

Retrieving the Imperial: Empire and International Relations

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This essay uses Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, one of the most widely read accounts of international politics in recent years, as a vehicle to rethink International Relations' engagement with the notion of empire. We begin with the observation that Westphalian models of the international obscure the role of imperial relations in world politics. We go on to develop a conception of the international as a 'thick' set of social relations, consisting of social and cultural flows as well as political-military and economic interactions, which often take place in a context of imperial hierarchy. Retrieving the imperial thus offers a way out of the 'territorial trap' set by Westphalia and alerts us to a range of phenomena occluded by IR's central categories. From this perspective, we analyse *Empire* as an innovative but flawed effort to take seriously the imperial character of international relations. In particular, we focus on the role of the multitude in world politics, Hardt and Negri's genealogy of sovereignty, and their claim that imperialism in the old-fashioned sense is over.

For some, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* is the 'most successful work of political theory to come from the Left for a generation'.¹ It is certainly one of the most widely read analyses of international politics in recent years.² Drawing on a combination of theoretic perspectives not found together in International Relations (IR)—postmodernism, Marxism, and the communist and autonomist traditions of the Italian left³—Hardt and Negri chart a new, unitary and global form of postmodern sovereignty

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). The quote is from Malcolm Bull, 'You Can't Build a New Society with a Stanley Knife', *London Review of Books* 23, no. 19 (2001) [www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n19/bull2319.htm] (29 April 2002). But see Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, 'Gems and Baubles in *Empire*', *Historical Materialism*, forthcoming.

2. Published in March, 2000, *Empire* has sold 52,865 copies (as of March 18, 2002) and was being translated into 10 languages; compare with Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which has sold 5760 copies, and the Cambridge University Press International Relations Series (75 titles) approximately 160,000 copies, according to marketing staff at Harvard and Cambridge.

3. See, for instance, Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

which they term 'Empire', a 'logic of rule' worldwide in scope.⁴ Their project is twice removed from the discipline of IR, in its intellectual resources and in its object of analysis.

Born into a world of empires at war and amid contemporary processes of globalisation, IR remains centred on the logic of a modern system of sovereign states. Marxian analyses of the international, by contrast, concentrate on the interconnections between Europe, capitalism, and imperialism. Postmodern approaches, in a variety of disciplines, stress the encounter with the post-colonial and the inter-penetration of the European and non-European worlds. Hardt and Negri could only develop an approach to world politics that conceives the histories of the North and the South as common, shared and profoundly implicated in one another. This tension between a view of world politics based on the sovereign state and one that takes imperial relations seriously frames our engagement with Hardt and Negri. In common with *Empire*, we argue that understanding sovereignty requires locating it in histories of European expansion and engagement with the world outside the West.

In large measure, IR's opposing camps share a focus on 'Westphalian' state sovereignty, if not agreement on its content or consequences: 'Westphalia . . . has become synonymous with the beginning as well as the end of what we understand as international relations'.⁵ Sovereignty and statehood, as understood in disciplinary narratives derived from Westphalia, apply only to limited periods of history and in particular regions, principally Europe. The central categories of IR have been developed without sufficient attention to the nature and character of the international relations governing most of the planet and its populations at one point or another, namely imperial relations of diverse kinds. In Westphalian terms, the 'international' is a 'thin' space of strategic interaction, populated by diplomats, soldiers and capitalists, to paraphrase Raymond Aron. Contemporary IR theory has added NGOs and 'norms', among other entities, but the contents of the international remain spare compared to domestic spaces.

From an imperial or peripheral perspective, however, the international appears as a 'thick' set of social relations, consisting of social and cultural flows as well as political-military and economic interactions in a context of hierarchy. IR's central categories of sovereignty and the states-system generate a systematic occlusion of the imperial and global character of world politics, past and present.

As a necessary preliminary to consideration of *Empire*, the first section below addresses this acute Eurocentrism pervading IR and outlines a richer conception of the international and the place of the imperial in it. We move on to a critical analysis of Hardt and Negri's text, focusing in particular on

4. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xii.

