The Illusions of “Empire”

Tuesday 19 August 2008, by ABU-MANNEH Bashir (Date first published: June 2004).

Contents

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, published by Harvard University Press in 2000, took the intellectual world by storm. After the declared demise of “grand narratives” and projects of human emancipation, here came a book that told the grandest of all stories, the totalization of capital, and anticipated the most magnificent of all revolutionary outcomes, communism. Postmodern taboos were shattered, or so it seemed. The prophets of the multitude, Hardt and Negri, were duly acknowledged and celebrated in the liberal press. In the United Kingdom, the *New Statesman* ran an interview with Negri entitled “The left should love globalization.” Globalization, Negri stated, leads to real democratic “global citizenship.” In the United States, *New York Times* reviewer Emily Eakin hailed *Empire* as the “next big idea,” announcing the arrival of a badly-needed “master theory” to overcome the “deep pessimism,” “banality” (Stanley Aronowitz’s term), “crisis,” and “void” that have characterized the humanities in the last decade. *Empire* (both book and concept) was good news for everyone, ushering in a period that, while difficult to define, is, in Hardt’s words, “actually an enormous historical improvement over the international system and imperialism.” [1]

The response of the conservative press was not so kind. While emphasizing Hardt and Negri’s championing of globalization as the end of imperialism, the *Sunday Times* (London), for example, struck a strong critical note at the end of an interview with Hardt. John Gray, it said, was left “unimpressed” by the book: “It looks to me more a response to the sorry condition of the humanities in the United States than a serious critique of globalization.” And David Pryce-Jones in the U.S. magazine *National Review* read the book as a farcical attempt to resurrect the “Last Big Idea Which Did Not Come Off”: communism. He went on to accuse the liberal press of being fooled by the ’68 generation of “fashionable intellectuals” who were “occupied in updating old-fashioned Marxism-Leninism with their brand-new lingo of deconstruction and poststructuralism.” His most venomous attack is on Hardt and Negri’s reading of the Soviet Union as “death from the socialist victory of modernization”: “Such a travesty is a tribute to the higher idiocy which only an imagination unconnected to reality is able to confect.” [2]

On the left, the book has been both praised and criticized. In fact, *Empire* has become a point of focus for a larger debate about globalization, contemporary forms of imperialism, and the post–cold war era, subjects of great importance. It is in connection with these subjects that I examine *Empire* in this essay. My aim is twofold: first, to examine the validity of the conceptual and theoretical apparatus advanced in *Empire*; and, second, to contribute to the understanding of the politics and ideology of contemporary global capitalism. As I will argue below, the defining issue of the debate surrounding *Empire* is whether capitalism has now entered into a “post-imperialist” stage, as Hardt and Negri argue, or whether it has consolidated a new phase of imperialism. The answer to this question is crucial not only because it defines the *actuality* of global capitalism but also because it determines the *potentiality* of its transformation.

Post-imperialism or new imperialism?

In order to understand the nature of Hardt and Negri's project, it is important to map out Lenin's ideas on imperialism. Not long before the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin said,

Can one, however, deny that in the abstract a new phase of capitalism to follow imperialism, namely, a phase of ultra-imperialism, is 'thinkable'? No. In the abstract one can think of such a phase. In practice, however, he who denies the sharp tasks of to-day in the name of dreams about soft tasks of the future becomes an opportunist. Theoretically it means to fail to base oneself on the developments now going on in real life, to detach oneself from them in the name of dreams. [3]

This was Lenin's judgement on Kautsky's notion of "ultra-imperialism." It is both a political and a theoretical rejection. Kautsky was imagining peaceful capitalist coexistence and cooperation exactly when inter-imperialist contradictions were sharpening and intensifying. Lenin says that Kautsky's notion is a "lifeless abstraction," which has no truck with "the concrete realities of the present-day world economy." Its main flaw lies in ignoring one of the basic laws and conditions of capitalism, its *combined and uneven development*. In a world of powers whose strength is unequal, uneven development can only become more acute. In an epoch characterized by "the striving for domination, not for freedom," "truce" is only possible as a prelude to war: there can be no permanent joint exploitation of the world, Lenin affirmed. Indeed, it is a "profoundly mistaken idea" which says "that the rule of finance capital *lessens* the unevenness and contradictions inherent in the world economy today, whereas in reality it *increases* them." [4]

