making inroads into. Only an international and internationalist proletariat could pose the problem of the state. Many impediments to the development of Marxist legal and state theory are linked to the limits of capitalist development, rather than to Marx himself. Only today, when capital advances and structures itself on the global market, can revolutionary theory correctly take up the problem of the state.

Empire or imperialism?

DZ The part of *Empire* that seems to me to be the most successful, and that poses the need for a new 'strategic' reflection on the structure and functions of processes of global integration, is the one that relates to the very notion of 'empire'. Clearly you and Hardt think that the new global order imposed by globalization has led to the disappearance of the Westphalian system of sovereign states. There are no longer national states, other than as pallid, formal structures that still survive within the juridical ordering of international institutions. The world is no longer governed by the political system of states; it is governed by a single structure of power that bears no significant analogy with the modern state of European origin. It is a decentred and deterritorialized political system that makes no reference to national or ethnic traditions and values, and whose political and normative basis is that of cosmopolitan universalism. For these reasons, you believe 'empire' to be the most appropriate name for this new kind of global power...

AN One must add that we are not at all nostalgic for nation-states. Moreover, it appears to us that these developments that you describe so well, which are both real and conceptual, are provoked by the force of workers' struggles, of anti-colonial struggles and finally of the struggles against the socialist management of capital – and *for* freedom – in the countries of 'real socialism'. The last third of the twentieth century was dominated by these movements.

DZ It would thus be wrong to think that empire – or its central and expansive core – is constituted by the United States and their closest Western allies. Neither the United States nor any other nation-state, as you and Hardt assert firmly in your book, 'can today form the centre of an imperialist project'. Therefore, global empire is something completely other than classical imperialism, and it would be a serious theoretical mistake to confuse the two. Do I interpret your position correctly?

AN Correct. I would like to add that it became apparent at Pôrto Alegre in particular just how dangerous the reliance of the emerging 'movement of movements' on nation-states would be. Were this to occur, ambiguous forms of nationalism and populism would become elements of the anti-globalization movement. Anti-Americanism and faith in nation-states almost always go hand-in-hand. This is the latest muddle inherited from Third Worldist socialism – which always seemed to me to be as serious a deviation as was Soviet Marxism.

DZ This is a very delicate point, one that raised numerous doubts that I partly share. In the book, empire seems to fade into a sort of 'category of the spirit': it is like God, present

everywhere because it coincides with the new global dimension. But one could object that if everything is imperial, nothing is imperial. How do we identify supranational subjects that bear imperial interests and aspirations in order to make them the targets of global struggle? Against whom do we enact anti-imperialist critique and resistance if states and their political forces are not the enemies to focus on? What sort of an empire is it that does not exercise political-military power? Does it express itself merely through instruments of economic or, at most, ideological control?

AN The process of imperial constitution is under way. Empire is the limit towards which the instruments of global capital tend: these instruments are sovereign, economic, military, cultural, and so on. In this phase empire is characterized fundamentally by a great tension between an institutional *non-place* and a series of global (though partial from the point of view of sovereignty) instruments used by collective capital. You rightly say that if everything is imperial, nothing is imperial. However, following Polybius' example, we identify certain sites or forms of imperial government: the monarchic function that the United States government, the G8 and other monetary institutions have attributed to themselves; the aristocratic power of multinationals that extend their web on the global market. It is certainly true that the global movement of the multitude (born after Seattle) has shown uncertainty when attempting to identify the points against which to exercise critique and resistance within the continuous creation of misery and exclusion and the violent, military response to protests – all of which are nonetheless very real, and consist in the distortion of economic development, in the destruction of planet Earth and in the growing attempts to appropriate what is 'common' to humanity between the Earth and sky... The paradox of the present moment (and what renders the situation so remarkable) is that empire will only be able to form its structures in *response* to the struggles of the multitude: but this entire process is that of the clash of powers *à la* Machiavelli. We are only at the beginning of a 'Thirty Years War'; after all, the modern state took no less time to crystallize.



DZ You claim that 'imperial constitution' distinguishes itself from the constitution of nation-states in terms of its functions: the objective of imperial sovereignty is not the political-territorial inclusion or assimilation of subordinate countries and peoples, as was the case with imperialism and the colonialism of nation-states between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. New imperial command is exercised through political institutions and juridical apparatuses whose objective is essentially the maintenance of global order – that is, a 'stable and universal' peace that would allow the normal functioning of the market economy. In several places you refer to the functions of 'international policing' and even to juridical functions exercised by empire. I basically agree with you but have a reservation: who, if not the political-military apparatus of the great Western power – *imprimis* of the USA – exercises these imperial functions?