5. Yongjin Zhang, 'System, Empire and State in Chinese International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 27, special issue (2001): 43.

their account of a transition from modern state sovereignty to postmodern global sovereignty. Their account of the contemporary world scene deploys a 'thick' conception of the international, contextualises Europe in its imperial relations, and grounds sovereignty and other political institutions in social relations and struggles. However, the break they posit between modern and postmodern sovereignty is not, in our view, sustainable. Their analysis of Empire obscures continuities with older histories of 'modern' imperialism. Moreover, despite 400-odd pages, Hardt and Negri's description of an emerging global political and social formation is notably threadbare and derivative, their historical periodisations highly questionable, and their lack of attention to the practical political, economic and military business of imperial governance, historical or contemporary, ultimately crippling.

The Imperial, the International, and International Relations

For IR, empires generally have passed away and are located elsewhere—Rome, China, or in the Soviet bloc countries. When empire intrudes on Europe, as it inevitably does, it is not allowed to compromise the logic of a system of sovereign states. The 'dominant European powers . . . were empires as well as states' the editors of a recent special issue of *Review of International Studies* (RIS) emphasise.⁶ Empire most often denotes a distinct type of political entity and imperialism a policy of foreign conquest and rule. Understood in such a way the concept has limited purchase on contemporary world politics. However, in our view, the empire concept is one of the principle routes out of the 'territorial trap' contained in the idea of a sovereign state system: the notion that borders are relatively impermeable containers of social relations.⁷ In particular, the imperial points the way to a more adequate theorisation of the 'international' as a distinct space of social interaction—a space within which processes of mutual constitution are productive of the entities which populate the international system. Such historical and contemporary processes often take place in the context of international relations of hierarchy, especially but not only in the case of North-South relations, and it is this hierarchy that empire and imperialism capture. Refigured in this way, the category of the imperial is revealing of the character and nature of world politics, past and present.

Contributors to the special issue of RIS, on 'Empires, Systems and States', make two general points. The first is that the Westphalian model of the international system, one 'composed of sovereign states each with

6. Michael Cox, Tim Dunne, and Ken Booth, 'Introduction: Empires, Systems and States: Great Transformations in International Politics', *Review of International Studies* 27, special issue (2001): 6-7, emphasis in original.

7. John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1995), Chapter 4.

exclusive authority within its own geographic boundaries' and based on 'the principles of autonomy, territory, mutual recognition and control', has been enormously influential across the range of IR scholarship.⁸ The second is that this 'elegant' image 'is a myth'⁹ and that 'the Westphalian sovereign state model has never been an accurate description of many of the entities that have been regarded as states.'¹⁰ The sovereign state is in many respects the common ground on which IR's competing traditions engage. Even those who argue that the Westphalian era is at an end, such as Hardt and Negri or students of globalisation, accept its relevance for the preceding centuries. But if in fact Westphalia was never a viable model of international politics or the entities found therein, it is necessary to ask what has been obscured by the discipline's near-exclusive focus on it.¹¹

John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge's conception of the 'territorial trap' provides an answer to this question. Sovereignty and conceptions of the nation-state which emphasise its self-contained and self-organising nature form the 'territorial trap'. 'The territorial state has been "prior" to and a "container" of society only under specific conditions'.¹² Even where and when borders are 'hard' in this way, the societies contained behind them and the state structures which rule over them are formed out of numerous international interactions and are subject to multiple international influences. It is precisely these international relations—a 'thick' set of social, political, economic, cultural and military relations—which are obscured by sovereign conceptions of the international system. Paradoxically, the core concepts of IR work to drain international relations of their content! The discipline's object of analysis—the international—becomes a spare space of strategic interaction between 'pre-existing' entities. This is especially true of structural realist approaches, which demote sovereignty and focus on autonomous political-military entities in a condition of anarchy. By beginning with the state and then analysing its activities in world politics, IR obscures the relations of mutual constitution through which states, societies, and other international phenomena are produced.