Politically, Lenin thought that Kautsky's vision constituted a form of political *evasion*, an opportunist abdication of responsibility: "And why not wave aside the 'exacting' tasks that have been posed by the epoch of imperialism now ruling in Europe?" Bukharin had a similar position: "This possibility [of 'ultra-imperialism'] would be thinkable if we were to look at the social process as a purely mechanical one, without counting the forces that are hostile to the policy of imperialism." [5] The potential for revolutionary transformation should never be discounted or excluded from the political equation. The tasks of the present moment, therefore, exclude turning to "innocent dreams of a comparatively peaceful, comparatively conflictless, comparatively non-catastrophic" future. [6] For Lenin, the real challenge was to unify the proletariat behind a policy of anti-imperialism in the present conjuncture. His 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* sought to do exactly that.

In *Imperialism* Lenin argued that imperialism was a stage that capitalist development had reached. It wasn't only a policy or an ideology, as Bukharin had argued in his seminal Imperialism and World Economy; neither was it only the rule of finance capital, as Hilferding had exhaustively shown in his pioneering Finance Capital; and nor was imperialism a choice that capitalists could decide to opt out of to revert back to "free competition," as Kautsky and others thought. The economic essence of imperialism is monopoly capitalism, Lenin argued: "If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism." [7] Due to the concentration of capital and production, there is a greater propensity towards monopolies. Competition is not eliminated, however, as imperialism "'ties up' monopoly with free competition." Imperialism "*cannot do away* with exchange, the market, competition, crises, etc.…The essential feature of imperialism, by and large, is not monopolies pure and simple, but monopolies in conjunction with exchange, markets, competition, crises." [8] While stating that all definitions are "conditional and relative," Lenin recounts the following main economic features of imperialism:

Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and *finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.* [9]

Historically, Lenin saw imperialism as a decaying, *moribund* capitalism, where a revolutionary transition to socialism is possible—as happened in Russia in 1917 but not in the rest of Europe. Its most destructive effect on the labor movement, he argued, lies in its strengthening of opportunism, generating reconciliation between the proletariat and bourgeois parties—as witnessed by the collapse of the Second International.

The "composite picture" Lenin draws of the capitalist system in the era of imperialism is therefore one of global rivalry among national capitals over repartitioning the world market, resulting in colonial oppression abroad and increased domination and opportunism at home. [10] It is a dynamic picture of conflict and struggle, both interimperial and social, resulting in war, uneasy peace, and war again: a universal dialectic of development and destruction, progress and stagnation, only to be overcome in socialism.

Hardt and Negri find Lenin's notion of imperialism no longer relevant to understanding our world today. *Empire* is what comes after imperialism, they argue, a new form of global juridical sovereignty "composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule" (xii). **] If imperialism was characterized by the struggle of sovereign national capitals for world domination, the rise of Empire indicates the demise of this era: "The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow" (xiii). Empire is therefore spatially limitless, temporally eternal, socially all-encompassing, politically centerless, and universally peaceful. Though this description has clear Kautskyian overtones, Hardt and Negri insist on anchoring their argument in Lenin's own thought. It is Lenin himself, they argue, who "was able to anticipate the passage to a new phase of capital beyond imperialism and identify the place (or really the non-place) of emerging imperial sovereignty" (232). Even though they do admit that this is an "exaggeration" (234), they still go on to say that "Lenin's analysis of imperialism and its crisis leads directly to the theory of Empire." "This is the alternative implicit in Lenin's work: *either world communist revolution or Empire*, and there is a profound analogy between these two choices" (232). This is clearly wrong. The only thing Lenin anticipated was revolution; Empire (or ultraimperialism) was never even a possibility. Lenin insisted that,**

There is no doubt that the development is going in the direction of a single world trust that will swallow up all enterprises and all states without exception. But the development in this direction is proceeding under such stress, with such a tempo, with such contradictions, conflicts, and convulsions—not only economical, but also political, national, etc., etc.—that before a single world trust will be reached, before the respective national finance capitals will have formed a world union of "ultra-imperialism," imperialism will inevitably explode, capitalism will turn into its opposite. [11]

If Hardt and Negri were really repeating Lenin, they would have to categorically deny the possibility of Empire/ultra-imperialism. If after imperialism comes socialism, then Empire/ultra-imperialism is premised on the denial of socialism. Herein lies the crux of Lenin's argument: the Kautskyian concept is theoretically flawed because it ignores the uneven development of capitalism, and politically opportunist because it denies the possibility of socialism.