AN It does not seem strange to me that empire endeavours to guarantee the global order through a stable and universal peace by means of all the political-military instruments at its disposal. Bush's clique make declarations of peace whilst engaging in acts of war on a daily basis. However, we must not confuse Bush's gang, and the political-military apparatus he employs, with the government of empire. Rather, I think that the present *imperialist* ideology and practice of the Bush government are fast placing themselves on a collision path with other capitalist forces that, at the global level, work for empire. The situation is completely open. Later, in the course of this conversation, we will return to the question of war as a specific form of imperial control. For now I just want to insist on the fact that the military and policing functions of war are becoming, at the level of empire, increasingly indistinguishable. Nevertheless, putting aside certain judgements and arguments till later, I would like once again to insist on the fact that anti-Americanism is a weak and mystifying attitude in the present phase of the critical definition of the new global constitution. Anti-Americanism confuses the American people with the American state. It fails to recognize that the United States is inserted in the global market just as much as Italy and South Africa are, and that Bush's policies are those of a small minority within the global aristocracy of multinational capitalism. Anti-Americanism is a dangerous state of mind, an ideology that mystifies the analytic data and hides the responsibility of collective capital. We should distance ourselves from it, just as we finally abandoned the Americanism of Alberto Sordi's movies.

DZ You maintain that the juridical imperial order is essentially engaged in a jurisdictional or quasi-judicial arbitrating function, and that this is not a merely marginal factor. Imperial power is even invoked by its subjects for its capacity to solve conflicts from a universal point of view – that is, neutrally and impartially. It is of significance – as you note perceptively in your book – that after a long period of eclipse the doctrine of the *bellum justum*, this medieval and typically universalist and imperial doctrine is, in the last decade, flourishing again. I fully share these analyses, not least because they take up theses that I affirmed some years ago, in *Cosmopolis* in particular. But, I insist, in my view these only make sense if the 'imperial constitution' is conceived as a political constitution, and this today still largely means a constitution and the authoritative structure of the state-form. As such, it has functions of 'coercive pacification' but also resorts to classical forms of war of aggression. There can be no doubt, I believe, that the United States – that is, the cognitive, communicative, economic, political and military powers that are concentrated in the geopolitical space of the American superpower – is today the central motor of this global strategic project, whether one calls it, as I prefer, 'hegemonic'; or 'imperial', as you do; or something else.

AN I disagree. I really cannot understand how you (who taught us in your writings, from *Cosmopolis* to *Chi dice umanità*, how the political and legal categories of modernity have been not only offended against but definitively trampled upon) are able to propose a definition of the current process of governance of the world market that still turns on the modern categories of imperialism. Here it is my turn to pose some questions: what does the power of the state mean now in the face of the *lex mercatoria* – that is, of that substantive modification of international private law in which it is surely no longer nation-states that are the legislators but rather the *law firms*? Then, so far as international public law is concerned: how is it possible not to feel pity before the pathetic attempts to relaunch the United Nations in this situation? The thing is that talking about the United States as the motor of a global strategic imperialist project entails all sorts of contradictions, particularly if one wants to assign the United States government an exclusive capacity of command (as is implicit in modern theories of national sovereignty and imperialism).

DZ In my view, the fact that the power of command and influence of the United States radiates across the entire world to the extent that it has become a 'global power', as the recent Quadrennial Defense Review Report of the US State Department claims, does not contradict the fact that this power is territorially and culturally placed in the United States and that it

can be identified with the American superpower also at the symbolic level. The September 11 terrorist attack also clearly expressed this: it intended to hit the symbols of economic, political and military power of the United States as the new imperial power. Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that the United States is also the centre of the television, information and intelligence network that encircles the world today.

AN I do not doubt that the United States is a 'global power', I only insist on another idea: that the power of the United States is subjected to (or in any case forced to dialogue with and/or contest) economic and political structures other than itself. The terrorist attack on September 11 was, among other things, also the demonstration of an open civil war between forces that intend to be structurally represented in the imperial constitution. Those who destroyed the Twin Towers are the same 'leaders' of mercenary armies who were hired to defend petrol interests in the Middle East. They have nothing to do with the multitudes; they are elements internal to the imperial structure in its becoming. On no account must we underestimate the civil war that is unfolding at the imperial level. I think we could say that the American leadership is profoundly weakened precisely at the times when it expresses these imperialist tendencies. It is clear that in the Arab, the European and the socialist worlds, not to mention that 'other continent' called China, these tendencies are unacceptable. The overwhelming power of the United States military is, as we know, largely neutralized by the impossibility of being used in its nuclear potential. And this is good news. Furthermore, from the monetary standpoint, the United States is increasingly exposed and weakened in the financial markets – and this is another excellent piece of news. In other words, in all probability the United States will soon be forced to stop being imperialist and recognize itself in empire.