As a result, the periphery of the international system, and the less powerful more generally, can drop out of the analysis of 'great power' politics, except as bargaining chips or as the location of natural resources. Alternatively, the periphery becomes the site of Western good intentions, of humanitarian intervention and development assistance. A focus on the

8. Stephen D. Krasner, 'Rethinking the Sovereign State Model', *Review of International Studies* 27, special issue (2001): 17.

9. Andreas Osiander, 'Before Sovereignty: Society and Politics in *Ancien Regime* Europe', *Review of International Studies* 27, special issue (2001): 119.

10. Krasner, 'Rethinking the Sovereign State Model', 17.

11. Martin Shaw provides one set of answers to this question in his *Theory of the Global State: Globality as Unfinished Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

12. Agnew and Corbridge, *Mastering Space*, 94.

imperial, however, draws attention to the many ways in which the non-European world works to constitute the West, the states and societies located there, and their international relations. Throughout the era of European power politics, the source of many of IR's archetypal categories, European politics and society were complexly interpenetrated with an imperial periphery. The rise of the modern state in Europe and the initial stages of European expansion abroad occurred simultaneously. The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth—from the Concert of Europe to total war—was also the era of formal empire. It is only in a juridical, not social, sense that the imperial domains were subsumed under the sovereignty of the European powers, which are more accurately conceived as imperial social formations. Imperialism in its many forms was essential in shaping the character of both Europe and the non-European world; it is their common history.

The force of this point, and the value of taking a 'peripheral' or subaltern perspective on international relations, can be made clearer through brief consideration of Paul Gilroy's idea of the 'Black Atlantic'.¹³ Not unlike Hardt and Negri, Gilroy adopts a primarily philosophical, literary and cultural approach to his topic. This in no way limits his value to IR scholars, who should rather view it as a challenge to develop the political and social dimensions of Gilroy's fecund concept. In consideration of the Black Atlantic, no firm connection can be made between culture, identity and place. The slave trade created a black diaspora in the Caribbean, the US and the UK that developed a variety of hybrid cultures through the circulation of people and ideas between the Americas, Africa and Europe. The result is that contemporary and historical Black Atlantic culture cannot be essentialised as 'African' or 'Afro-Caribbean' or 'Afro-American' but is in fact inherently transnational in nature. Although numerous denizens of the Black Atlantic make various essentialist claims about their identity, Gilroy resists binary oppositions of 'self' and 'other', attending to the multiple and diverse sources of identity and of cultural objects such as novels and music. Gilroy avoids 'mapping' identity onto sovereign states in an isomorphic fashion, as in much constructivist scholarship in IR.¹⁴

What is the significance of Gilroy's work for IR? Is it simply of interest to students of black culture? Gilroy comments that 'the history of slavery is somehow assigned to the blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole.'¹⁵

13. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

14. See, for instance, Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 46, 2 (1992): 391-425. On isomorphism, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

15. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 49.

But of course slavery and the modern cultural history of blacks 'has a great bearing on ideas of what the West was and is today'.¹⁶ The slave trade was fundamental to the development of capitalism and the world economy, as Hardt and Negri also recognise.¹⁷ The Black Atlantic is woven into the texture of world politics, into the entities and relations that populate the international system. The black diaspora in the Caribbean, and the hybrid cultures and society it gave rise to, was and is central to politics and society there. The centrality of the slave question and black populations to both the historical development of the US and to its contemporary society and politics need hardly be remarked. Indeed, the Black Atlantic is still right here in us, as complexly interwoven with the 'White Atlantic' and the 'Hispanic Atlantic' as it has been since its origins. The inter-relations between the slave revolts that swept the Caribbean in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the American and French revolutions are only some of the ways Atlantic social formations interpenetrated one another, and could do so in the 'age of sail'.¹⁸ It is now domestic space that begins to look spare in comparison with the reach and import of the international; indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate off one from the other.