For Hardt and Negri, Lenin's analysis of imperialism has been superseded by history. Vietnam struck the death knell of U.S. imperialism and its continuation of the European colonial project, ushering in a new period they dub Empire: a "smooth space" where "there is *no place* of power—it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*" (190). It is therefore no longer necessary to reject ultra-imperialism: "Empire has been materializing before our eyes" (xi). It is my aim in the following to show by recourse to concrete political analysis that nothing has changed to make Empire any less utopian than it was when Kautsky first suggested it in 1914; and that Hardt and Negri have misconstrued the process of globalization by naively accepting its definition as "'a process without a subject." They wrongly conclude, therefore, that imperialism has been overcome. In reality, it has only been perfected under U.S. hegemony. As Lenin back in 1916 recognized, "'American ethics,' which the European professors and well-meaning bourgeois so hypocritically deplore, have, in the age of finance capital, become the ethics of literally every large city in any country." [12] The rainbow that Hardt and Negri see is only a mirage obscuring the Stars and Stripes.

"American capitalism," Trotsky stated in his 1924 speech "Perspectives of World Development," "is seeking the position of world domination; it wants to establish an American imperialist autocracy over our planet." For Trotsky, the fate of mankind therefore hinges on the outcome of the international conflict between revolutionary Bolshevism and American imperialism. In this context, Europe will be allowed to rise again within limits set by the United States and will gradually be transformed into an "American dominion of a new type." For England, "only retreats are possible" to avoid interimperial war with the United States. The internal political makeup of Europe has also been affected. Americanism wears the cloaks of social democracy: "European Social Democracy is becoming, before our very eyes, the political agency of American capitalism." Trotsky's only hope lay in the revolutionary potential of the American proletariat: "Americanized Bolshevism will crush and conquer imperialist Americanism." [13] The reverse has happened. The 20th century has witnessed the containment of revolutionary Bolshevism, its degeneration into Stalinism, and its eventual implosion beginning in 1989. For the first time in history, capital was universalized: "It has totalized itself both intensively and extensively. It's global in reach, and it penetrates to the heart and soul of social life and nature." [14] A new world order was duly declared by George Bush senior, promising global peace and prosperity while threatening Iraq with war. [15] This double register of peace and war has come to define the 1990s.

Hardt and Negri read the 1991 Gulf War as a symptom of Empire, of a new order exemplified by the ethicality and effectiveness of war:

The importance of the Gulf War derives rather from the fact that it presented the United States as the only power able to manage international justice, ***not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right****.* (180)

This is exactly the way the United States presented its intervention in Iraq. International norms had to be upheld, and the United States was forced to intervene to rectify global criminal behavior. To accept and uncritically replicate this hegemonic U.S. discourse of policing the world, of rights and "just war," is to fall into the trap of projecting domestic criminal law onto the behavior of states. This involves an unprecedented "transfer of the discourse that serves the domestic legal system within a liberal democratic state to the realm of world politics," leading to a depoliticization of global conflicts like wars. [16] Because the Gulf War couldn't really be justified in liberal or democratic terms, a moral discourse of right and wrong had to be imported into international relations. International politics, national interests, or even capital reproduction strategies are substituted by a humanitarian discourse, which Hardt and Negri endorse. Its vanguards are the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), which prepare for military intervention and "represent directly global and universal human interests" (313), thus aiming to meet "the needs of life itself." "Beyond politics" (314), morality rules.

But whose morality is it? And whose humanity was it that was being represented in the Gulf War?