DZ Obviously we all know that great corporations, including those of the new economy, operate according to strategies that are largely independent of the political command of states, and that this is also true of the United States. Multinational companies are becoming increasingly powerful because they are capable of drastically reducing labour costs as well as escaping from the fiscal demands of nation-states. But, as Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson persuasively argued in *Globalization in Question*, there is still a complex synergy between the economic policies of industrial powers and the economic/financial strategies of corporations whose headquarters are in their geopolitical space. The United States president is elected because he is financially supported by multinational corporations – I am thinking of the oil, arms and tobacco industries – and they then influence the decision of the administration. But it is evident that the large companies perform only very indirect political functions; that they cannot do without the intermediation of the political-administrative – and especially military – power of states.

AN That multinationals participate in the elections of the American president is an argument in favour of empire. I find what you have just outlined largely acceptable. To Hirst and Thompson's book I would add that of Mittelman, to underline how complex is the synergy among agents as much as the hierarchy among imperial spaces. Having said that, I believe the autonomy of capitalist strategies to be still sufficiently extensive, and at any rate largely independent of nation-states. I am not Leninist but simply Machiavellian when I think, for instance, that today the only concrete and realistic way to bring down Bush's gang is through the aristocratic power of the multinationals. This is desirable because it would provide the movement of global multitudes with time and space to advance the process of configuration of a democratic power within empire.

The imperial dialectic

DZ There is another aspect of your theory of empire that I find questionable. It is an aspect that I attribute to the implicit 'ontology' (to use your term) that acts as the metaphysical counterpoint to your analyses: the dialectic of history that is typical of Hegelian Marxism and Leninism. According to you, global empire represents a positive overcoming of the Westphal-

ian system of sovereign states. Having put a stop to states and their nationalism, empire has also ended colonialism and classical imperialism and opened a cosmopolitan perspective that should be welcomed. Any attempt to reassert the role of nation-states in opposition to the present imperial constitution of the world would express a ‘false and harmful’ ideology. The philosophy of the anti-globalization movement and all forms of naturalist environmentalism and localism must therefore be rejected as primitive and anti-dialectical positions, or in other words as substantially reactionary. You show little sympathy even for the so-called ‘people of Seattle’ and the network of NGOs linked to it.

AN I do not think that the accusations levelled against us can be sustained. As anyone who has read the book knows (and you surely have read it), we reject all dialectics in favour of class struggle. It is class struggle (a *dispositif* à la Machiavelli: one that is open, indeterminate, a-teleological and hazardous) that constitutes the basis of our method. There is nothing dialectical here, unless one uses this epithet to mean any analytical approach to historical development. Our narrative speaks of a concrete telos, of the risks taken in the struggle of men against exploitation, for a joyous life and the elimination of pain. Our political problem, then, is that of proposing an adequate space for all the struggles that start from below. In this framework there is no room for nostalgia and the defence of the nation-state – that absolute barbarism of which Verdun, the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and (if you permit me) Auschwitz have given us lasting proof. I do not know how the ideology of the nation-state can be considered anything other than false and dangerous. In contrast, the networks of the movement of movements are, as



is everything that freely occurs in the world, polyvalent: they intersect and are able, without difficulty, to build a unitary movement. Any attempt to stand in the way of this unification and the consequent recognition of *common* objectives is reactionary, or, rather, expresses sectarian and inimical operations. The philosophy of the anti-globalization and Seattle movements is internationalist and global. As far as our antipathy for some NGOs is concerned (an antipathy that the movements largely share), it should not be confused with one for the voluntary sector or the methods of the new militancy.

DZ Communists, you say, are by vocation universalist, cosmopolitan, ‘catholic’; their horizon is that of humanity as a whole, of ‘generic human nature’, as Marx said. As you recall, in the course of the last century the working masses always put their faith in the internationalization of political and social relations. For this reason you assert that the global powers of empire must be controlled but not demolished: the imperial constitution is to be preserved and directed towards other objectives. Even though it is true that techniques of policing are the hardcore of the imperial order, this order has nothing to do, according to you, with the practices of dictatorship and totalitarianism of the last century. From the point of view of the transition to a communist society the construction of empire is a step forward: empire, you say, ‘is better’ than what preceded it because ‘it does away with the cruel regimes of modern power’ and ‘provides greater possibilities for creation and liberation’ (*Empire*, pp. 44, 218). I cannot share this dialectical optimism of evident Hegelian and Marxist ascendancy.