The Black Atlantic is situated in the histories of imperialism and the international relations of hierarchy to which we seek to draw attention. It represents just one route through which not only the international but also the peripheral and subaltern become crucial to an adequate grasp of the character of world politics as a whole. And it identifies a processual ontology through which international relations of diverse kinds constitute the entities and phenomena that populate world politics. It is these relations that should lie at the centre of inquiry in IR. Imperial relations are not the only kind of international relations. However, once vision is shifted from the policies and politics of great powers to the ebb and flow of the social relations through which great powers and their societies are constituted, re-produced and transformed, the imperial and the non-European world more generally take on fundamental importance.¹⁹

The notion of the international as a zone of mutual constitution cannot be explored here fully, although at the level of culture and society it is in many respects self-evident. The complex implication of cricket in the identity politics of former British colonies is one obvious example,²⁰ and

16. *Ibid.*, 45.

17. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 120-24. See also Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

18. See, for instance, C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1963).

19. See, for instance, Siba N. Grovogui, 'Postcolonial Criticism: International Reality and Modes of Inquiry', in *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*, eds. Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (London: Routledge, 2002), 33-55.

20. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, Chapter 5.

the centrality of the South Asian diaspora to identity politics in the UK and especially England is another. That these examples and those discussed above are primarily 'cultural' or at best 'sociological' does not mean that such a perspective on the international is less useful for the 'high politics' of central concern to IR. It only means that scholars of cultural studies and anthropology have been more attentive to the significance of the international and its potential dramatically to unsettle the 'elegant' image of a world composed of discrete states, societies, and regions, each with their own 'internal' dynamics that can be studied in isolation. IR is organised around such a 'nation-state' ontology of world politics, but so too is comparative politics and area studies, as well as much of anthropology, sociology and history. Scholars in these disciplines have increasingly found it impossible to understand their objects of analysis without reference to the kind of robust conception of the international we argue for here.²¹

Processes of mutual constitution are not limited to the social and the cultural narrowly-defined in any case. The international interaction involved in political-military relations shapes the character of states and societies as well. For example, US Cold War policy towards Iran was fundamental to post-1945 Iranian history. The social forces that carried out the Iranian revolution were strengthened in multiple ways by US policy. In turn, the Iranian revolution in 1979 profoundly shaped the subsequent political history of the US. It was in part responsible for the collapse of the Carter Administration, the electoral success of Governor Reagan, and the subsequent development of an extra-legal apparatus within the Reagan Administration for the prosecution of US foreign policy, culminating in the Iran-Contra scandal. Iran-Contra was itself primarily driven by Nicaraguan resistance to US foreign policy in Central America. In other words, the resistance of some Nicaraguan peasants nearly toppled the Reagan Presidency, a situation not as novel as one might think, as Presidents Johnson and Nixon can attest with regards to similar difficulties with Vietnamese peasants. What US politics and society are is in part the result of US engagements with the Third World.

Other scholars and approaches recognise that these kinds of interconnections exist but they have not been made central to our understandings of world politics. Analyses of interdependence and globalisation typically assume that international interconnectedness is of relatively recent origin, impacting on previously discrete and autonomous political units.²² By contrast, our conception of the international sees

21. See, for instance, John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992) and Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

22. See, for instance, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence*

contemporary relations of interconnectedness in the context of a longer, shared and largely imperial history of interaction. It is precisely out of this history that a world of seemingly discrete states and regions has arisen. What would an account of world politics informed by such a view look like? By way of illustration, and in order to elaborate on our preliminary reflections on the imperial and the international, we turn to Hardt and Negri's *Empire*.

Seeing Through Sovereignty: *Empire* and the International

Although widely hailed as 'the Next Big Idea' in intellectual life, Hardt and Negri see *Empire* differently: 'Toni and I don't think of this as a very original book. We're putting together a variety of things that others have said. That's why it's been so well received. It's what people have been thinking but not really articulating'.²³ Our interest in the book is less with questions of novelty than with the kind of analysis it represents. Engaging with and developing the long tradition of Marxian analyses of imperialism, *Empire* offers a 'total' analysis of world politics past and present. Core and periphery, North and South, East and West, inside and outside are treated as part of a single, increasingly global formation, structured and produced by imperial relations of diverse kinds. Following a brief exposition of their main argument, we focus on three themes central to the book: the role of the multitude in world politics, the transformation of sovereignty from a modern to a postmodern form, and the putative disappearance of imperialism.