Which "life in all its generality" (313) was being affirmed? Certainly not those of the Iraqis, as many immediately recognized. Western humanitarian intervention and "global right" are in fact premised on the degradation and dehumanization of the Iraqi people. As Edward Said has argued:

Representation of the conflict in the West, by the first week of the crisis in August, had succeeded, first in demonizing Saddam; second, in personalizing the crisis and eliminating Iraq as a nation, a people, a culture, a history; and third, in completely occluding the role of the United States and its allies in the formation of the crisis. [17]

Said has also explained that the Gulf War was part of a long and disastrous history of U.S. imperialist design in the region, as have many other anti-imperialist intellectuals like Robin Blackburn and Noam Chomsky. What should have given Hardt and Negri additional pause was the fact that this "global right" was being applied unequally. What sort of international juridical norms were being followed when they applied only to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait but not to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights? If there is such a thing as a "new supranational right," why is it policed so selectively? Hardt and Negri remain untroubled by such questions. For them, the United States is simply constitutionally and historically privileged to selflessly act as a global "peace police" in order to safeguard and guarantee the public good, a role which it has been asked to assume by international organizations after the demise of the Soviet bloc. As Neil Smith argues, Hardt and Negri "swallow completely the conflation of narrow national self-interest of US elites with the facade of representing global good." [18] Politically, this makes them complicit with every act of destruction wreaked in the name of global liberal norms from the Gulf War to Kosovo:

Those who present the US war drive as a force for liberal values and a move toward restoration of justice in the Gulf are complicit in the carnage and destruction wrought by Desert Storm to buttress a regional regime of oppression and economic exploitation. [19]

In reality, the new world order is substantially different from the one depicted in *Empire*. Imperialism has indeed persisted. And American empire is the real goal of globalization. This has been clearly demonstrated in Peter Gowan's *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance*. The new world order, he argues, is in essence about the U.S. drive to dominate the world economy unchallenged, to "go global" in order "to entrench the United States as the power that will control the major economic and political outcomes across the globe in the twenty-first century." Globalization and neoliberalism are U.S. strategies for global dominance, allowing the United States to shape both "the internal and external environments of states in directions which will induce them to continue to accept U.S. political and economic dominance." [20] Seeing globalization as a "process without a subject," as Hardt and Negri do in *Empire*, mystifies the real dynamics of U.S. global expansion in the 1990s and serves as an ideological cloak for U.S. imperialism. By confusing U.S. self-presentation with objective reality, they promote the crippling illusion that global power is without a dominant center. Put simply, what is globalization to the rest of the world is Americanization to the United States:

Globalization thus deglobalizes US macroeconomic policy...while other economies and governments experience new kinds of subordination to international economic processes, from the angle of the US economy globalization can rather present itself as an 'Americanization' of the world economy—a process of harmonizing the rest of the world to the rhythms and requirements of the U.S. economy. [21]

The pressure on the rest of the world has as a result been immense, forcing states themselves to become "efficient agencies for capitalist globalization." [22] But this has not led to the construction of a global state or Empire. One of the basic features of U.S. globalization, contra Hardt and Negri, has been that it uses other states to promote its own interests. The state is necessary for globalization, and the question that therefore needs to be addressed is that of how the contemporary state has been restructured to perform the new requirements of the drive to "go global" by the United States. It is important to understand the process through which other states have internalized U.S. global demands, and to capture the way the U.S. pressures other states to bend to its will. This process is not only economic or military, but juridical as well. As Aijaz Ahmad observes: "national legal systems are being constantly pressed into altering their own laws to make them more compatible with—often mere facsimiles of—American law." He therefore concludes:

The non-territorial empire that has its capital in Washington D.C. thus takes over the actual internal functioning of far-flung nation-states three times over: under the lure and power of private transnational capital, under the regulatory regimes of the supra-national institutions (the IMF and so on), and by turning the laws of various nations into replicas of American law. [23]

Many of these features are specific to the 1990s, but some have a lineage that goes back to the early 1970s, if not before. One of U.S. imperialism's most dominant features in the postwar period has been its power to copy its relations of production inside other imperial metropolises. And this has continued, expanded, and intensified. Another important feature is that the United States has never sought to emulate old-style European imperialism by creating a juridical empire of its own. The reverse is actually true. Decolonization and formal juridical and political independence were necessary conditions for the United States' own domination and expansion.