AN I do not think that it is fair to call our position one of dialectical optimism. Nonetheless, it is clear that you are intransigent on this question of dialectics. Anything you do not like is dialectical. So let me propose an author who is certainly not dialectical and yet is capable of looking forward: Spinoza. In his philosophy optimism has nothing to do with Hegel's understanding of it: it has to do with the freedom and joy of liberation from slavery.... But I don't want to keep up this jousting with saints. I prefer knaves. That is, the multitudes – a multiplicity of singularities, already hybridized, capable of immaterial and intellectual labour and with an enormous capacity for freedom. This is not dialectics but a factual and precise sociological analysis of the transformation of work, of its organization and of the political subjectivity that follows from it. I cannot believe that you prefer archaic, peasant and artisan traditions embodied in ineffectual myths, or the misery of the mass worker, bound to his chains, to the global mobility and temporal flexibility of life and labour. The expanding of life prospects and the enrichment of the moral and intellectual life of workers seem to me a good thing. It is here that empire is good *in itself*. From here to becoming good *for itself*, however, is another matter, and it is not up to *Geist* but up to the movements to have their say. Moreover, the movements that in the conditions of the emergence of empire present themselves as antagonistic do not make claims or posit questions that are homologous to imperial power. Today, the most interesting thing that emerges from the observation of the movements is that there is no discourse of the 'seizure of power' in opposition to the formation of imperial power. What is proposed in its place is 'exodus'. Negative dialectics? You could accuse me of this, but I cannot call by such a name that colossal phenomenon of distancing from the demand for political power that runs through people, especially young people, today's multitudes. This change is even deeper than the one we indicated at the level of political categories from modernity to postmodernity. Be wary, for great suffering awaits this 'city of men' that is only at the beginning... It is the continuation (and at the same time the transfiguration) of the sometimes democratic, sometimes socialist, always rebel movements that have traversed modernity.

DZ I find the analyses of post-colonialism, which outline the path of continuity between classical colonialism and the current processes of hegemonic globalization, more convincing – I am thinking in particular of subaltern studies. Today, after the parenthesis of the Cold War and the ephemeral liberation of colonial countries from direct political subjection to European powers, the West is once again engaged in a strategy of control, of military occupation, mercantile invasion and 'civilization' of the non-Western world. It is precisely against this strategy that the bloody and impotent response of global terrorism fights, and it is no mere coincidence that it aims almost exclusively at the United States.

AN I can only agree with you on this issue. There is a visible thread of continuity running between classical colonialism and the current processes of imperial globalization. However, I would be very careful not to call the liberation of colonial countries 'ephemeral' or to think that the cards on the geopolitical table have not altered radically. The relations between First, Second and Third Worlds have not changed in a superficial manner but fundamentally: they have mixed, and you find the First World at the southernmost point of Africa as in the republics of central Asia, in the same way as you find the Third World in the European or American metropolises. If you look at all this from a spatial viewpoint, the situation, though changed, appears stationary; on the other hand, if you look at these same phenomena and displacements from the standpoint of their intensity, then (and this is above all what is narrated by subaltern studies) you can perceive the transformative power of these processes, which are mines distributed across the globe. From this perspective, whereas global terrorism is part of the 'civil war' for imperial leadership, movements of resistance and exodus constitute the truly new threat to the global capitalist order.

DZ The processes of globalization have sped up since the end of the 1980s, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world order. Since then, Western countries led by the USA have engaged in a new politics of power that has been perceived by non-Western

countries – especially in the Islamic world and East Asia – as a growing challenge to their own territorial integrity, their political independence and their collective identity. United States’ military bases and their espionage centres have spread in a capillary manner across the whole planet and are especially concentrated around the territories of the regional powers. In my opinion, this is the manner in which, in the era of globalization, the new colonialism and the new imperialism find expression – in linear continuity with their classical, state-based and territorial forms. The whole series of military interventions undertaken by the United States since the Gulf War have demonstrated the growing divide between the military (hence economic, scientific and technological) potential at its disposal and that available to the rest of the world. Perhaps never before in the history of humanity has the power of a single country seemed so overwhelming on the political plane and invincible on the military. In this hegemonic scenario I am unable to detect any concrete element that could give *objective* foundation to a perspective of collective emancipation operating within empire – that is, which would leave the structure of ‘cosmopolitical’ power intact without coming into conflict with its universalist ambitions.