Empire's thesis is a familiar one: sovereignty is not what it used to be. Under the pressure of capitalist globalisation, sovereignty's very nature is being transformed, from a modern to a postmodern form. In the process, a new global form of rule is emerging which Hardt and Negri term *Empire*.²⁴ Imperialism is central to *Empire's* account of world politics. Imperialism, they claim, operated through the modernist logic of inside/outside.²⁵ Modern sovereignty and classical imperialism are thus

(Boston: Little and Brown, 1977) and David Held et al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

23. Quoted in Emily Eakin, 'What is the Next Big Idea? Buzz is Growing for "Empire"', *New York Times*, 7 July 2001 [<http://www.pastforward.org/hardt/nytimes.1.rtf>] (2 May 2002). In IR, *Empire* is usefully compared with the work of Michael Dillon and Julian Reid. See, for instance, their 'Global Liberal Governance: Biopolitics, Security and War', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 1 (2001): 41-66.

24. Compare, for instance, with Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126-55 and Neil Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies', *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 39-78.

25. See R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*

inseparable: together they divided up the world and its population, in Europe and elsewhere. Imperialism was also 'a system designed to serve the needs and further the interests of capital in its phase of global conquest'.²⁶ But from its inception, capital has tended toward world power in the form of the world market. The realisation of that power requires the remaking of modern sovereignty, which is a sovereignty of borders and limits. 'Imperialism is a machine of global striation, channelling, coding, and territorialising the flows of capital, blocking certain flows and facilitating others. The world market, in contrast, requires a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialised flows'.²⁷ It follows, on Hardt and Negri's account, that once the world market is achieved and there is no more outside, imperialism by definition is over. What remains is a new post-imperial and post-colonial world order.

Even though imperialism and modern sovereignty are in decline, capital still needs the state. From a Marxian perspective, the 'state-capital dialectic' is only conflictual from the point of view of the individual capitalist: '[w]ithout the state, social capital has no means to project and realise its collective interests'.²⁸ The sovereign state and its powers may be undermined but state functions remain necessary and are 'effectively displaced to other levels and domains', local and transnational.²⁹ The 'twilight of modern sovereignty' is also the dawn of Empire, a new 'decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers'.³⁰

The model for understanding this new postmodern form of global capitalist sovereignty is the world market.³¹ In contrast to imperialism, the new sovereignty is imperial but not imperialist, for the simple reason that 'its space is always open' rather than bounded: 'modern sovereignty resides precisely on the limit. In the imperial conception, by contrast, power finds the logics of its order always renewed and always re-created in expansion'.³² As modern sovereignty declines, the world is in fact becoming 'a smooth space' across which people, ideas and things move freely, albeit

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

26. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 224-25. Capital 'constantly operates through the reconfiguration of the boundaries of the inside and the outside. Indeed, capital does not function within the confines of a fixed territory and population, but always overflows its borders and internalizes new spaces'; in *ibid.*, 221-22.

27. *Ibid.*, 332-33.

28. *Ibid.*, 307.

29. *Ibid.*, 307-08. See also Bob Jessop, 'Post-Fordism and the State', in *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, ed. Ash Amin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 251-79.

30. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xi-xii, 333, emphasis in original.

31. *Ibid.*, 333.

32. *Ibid.*, 166-67.

one cross-cut with new and old 'lines of segmentation', including class, that do not follow the boundaries of modern nation-states.³³

Most analyses of globalisation focus on the role of capital or the state in driving these changes.³⁴ In contrast, Hardt and Negri stress the role of labour struggles, both in the emergence of globalisation as a capitalist strategy and in capitalist development more generally.³⁵ Capital 'is not a thing but a social relationship, an antagonistic relationship, one side of which is animated by the productive life of the multitude', Hardt and Negri's term for what used to be called the proletariat.³⁶ Successive stages in the evolution of capital and sovereignty are driven by this antagonism, with labour always the active subject. Significantly, the multitude is not located only in Europe but also outside.³⁷ Hardt and Negri highlight the inter-related character of struggles across the globe and their role in driving capital forward, forcing it to respond to the multitude's essential creativity and plurality. Thus, the emergence of

Empire and its global networks is a response to the various struggles against the modern machines of power, and specifically to class struggle driven by the multitude's desire for liberation. The multitude called Empire into being.³⁸

Indeed, Empire's genealogy of the international functions as a grand narrative in which history is nothing but a series of struggles between the communism of the multitude and capitalist forces of reaction, the latter initially vested in modern sovereignty and the state and now located in Empire.