The United States has in fact come to rely on the compliance of other states with its own military-political projects, and this was one of the most significant features of the cold war era. Through the construction of an elaborate hub-and-spokes protectorate system, the United States was able to dominate its allies and determine their friends, enemies, states of emergency, foreign policies, and strategies of accumulation. [24] Allies were dependent on the United States to satisfy their security needs, and each individual ally's main strategic relationship had to be with the United States. Interimperial rivalries and antagonisms were therefore contained by the unity provided by U.S. domination. While never seeking to eliminate its allies as independent centers of capital accumulation, the United States always sought to determine their development. So Europe and Japan became strategically and politically dependent on the United States' relation with the Soviet Union, which the United States utilized to secure its own economic and political supremacy over the world market. Indeed, as David N. Gibbs has argued, the United States pursued a "double containment" strategy during the cold war "to contain Communism and the capitalist allies of the United States in Europe simultaneously." The former was used to legitimize the latter. "With the demise of the Soviet Bloc, after 1989, the containment of allies has remained a central U.S. objective." [25] The crisis of the 1990s can therefore be read as a crisis of legitimacy for U.S. power: how to maintain and reproduce the cold war structures of domination and dependency when they were no longer officially needed. This has been the challenge U.S. elites have had to grapple with in the 1990s.

In other words, the central U.S. objective has remained a constant since at least as far back as the First World War: global domination. As the former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage so succinctly put it in 1990, "There is absolutely no substitute for decisive, clearheaded American leadership." [26] The real challenge for the United States in the 1990s had been finding new ways to legitimize this proposition. The third world and Eastern Europe have had to bear the brunt of this process, as interimperialist tensions were projected outwards. Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, "humanitarian intervention," "just war," NATO expansion, and a host of other forms of statecraft like globalization and neoliberalism cannot be understood outside this essential fact. This explains, as Gowan has argued, the turbulence in transatlantic relations in the 1990s:

The entire shape of European politics and economics in the 1990s has been shaped by the battles amongst the main NATO powers over how to reshape the political framework in Western Europe after it was shattered by the Soviet bloc collapse.

The United States has vehemently refused to renegotiate the basic terms and conditions of the "strong partnership" between itself and Europe:

In U.S. official parlance, the phrase "strong partnership" is code. In diplomatic language, it means strong U.S. leadership over Euroland. More bluntly, it means U.S. hegemonic leadership of Western Europe, the kind of "strong partnership" that used to exist during the Cold War (and in the Gulf War). [27]

The United States has, as a result, continued to resist what can be described as the European ultra-imperialist project of carving up the rest of the world equally. As Lenin emphasized early last century, uneven development and uneven distribution of power undermine any sense of equality in international relations. This has been borne out in international politics today. The United States does not accept what senior British diplomat Robert Cooper today calls postmodern or cooperative imperialism: "a framework in which each has a share in the government, in which no single country dominates and in which the governing principles are not ethnic but legal." [28] This project, which includes the International Criminal Court and other institutions for mutual state interference, sounds very much like Hardt and Negri's juridical Empire. And it stands in sharp contradiction with the United States' strategy to attain unchallenged supremacy over the world. The United States continues to interpret "cooperative empire" as a direct threat to its own constitution and national interest since it involves subjecting U.S. domestic law to international constraints. The European Union has strongly argued against such a reading. It sees its version of globalization/imperialism—a network of shared sovereignty—as a positive development in international relations. As its External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten recently said:

On the contrary, the instinct to return to a narrow definition of the national interest; to assert the primacy of US concerns, and especially economic interests, over any outside authority; constitutes a threat not just to the developing international order, but to the US itself. [29]

The United States categorically refuses to partake in the European Union's "neoliberal cosmopolitanism": "the United States has not exhibited any discernible tendency either to abandon power politics or to subordinate itself to supra-national global authorities." [30] As the 1990s clearly demonstrated, maintaining a hierarchically structured unipolar global order has remained the United States' primary objective.

It is in this context that the "war on terrorism" needs to be understood. For Hardt and Negri, it signifies a rupture in the Empire project. After September 11, 2001, they have argued, the United States adopted a unilateral imperialist project, abandoning the decentered multilateralism of the network: Empire is no more, downgraded from an actuality into a potentiality, a mere alternative within global politics. [31] This conception of contemporary international politics is pure idealism. Empire, like ultra-imperialism, has always been a theoretical possibility but never a reality—and it never can be, as the United States has insisted. The "war on terrorism" has only provided the United States with a means to legitimize a host of new imperialist measures (including "regime change" and "preemptive strike") in order to increase its global penetration. Combining growing authoritarianism at home with intensifying intervention abroad, the United States exploited the September 11 terrorist attacks to consolidate and extend existing U.S. strategies for world domination. As the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, published in September 2002, indicates, the global economy, free markets, and the national development of other states are all national security issues for the United States now. For example, "A return to strong economic growth in

Europe and Japan is vital to U.S. national security interests." The sphere of the U.S.'s global interference is thus constantly being expanded. The domestic affairs of other nations are increasingly becoming U.S. affairs as well: "Today, the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs is diminishing. In a globalized world, events beyond America's borders have a greater impact inside them."