AN Evidently, if one accepts your description of the situation, any rupture is impossible. The continuity of the old and new imperialism, the persistence of colonialism, the binding together of exploitation and military technology effected by the United States... this scenario appears to leave no room for manoeuvre: once we accept this neo-Marcusian vision of globalization, nothing can be done. It is clear to me that your standpoint is in contrast, in principle, with the position that lies at the basis of the analysis of *Empire*. Indeed, on the basis of the methodological presuppositions we have already announced – that however unyielding imperial biopowers may be, they are always opposed by and drawn on to the terrain of biopolitical conflict and antagonism – we cannot accept the neo-imperialist framework you depict. Wherever biopower – that is, the capacity of power to extend itself over all aspects of life – is exercised, it opens itself to microphysical dynamics of resistance, and the proliferation of conflicts is then often impossible to contain. Thus, once we look at empire from below as well as from above, we can perceive its fragility and we can think of intervening in its constitutive processes. Besides, the precariousness of the imperial structure was also confirmed by the analysis of its genesis: empire is the product of workers’ and anti-colonial struggles, and of the revolt against Stalinist totalitarianism. For this reason it is possible to fight within and against empire. Permit me this cheap jibe: don’t you think that with these images of classical neo-imperialism you may be giving us an example of bad totalitarian dialectics?

DZ In my view it is rather *against* empire that the struggle needs to be directed, by contrasting global expansionism and cosmopolitan ideology. Unlike the theorists of communitarian republicanism, I am not looking nostalgically to a return of nineteenth-century nation-states – though I am not convinced that nation-states are mere historical relics. I share Ulrich Beck’s idea that they are changing into ‘transnational’ states whose civil society is crisscrossed by a number of agencies and multinational institutions such as those of big business, of financial markets, of information and communication technologies, the culture industry, and so on. It is clear to me that states are redefining their functions, concentrating more on questions of security and internal public order, as Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant assert. According to Thomas Mathiesen, thanks to the immense capacity for control offered by new technologies and electronic databases, constituted without the knowledge of citizens, we are moving from the ‘panoptic’ state to the ‘synoptic’ one. But states are very far from ‘extinction’. Some of them are even getting stronger.

AN I am largely in agreement with you on this and I appreciate the literature you mention. I also think that nation-states have not disappeared. This is obvious. It is also evident that the articulation of the functions of universal control and domestic public order are organized by nation-states. But to say that many of the functions of nation-states survive is not to say that nation-states continue in the same form, let alone that they are getting stronger. On the contrary, even the association of nation-states, traversed by transnational *dispositifs* (*à la* Beck),

must be seen in terms of the processes of hierarchization and specialization that characterize empire. Which is to say that the question of the universal guarantee of (global) regulation has been posed in *irreversible* terms. The epochal passage is now given. Our political and theoretical choices operate within this process; and so we must take account of these changes and face up to this problem. I admit that you can accuse me of being doctrinaire, and failing to get my hands dirty with the reality of international relations. But if this is the case, it is merely to shorten the discussion. I could, just as an example, look into what is going on in Latin America. There, where the direct interference of the United States seems greatest, I could outline the deep connections and alliances between capitalist ruling classes, beyond nation-states. But we have already spoken enough of this.

DZ I would rather that, in the name of multipolar regionalism, we deliberate on (and endeavour to establish) new forms of world equilibrium capable of balancing and then weakening and defeating the aggressive strategic unilateralism of the imperial power of the United States. A Europe freed from the suffocating Atlantic embrace – a Europe that is less Western and more Mediterranean and ‘oriental’ – could have an important role in this sense. It is in this direction that Southeast Asia and the northeast Chinese–Confucian bloc are quietly moving.

AN New forms of global organization, articulated in accordance with a multipolar regionalism, are desirable. Indeed, this is already happening within the world market in the process that leads to the construction of imperial sovereignty. I cannot understand what this process is preferable to, however, since it is what is already actually happening. Rather, the problem is to act, from any point within empire, so as to open scenarios of global destabilization. It is only within this framework that a transformation of the rules of domination and exploitation is possible. Therefore, it is clear that I do not accept the concept itself of ‘equilibrium’, which is the product of other periods of thought (periods that were, as Musil teaches us, as disenchanting as they have all too often been ineffectual). Whether or not it is organized in regional terms, it will always be about hierarchy rather than equilibrium, multi-functionalism rather than multipolarity. Personally, I still believe what I wrote on this question for a conference at the European Institute in Fiesole: that in the framework of empire, a united Europe could exercise a function that would be subversive of the global order, but that such a function can only be created and develop from below, through the mobilization of the multitudes. I have more faith in the democratic force of the popular American institutions than I do in the European ones.