We stand here at some distance from a Westphalian view of the world and the disciplinary debates of IR. 'In the 1990s', observes Patomäki, 'after the short visit of Marxism in the mainstream of IR, there has been, perhaps more than ever, a tendency to reduce all problems of IR to an almost eternal dispute between political realism and liberalism'.³⁹ In marked contrast to such disciplinary analyses, Hardt and Negri offer us a glimpse—albeit one that is sometimes partial, distorted or simply false—of what world

33. Ibid., 332-36, 198; see also 466-67 n.4.

34. See, respectively, Robert Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', *New Left Review*, no. 229 (1998): 1-265 and Randall Germain, *The International Organization of Credit: States and Global Finance in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

35. This is the autonomist influence in *Empire*. See, for instance, Alex Callinicos, 'Toni Negri in Perspective', *International Socialism Journal* 92, (2001) [www.isj1text.ble.org.uk/pubs/isj92] (2 May 2002).

36. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 30.

37. Ibid., 76-77.

38. Ibid., 43.

39. Heikki Patomäki, *After International Relations: Critical Realism and the (Re)Construction of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 70. Most constructivist work can be located in one or the other of these camps.

politics looks like from a strikingly different angle of vision, one that takes both imperialism and Marxism after postmodernism seriously.⁴⁰ As a result, they also help us see how attending to the imperial transforms our understanding of world politics. Nowhere is this more evident than Empire's treatment of the multitude's struggles and their role in the historical development of sovereignty.

Putting the multitude at the centre of analysis is a major step forward in elaborating a 'thicker' conception of the international directly attentive to imperial relations. Focusing on labour grounds Empire's analysis of the international in social forces and relations.⁴¹ A growing number of scholars have pointed to the everyday relations of power that underpin and enable the international system as conventionally understood, locating the international in the biopolitical.⁴² 'International politics', as E.H. Carr so famously observed, 'are always power politics'.⁴³ But as Cynthia Enloe notes, 'it takes much more power to construct and perpetuate international . . . relations than we have been led to believe'.⁴⁴ 'Ordinary people' have to be incorporated into the global social order so that their labour can sustain it.

Although seldom central to IR analyses, scholars in the interdisciplinary 'trading zone' of IPE regularly remind us of these relations. Aihwa Ong's analysis of the cultural politics of Chinese transnationalism shows how conceptions of national and ethnic identity are reworked and deployed, often in hybrid ways, in the service of capitalist entrepreneurialism and investment.⁴⁵ Similarly, Jacqui True's discussion of post-socialist transformations in the Czech republic demonstrates the centrality of gender relations to capital's entry into new territories and construction of new markets.⁴⁶ In these and other ways, the social relations of capital remake subjectivities. Beginning with the multitude, with people in the irreducible diversity of their daily lives, opens up space for a richer

40. See, for instance, Antonio Callari and David Ruccio, eds., *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996) and Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

41. For instance, compare this with Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders'.

42. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 22-42.

43. E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939*, 2d ed., (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 145.

44. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 197.

45. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). Compare with Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 190-95.

46. Jacqui True, 'Expanding Markets and Marketing Gender: The Integration of the Post-Socialist Czech Republic', *Review of International Political Economy* 6, no. 3 (1999): 360-89. Gender is almost entirely absent in *Empire*, although see Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 171.

account of the international, one grounded in the everyday production of subjectivity and the intimate connections between and among the concrete struggles of peoples the world over.⁴⁷