Militarily, deterrence is no longer sufficient. A proactive policy of preemption and prevention is necessary to counter an elusive and fluid foe like terrorism, giving the United States the right to dictate any measures it deems necessary for its own protection. It is rather ironic yet quite apt that the administration chooses to call such a global strategy of domination and intervention "American internationalism." What Trotsky dreaded early in the last century has come to pass: the globe has finally been Americanized. Or, as Perry Anderson has put it, America has been internationalized:

Internationalism in this sense is no longer coordination of the major capitalist powers under American dominance against a common enemy, the negative task of the Cold War, but an affirmative ideal—the reconstruction of the globe in the American image, sans phrases. [32]

Postmodern Desertions

The arrogance of the "international community" and its rights of intervention across the globe are not a series of arbitrary events or disconnected episodes. They compose a system, which needs to be fought with a coherence not less than its own. [33]

Desertion is not a particularly socialist (or even political) value, yet it occupies a central place in Hardt and Negri's conception of change in Empire. To desert, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, is "to abandon, forsake, relinquish, give up (a thing); to depart from (a place or position)," It signifies failure and a violation of an oath or allegiance. Desertion is wilful abandonment of duty or obligation. There is also a condition of being deserted, desertedness, which, interestingly, in a theological register, signifies spiritual despondency: "A sense of the dereliction of God (Johnson)."

Empire is premised on the power of desertion and nomadism. Having in one breath criticized postcolonial theory for being outmoded, Hardt and Negri go on to privilege its most recent theoretical trope in the next: the migrant as bearer of truth, as symbol of a new world and its liberatory potential. Through migrancy, the multitude anticipates and invents Empire: "The deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction" (61). At the same time as being controlled by Empire, the multitude determines its development: "it is always the initiatives of organized labor power that determine the figure of capitalist development" (208). Which turns Marx on his head. In *Capital*, proletarian migrancy or nomad labor is a symptom of the power of capital: "They are the light infantry of capital, thrown by it, according to its needs, now to this point, now to that. When they are not on the march, they 'camp.'" [34] Undermining Marx's emphasis on the rule of capital over labor, the struggle between capital and labor comes then to be defined through desertion, exodus, and refusal. Hardt and Negri substitute political passivity for challenge and opposition to capital. Class struggle becomes about disengagement. The politics of refusal becomes, in anarchist mode, a refusal of politics. It is quite ironic, therefore, that after presenting Empire as a realm "beyond politics," Hardt and Negri end up advocating a reformist sort of politics—like the right to global citizenship, a social wage, and the right of reappropriation. But then such a contradiction between revolutionary rhetoric and reformist practice is itself a dominant feature of some brands of anarchism.

For Hardt and Negri, migration becomes the new vanguard activity—even though they reject vanguardism as a political form. Evoking the *Communist Manifesto*, they state that "A specter haunts the world and it is the specter of migration. All the powers of the old world are allied in a merciless operation against it, but the movement is irresistible" (213). "Migration" is here substituted for Marx and Engels's original "Communism." The shift is emblematic. A social process is substituted for a political party/subject. And this has also been the dominant logic of social movements since the 1970s, as James Heartfield has observed: "The real meaning of the 'new social movements' is a move away from the idea of an agent of social transformation altogether. The novel forms of organization are a break with the idea of collective agency." [35] The decline and defeat of the working class as a political force from the late 1970s onwards has indeed been the primary precondition for the rise of social movements like "direct action," environmentalism, feminism, indigenism, NGOs, and, today, the anticapitalist movement.