DZ I want to add that a multipolar equilibrium is the necessary condition for international law to exercise even that minimal function, which is the containment of the most destructive consequences of modern warfare. The condition for an international normative system to be able to ritualize and contain the use of force (obliging all agents to submit to predetermined procedures and general rules) is that no agent in the international order should, because of its overarching power, regard itself, or be considered by the international community, as *legibus solutus*. In other words, it is necessary that ‘imperial constitution’ be abolished. Empire and international law negate one another.

AN I agree: empire and international law negate one another. But this was the premiss from which we began. It is an irreversible condition, and hence my deep scepticism for the ‘cold comfort’ of UN internationalism. There is an enormous literature (that you have explored brilliantly) around the question of the reinvigoration of the United Nations and the construction of a global ‘civil society’ as the potential interlocutor of the sovereign of the new global order. Even the World Bank has, unlike other global institutions, toyed with this idea. However, the attempt to reactivate a participative and normative ‘international’ system (in the Westphalian sense) has had no effect. Even when it aims to respond to the subjective rights of citizens and nations, of groups and associations, as in the case of the constitution of the great world tribunals, juridical reformism has already bypassed classical international law. Only on this terrain can one fight.

DZ Following September 11 there has been an escalation of international instability. We have seen the affirmation of a strategy of permanent war that is becoming hegemonic, which is without territorial borders and with no time limits. It is largely secretive, and increasingly played out outside the control of international law. Now more than ever, Western military-political elites appear to be aware that in order to ensure the security and wealth of industrialized countries it is necessary to exercise increasing military pressure on the whole world. It is now certain that the war in Afghanistan was only the beginning of a total war against the so-called ‘axis of evil’: Iraq will surely be attacked too...^{*} And the Palestinian people will continue to endure the merciless persecution of Zionist colonialism and imperialism. In my view, the strategic aim of the United States goes much further than the repression of ‘global terrorism’. The aim of the last remaining superpower is that of consolidation of its planetary hegemony in order to ensure a stable military presence in the heart of central Asia. The project is to control the vast energy resources present in the territories of the ex-Soviet republics of the Caucasian, Caspian and trans-Caspian regions, and above all to complete the dual encirclement of the Russian federation from the West and of China from the East. Thus, the prospect of an extremely aggressive relaunch of neocolonial strategy – under the pretext of the fight against terrorism – is frighteningly topical. In the meantime, due to the globalization of markets, the abyss that separates rich and powerful countries from the poor and weak widens on a daily basis. More than a billion people live in absolute poverty, whilst a billion people live in conditions of growing comfort in an ever smaller world within which they are increasingly able to do what they wish. From this point of view I do not see any trace of an objective historical dialectics that would make the overcoming of the present world order easier.

AN But who’s talking about dialectics? In this process (that you describe more or less correctly), I see only the need to resist a capitalism that is becoming increasingly parasitical and predatory, and whose legitimacy (and that of the states and imperial instruments with which it is progressively identified) rests entirely upon war. Foucault and Deleuze have discussed exhaustively the shift from the disciplinary regimes of classical capitalism (concerned with individuals) to the regimes of control of mature capitalism (concerned with populations). Today war becomes integral to that kind of legitimation. In this way misery and marginalization are not only maintained but also continuously reproduced by imperial wars. Imperial

^{*} This conversation took place in September 2002.

war determines new territorial and racial borders. In the face of all this my only problem is that of understanding what kind of resistance – to war, misery and exploitation – can be exercised. However correct your geography of domination might be, we must set against it a topology of resistance. Subcomandante Marcos is from this standpoint more important than the whole American ‘revolution in military affairs’. What interests me is the David in the face of Goliath, of all imperial Goliaths: the military would call it ‘asymmetric resistance’. It is for this reason that the global framework of resistance becomes powerful: because despite the relentless and continuous fencing-off operation produced by the imperial armies, we keep finding free spaces, holes and folds through which exodus and resistance can occur within globalization.

A revolution of the multitude?

DZ I propose to conclude our discussion on one last theme: that of the subject or the subjects of what, for you and Hardt, should be a revolution *within* empire. I use the term ‘revolution’ in its full anthropological significance, since I think this is how your communist project should be understood. You think, classically, of a transformation of the world that is not only political but also cultural and ethical.

AN Apart from thinking revolution in ethical and political terms, we think of it also in terms of a profound anthropological modification: as a mixing and continuous hybridizing of populations – as biopolitical metamorphosis. The first terrain of struggle is the universal right of movement, work and education across the surface of the globe. The revolution we envisage takes place not only *within* empire but also *through* empire. It is not a fight against some improbable Winter Palace (only the anti-imperialists want to bomb the White House), but one directed against all the central and peripheral structures of power, in order to drain them of that power and take away the productive capacity of capital.

DZ You designate the subject of this revolution within empire, the ‘multitude’. I say ‘designate’ with a critical intention: for me, ‘multitude’ is a slippery concept, the least appealing in the whole conceptual arsenal of *Empire*. Nowhere in the book do you present an analytical definition of it based on political-sociological categories to help the reader identify this collective subject within determined sociopolitical contexts, however open these contexts may be to globalization. In place of an analysis, the reader comes across many passages (in particular pp. 353–70) of emphatic tributes to the ‘power of the multitude’ – its power to ‘be, love, transform, create’ – and its ‘desire’ for emancipation. I’m afraid that you are indebted here to Marxist messianism and its grandiose political simplifications. The multitude appears to be an evanescent sinopia of the nineteenth-century proletariat, the class that Marx had elevated to the position of demiurge of history. I say this with bitterness and without irony.

AN You are right to charge us with lacking an adequate analytical definition of the concept of the multitude in *Empire*. I am happy to be self-critical, all the more so since Hardt and I are zealously working on this notion at the moment. Even so, I believe that the concept of multitude in the book can be understood from three different perspectives. The first is in polemical opposition to the two definitions that have been given of ‘populations’ inserted in the framework of modern sovereignty: ‘people’ and ‘masses’. We think that the multitude is a *multiplicity* of singularities that can in no way find representative *unity*. The people is, on the contrary, an artificial unity that is necessary for the modern state to ground the fiction of legitimation; whereas the masses is a concept that realist sociology assumes as forming the basis of the capitalist mode of production (both in the liberal form and the socialist one of the management of capital). In each of these two cases there is a reduction to an undifferentiated unity. For us, on the other hand, men and women are singularities, a multitude of *singularities*. A second meaning of multitude derives from the fact that we contrast it with the concept of ‘class’. As a matter of fact, from the standpoint of a renewed sociology of labour, the worker

is increasingly presented as the bearer of immaterial productive ability. He reappropriates the instrument of labour. In immaterial productive labour this instrument is the brain (and so the Hegelian dialectics of the instrument comes to an end). This singular capacity for work constitutes the workers as a multitude rather than a class. Consequently, here we find a third element of definition, which is the more expressly political one. We regard the multitude as a political power *sui generis*: new political categories must be defined with respect to it – that is, in relation to a multitude of singularities. We think that these new political categories must be identified through an analysis of the *common* rather than through the hypostasis of unity. But this is not the place to advance further with our analysis: I say this with a good dose of irony.

DZ In my opinion your book leaves unsolved the problem of the new spaces and new subjects of global contestation and the issue of the ‘new militants’, to quote Marco Revelli. Your suggestions indicate the need to raise the political struggle to the global level, which follows from your claim of the loss of meaning and efficacy of any engagement in the political arenas of nation-states. But it seems to me that you have paid insufficient attention to the issue of the ‘de-politicization of the world’ that has been brought about by the great powers of technology and the economy, an issue Massimo Cacciari recently insisted on in his *Duemilauno: Politica e futuro*. On the contrary, there are passages in your text that seem animated by a real technological and industrialist – one might even say labourist – fervour towards the network society, to use Manuel Castells’ terms. It is as if for you the technological and information revolution are the vectors for an approaching communist revolution.

AN We pay a lot of attention to the information revolution. Obviously we do so because we remain Marxists and believe that if the law of value no longer works as a law of measure of capitalist development, labour nonetheless remains the source of human dignity and the substance of history. The IT revolution opens the possibility for new spaces of freedom. At the moment, it also determines new forms of slavery. But the workers’ *reappropriation of the instrument*, the concentration of valorization on the *cooperation* between cognitive workers, the extension of knowledge and the importance of science in productive processes, all this determines new material conditions that must be grasped, within the perspective of transformation, in their positivity. The problem of political organization must come to terms with *this* multitude, just as the development of the trade unions or the socialist party had to come to terms with different and changing figures of the proletariat. The depoliticization of the world operated by the great powers is not just a negative event, when it is aimed at getting rid of and/or unmasking old powers and forms of representation that no longer have any real referent. Now is the time to construe a ‘new side’ – that is, a ‘new whole’ of the workers. Calling it a New Left is banal: unfortunately the problem is much deeper and the prospect is desperate. Time is running out.

DZ In my view, the adoption of the term ‘multitude’ is for you also a declaration of radical political anti-individualism. *Empire* requires the almost complete exclusion of the European liberal-democratic tradition. I’m afraid this is the point that most divides us.