Empire is quite explicit, therefore, in its rejection of proletarian forms of political organization. Internationalism is a case in point. Hardt and Negri are particularly eager to dispel the notion that internationalism has any role to play in contemporary politics. "Today we should all clearly recognize," they state, "that the time of such proletarian internationalism is over" (50). Globalization is a response to internationalism rather than a result of its failure. Again, workers have "anticipated and prefigured the processes of the globalization of capital and the formation of Empire" (51). Global capital emulates international struggles, they claim. Having prefigured Empire, proletarian internationalism has become outmoded, its tactics and strategy "completely irretrievable" (59). As "*struggles have become all but incommunicable*" (54), they "do not link horizontally, but each one leaps vertically, directly to the virtual center of Empire" (58). In a reversal of the shared antagonisms and resemblances of proletarian internationalism, difference rules in struggles today: "Enlightenment is the problem and postmodernism is the solution" (140). But what sort of solution is it? Have the problems of inequality, exploitation, and binary antagonisms generated by capitalism really been resolved in postmodernity?

Empire seems to have resolved these problems away by performing a double evacuation: both of structure and of agency. With the dilution of an objective power structure comes the liquidation of a subject of liberation. If Empire is centerless, then so is counter-Empire. Hardt and Negri's rejection of internationalism is therefore premised on the flawed assumption that the nation-state has disappeared, when, in fact, it has only been restructured. If state power has not evaporated in Empire/globalization but only been reconfigured, then their politics of difference is an evasion of political action. Which means that the moment of "the missed opportunities of international socialism" has not become redundant. [36] Neither has the strategy of capturing state power as the main objective of revolutionary movements. As Marx and Engels put it in the *Manifesto*: "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie." [37]

But who in postmodernity is to counter and overcome "American internationalism," and guarantee that "neoliberal cosmopolitanism"—its equally imperialist EU competitor—is defeated as well? The real question is slightly different, as Ralph Miliband observes: who is structurally capable of transforming global capitalism and overcoming the logic of its domination? Miliband had no doubts that it can only be the working class, the subordinated majority. If the working class does not overcome the rule of capital, then, quite simply, nobody else will:

[T]he "primacy" of organized labor in struggle arises from the fact that no other group, movement or force in capitalist society is remotely capable of mounting as effective and formidable a challenge to the existing structures of power and privilege as it is in the power of organized labor to mount. In no way is this to say that movements of women, blacks, peace activists, ecologists, gays, and others are not important, or cannot have effect, or that they ought to surrender separate identity. Not at all. It

is only to say that the principal (not the only) "gravedigger" of capitalism remains the organized working class. Here is the necessary, indispensable "agency of historical change." And if, as one is constantly told is the case, the organized working class will refuse to do the job, then the job will not be done. [38]

Put differently: only the "particularized universalism" of socialist internationalism can counter the "universalized particularism" [39] of postmodern American internationalism. The postmodern left has deserted this position and, in so doing, has refused to acknowledge the unprecedented power of global capitalist domination. Capitalism, it turns out, is not at all as all-powerful as Marxists thought it was before the days of deconstruction. It is actually "a paper tiger" [40] and has no essential identity. Between such denial and Hardt and Negri's euphoria, capitalism is left unchallenged. Part of today's necessary "uncompromising realism" is an appreciation of the force and truth of Miliband's statement above. Only by "refusing any accommodation with the ruling system, and rejecting every piety and euphemism that would understate its power" [41] can a real appreciation of the tasks ahead be achieved. Idealism and mystification will only undermine any re-emerging potential for real transformation in the future.

* *All of the parenthetical numbers in the text refer to the Hardt and Negri book.*

P.S.

* From the Montly Review Volume 56, Number 2, June 2004:

http://www.monthlyreview.org/0604abumanneh.htm

* Bashir Abu-Manneh teaches English at Barnard College. This article is an abridged version of his introduction to a symposium he edited on Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's Empire (Harvard University Press, 2000). The symposium, "Empire and US Imperialism" was first published in Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies 5, no. 2 (2003) and can be found at www.tandf.co.uk/. He is also the author of "Palestine Revealed: The Liberation Cinema of Michel Khleifi," in Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema, edited by Hamid Dabashi (forthcoming).The Illusions of Empire.

Footnotes

[1] Mark Leonard, "The left should love globalization," *New Statesman*, May 28, 2001; Emily Eakin, "What is the next big idea? Buzz is growing for 'Empire,'" *New York Times*, July 7, 2001.