AN I agree that the term ‘multitude’ (and what it comprises) represents a position of radical political anti-individualism. *Empire* entails the refusal of the tradition of possessive individualism, but I do not think that this also involves the exclusion of the liberal-democratic European tradition, to the extent that, with the concept of the multitude, what is called for is – *à la* Spinoza – ‘absolute democracy’. The problem for us, as it was for Spinoza, is not the bringing together of isolated individuals but of constructing forms and instruments of association through cooperation, and to move towards the (ontological) recognition of the common. From air to water up to computerized production to networks, this is the plane across which freedom extends itself: how is the common organized?

DZ I appreciate the theoretical courage and originality you display when dealing with such difficult issues, but what I also find unsatisfactory is your proposal of ‘nomadism’ and ‘miscegenation’ as instruments of cosmopolitical struggle to be carried out within the parasitical chrysalis of empire. You claim that nomadism and miscegenation are weapons to use against the subjection to reactionary ideologies such as the nation, ethnicity, people and race. The ‘multitude’ becomes powerful thanks to its ability to circulate, ‘navigate’, contaminate. I think that your views on this issue belie an underestimation of the fact that nomadism, miscegenation and cultural creolization are effects of the great migration flows induced by the increasing international disproportion of power and wealth. Serge Latouche has claimed that the effects of ‘deculturation’, ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘planetary uprooting’ point to a real failure of the project of modernization and to a setback of its Promethean universalism.

AN I am very pleased that you see, with a certain amount of theoretical enthusiasm, the efficacy of our theses on nomadism and miscegenation – I think I can interpret your words in this way. And yet your judgement is inclined towards pessimism. I have often confronted Serge Latouche on these issues and I must say that the reason I don’t accept his position is not that there is no truth to it, but simply that I find it ridden with aspects that are all-consuming and catastrophic. I do not understand why one must ridicule as ‘Promethean universalism’ the migrant fleeing and searching for hope by many people around the world. I do not believe migrants only flee misery; I think they search for freedom, knowledge and wealth. Desire is a constructive power and it is all the stronger when rooted in poverty. Indeed, *poverty* is not simply misery; it is also the *possibility* of many things indicated by desire and produced by labour. The migrant has the dignity of those who seek truth, production, happiness. This is the strength that breaks the enemy’s ability to isolate and exploit, and eliminates – as well as the supposed Prometheanism – any heroic and/or theological element from the actions of the poor and the subversive. If anything, the Prometheanism of the poor and of migrants is the salt of the earth and the world is really changed by nomadism and miscegenation.

DZ I would finally like to ask you – although I realize how difficult it is to answer this – what are the institutional and normative forms of that which you call ‘counter-empire’ – that is, of the ‘alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges’? You claim this to be the political organization that the ‘creative forces of the multitude’ are ‘capable of autonomously constructing’ (p. xv). What does it consist in, concretely? All I could infer from a careful examination of your book is that it would still have an imperial political form. I do not think this is very satisfying either theoretically or politically. Yet it is particularly symptomatic of your adherence to a position that closely resembles the Marxist theory of the ‘withering away of the state’. Empire is the institutional shell within which states and their juridical ordering will be dissolved, will ‘wane’ (*otmiranie*), as Lenin said. Here, still within the Marxist orthodoxy that starts with ‘On the Jewish Question’, your book ignores the whole doctrine of the ‘state of law’ and of the protection of fundamental freedoms, together with the issues of respect for political minorities and peoples’ right to self-determination. In your book the power of the multitude is conceived as an unlimited, global and permanent constituent energy: a collective energy that expresses ‘generative power, desire and love’. The ‘multitude’ is a sort of historical uterus from which a new way of life and a new species will emerge: ‘*toward homohomo, humanity squared, enriched by the collective intelligence and the love of the community*’ (p. 204). Don’t you think this is all too prophetic, generous ‘wishful thinking’ to be able to found a practical standpoint of resistance and struggle against all that seems, to me as much as to you, unacceptable in the globalized world we live in?

AN I don’t know how to reply to your last questions. I almost feel that, exhausted as we now are, we are putting forward impressions and static ideas rather than lines of argument. You have surely studied ‘the withering away of the state’ in the Marxist classics more than I have, since I was more concerned with the problems of the transition. Telling you today that all that seems to me absurd I’m sure can only meet with your approval. However, I think that

the whole doctrine of the 'state of law' has also grown decrepit, and that, so as not to end up like so many Don Ferrantes who keep philosophizing in the void of meaning, we must consider anew the substantive element of freedom it contained. Finally, on what the multitude will do against empire, I willingly put my trust in what the militants of the global movements think and do. Believe me, they are much more capable and intelligent than we were when we were young.

Translated by Arianna Bove and Matteo Mandarini

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