[2] David Smith, "He foresees a great future for the workers," The *Sunday Times*, July 15, 2001; David Pryce-Jones, "Evil Empire: the communist 'hot, smart book of the moment,'" *National Review*, September 17, 2001.

[3] V. I. Lenin, "Introduction,"[originally published in 1915] in N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and the World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 13–14.

[4] All quotes in paragraph are from V. I. Lenin, "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism," in *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 169–292.

[5] Bukharin, *Imperialism*, 142.

[6] Lenin, “Introduction,” 12.

[7] Lenin, “Imperialism,” 232.

[8] V. I. Lenin, “Materials Relating to the Revision of the Party Programme,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 464.

[9] Lenin, “Imperialism,” 232–233.

[10] Lenin, “Imperialism,” 171.

[11] Lenin, “Introduction,” 14.

[12] Lenin, “Imperialism,” 208.

[13] This and the above quotes in this paragraph are from Leon Trotsky, *Europe & America: Two Speeches on Imperialism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971).

[14] Ellen Meiksins Wood, “Back to Marx,” *Monthly Review* 49, no. 2 (1997): 5.

[15] Gilbert Achcar, “The Clash of Barbarisms (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).

[16] Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble* (London: Verso, 1999), 142.

[17] Edward Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 357.

[18] Neil Smith, “After the American Lebensraum: ‘Empire,’ Empire, and Globalization,” *Interventions* 5, no. 2 (2003): 261.

[19] Gowan, *Global Gamble*, 163.

[20] Gowan, *Global Gamble*, vii.

[21] Peter Gowan, “Explaining the American Boom: the Roles of ‘Globalization’ and United States Global Power,” *New Political Economy* 6, no. 3 (2001): 373.

[22] Leo Panitch, “‘The State in a Changing World’: Social-Democratizing Global Capitalism?,” *Monthly Review* 50, no. 5 (1998): 22.

[23] Aijaz Ahamd, “Globalization: A Society of Aliens?,” *Frontline* 17, no. 20 (2000), http://www.flonnet.com/fl1720/17200490.htm.

[24] Peter Gowan, “The American Campaign for Global Sovereignty” in Leo Panitch & Colin Leys, eds., *The Socialist Register 2003: Fighting Identities* (New York: Monthly Review, 2002), 1–27.

[25] David N. Gibbs, “Washington’s New Interventionism: U.S. Hegemony and Inter-Imperialist Rivalries,” *Monthly Review* 53, no. 4 (2001): 16.

[26] Cited in Michael T. Klare, “U.S. Military Policy in the Post-Cold War Era,” in Leo Panitch and

Ralph Miliband, eds., *The Socialist Register 1992: New World Order?* (London: Merlin, 1992), 139.

[27] Both quotes are from Peter Gowan, "The Euro-Atlantic Origins of NATO's Attack on Yugoslavia," in Tariq Ali, ed., *Masters of the Universe?: NATO's Balkan Crusade* (London: Verso, 2000), 19, 8.

[28] Robert Cooper, "The Postmodern State," in Mark Leonard, ed., *Re-Ordering the World* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2002), 19.

[29] Chris Patten, "Sovereignty and the National Interest: Old Concepts, New Meanings," http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/sp02_77.htm.

[30] Peter Gowan, "Neoliberal Cosmopolitanism," *New Left Review* II, no. 11 (2001): 85.

[31] Michael Hardt, "Folly of Our Masters of the Universe," *Guardian*, December 18, 2002.

[32] Perry Anderson, "Force and Consent," *New Left Review* II, no. 17 (2002): 24.

[33] Anderson, "Force and Consent," 30.

[34] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), 621.

[35] James Heartfield, *The "Death of the Subject" Explained* (Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2002), 148.

[36] Stephen Morton, "'Workers of the World Unite' and Other Impossible Propositions," I*nterventions* 5, no. 2 (2003): 293.

[37] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifest of the Communist Party," in *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968), 44.

[38] Ralph Miliband, "The New Revisionism in Britain," *New Left Review*, no. 150, (1985): 13.

[39] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 78.

[40] Ronaldo Munck, *Marx @ 2000* (London: Zed, 2002), 152.

[41] Perry Anderson, "Renewals," *New Left Review* II, no. 1 (2001): 14.