An example helps draw out further some of the implications of a focus on the multitude for understanding world politics. We have already mentioned the role of Vietnamese peasants in producing the contemporary US. On 4 May 1970 Ohio National Guardsmen on the campus of Kent State University (KSU) opened fire on students protesting the US invasion of Cambodia. Thirteen students were shot, four of them fatally. That the students were white made the event all the more shocking to public opinion.⁴⁸ 'Kent State' and 'May 4th' rapidly took on iconic status, as representative of an era wracked by imperial war in Southeast Asia and civil unrest in the US and elsewhere.⁴⁹

In the three decades since 1970, efforts to commemorate and memorialise the shootings at KSU has generated continuing controversy.⁵⁰ As Scott Bills argues, 'the link between culture, narrative and empire is the key to examining post-1970 events at Kent State'.⁵¹ By their very nature, imperial adventures abroad and their consequences at home produce popular memories that contradict public or official histories. In representations of 'May 4th' dominant narratives and public myths of America confront both an event and memories of it that challenge and unsettle them. Similar struggles over memory and the nation are evident in the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian Institute's attempt to provide a historically accurate account of the US use of nuclear weapons at the end of the Second World War as well as in debates over the responsibility of past US policies for the strikes on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September.⁵² In these and other ways, connections between widely dispersed populations are made manifest and translated

47. See, for instance, Jutta Weldes et al., eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

48. Miriam R. Jackson, 'The Kent State Legacy and "The Business at Hand"', in *Kent State/May 4: Echoes Through a Decade*, ed. Scott L. Bills (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 177-86.

49. On Vietnam as an imperial war, see for instance, Bruce Cumings, 'The Wicked Witch of the West is Dead: Long Live the Wicked Witch of the East', in *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*, ed. Michael J. Hogan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 87-101.

50. Jutta Weldes and Mark Laffey, 'Learning to Live with US Imperialism and Its Discontents: The Politics of Public Memory at Kent State, 1970-2001' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, 24-27 March 2002).

51. Scott L. Bills, 'Empire, Imaginative Geography, and the May 4th Movement', *Peace and Change* 21, no. 2 (1996): 202.

52. Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy*, (Stony Creek, CN: The

into continuing struggles over history, memory and identity. The significance of such struggles for world politics is evident, for example, in the past and present impact of the American experience in Vietnam on US foreign policy. Seeing the multitude as central to what world politics is and how it changes over time directs our attention to a range of actors, locations and 'thick' relations all but invisible in contemporary IR.

A second theme from *Empire* that illuminates our larger argument about the significance of the imperial concerns the genealogy of sovereignty. Hardt and Negri offer a peripheral or subaltern re-reading of sovereignty. 'Modern sovereignty', they observe, may have 'emanated from Europe', but 'it was born and developed in large part through Europe's relationship with its outside, and particularly through its colonial project and the resistance of the colonized . . .'. It follows that 'rule within Europe and European rule over the world' are 'two coextensive and complementary faces of one development'.⁵³

Critical scholarship in IR largely overlooks this integral relation. R.B.J. Walker's *Inside/Outside*, for example, has no index references to colony, empire or imperialism. Jens Bartelson's genealogy of sovereignty refers to empires and imperialism only in passing.⁵⁴ David Held's writings on sovereignty also ignore or marginalise Europe's relations with its colonies.⁵⁵ Even Hedley Bull and Adam Watson's *The Expansion of International Society*—explicitly addressed to the spread of sovereign recognition to formerly colonised territories—takes for granted that sovereignty emerges in Europe alone and then diffuses throughout the world.⁵⁶

In contrast to such views, Hardt and Negri force us to see that sovereignty, as a concept and an institution, developed in the encounter between Europe and the non-European world. The genealogy of sovereignty cannot be restricted to Europe itself but must include the imperial relations between Europe and its colonies: 'The colony stands in a dialectical opposition to European modernity, as its necessary double and irrepressible antagonist'.⁵⁷ Inherent in sovereignty are racialised assumptions of European superiority and fitness for self-rule. Race, hitherto a marginal concern within the discipline, becomes central.⁵⁸ As Gilroy

Pamphleteer's Press, 1998) and Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 2000).

53. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 70.

54. Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

55. For instance, David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

56. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

57. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 115. See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

58. See, for instance, Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'The Bounds of "Race" in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1993): 443-61.

argues in the case of modernity and slavery, Western political ideas and institutions cannot be separated out from their implication in the history of imperialism and its racialised terror and genocide.⁵⁹ In these and other ways, understanding the West requires attention to its implication in world politics as a whole and to the 'thick' conception of the international outlined above.

While Hardt and Negri's re-reading of sovereignty is helpful in this regard, it must be supplemented with a more historically informed account of the relations between rule 'at home' and 'abroad'. Hardt and Negri take for granted that modern sovereignty in the form of imperialism functioned outside Europe in much the same way as it did inside, as a machinery of borders and limits. But sovereignty in the colonies was never what it was in the metropole. In purely juridical terms, at the height of the era of formal empire, one could speak of Belgian sovereignty over the Congo or British sovereignty over its Indian Empire. But often there was a considerable gap between the sharp lines and coloured spaces of imperial maps and the realities of colonial administration and rule.⁶⁰ Large tracts were never adequately pacified, as on the Northwest Frontier of British India, while other areas were never brought under effective administration, as in much of Africa. Even at their height, European and other empires did not display the centralisation of authority taken for granted in discussions of the sovereign state. Relations between the formal apparatus of the 'home' state within an empire and the populations it ruled 'abroad' were multiple, diverse, and changing. Forms of rule were often overlapping and myriad arrangements were struck with local elites. Understanding world politics in terms of sovereignty—whether Westphalian or that of Hardt and Negri's Empire—too easily obscures real relations of rule.

Even after 1945, in the high noon of modern sovereignty, patterns of rule and power were often only contingently aligned with sovereign borders. In the wake of decolonisation, many new states were subject to high degrees of intervention by former imperial patrons and the superpowers, sometimes exceeding that experienced in formal empire when many areas were ruled more or less 'indirectly'. In the core too, the Cold War system led to high levels of superpower penetration of former great powers and other states as in Germany, Japan and Eastern Europe. Similar relations of international rule persist today in the policies and practices of the international financial institutions,⁶¹ the Western

59. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, Chapter 2. See also Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001).

60. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Reconceptualizing Anarchy: Structural Realism Meets World History', *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 4 (1996): 403-38. Compare with Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xii.

61. See, for instance, David Williams, 'Aid and Sovereignty: Quasi-States and the International Financial Institutions', *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000): 557-73.

administered territories of Bosnia and Kosovo, and the Anglo-American sanctions regime in Iraq. Modern sovereignty, even after decolonisation, was not a universal but at best only a regional practice of government and rule. This fact highlights the distorted and mystifying character of accounts of world politics that start with Westphalian sovereignty and its global diffusion. Attention to the everyday mechanics of rule also highlights difficulties with Hardt and Negri's account of Empire. Their claims for a sharp division between modern and postmodern forms of sovereignty founder in the face of the imperial continuities of international relations, past and present.

These reflections lead us to our third and final theme, the putative disappearance of imperialism. Hardt and Negri assert that imperialism is over for two reasons. First, the world market has been realised, at least tendentially. It is on this basis, as modern sovereignty collapses in the face of globalisation, that the world can now be characterised as a 'smooth space'. But Hardt and Negri's basic empirical claims about the decline of borders, as Petras and others have pointed out, are indefensible.⁶² Processes of liberalisation also have another side, namely, a massive effort to make it harder for undesirable flows—be they illegal economic migrants, asylum seekers, illegal drugs, crime, or contraband—to cross borders. As the European Union disassembles internal boundaries, for example, it simultaneously reinforces its external border.

The second reason imperialism is said no longer to exist stems from the unique character of the US. While many would agree with Edward Said's assertion that the US is replicating 'the tactics of the great empires', Hardt and Negri claim we are witnessing not a reinvigorated US imperialism but the birth of a post-imperial international system.⁶³ They acknowledge US global hegemony over the use of force as well as its central role in controlling the international financial system.⁶⁴ However, they argue that US policies are imperial not imperialist, in the sense that they are only ambiguously motivated by US national interests and do not seek to foster a world of closed spaces under US sovereignty.⁶⁵ Indeed, US sovereignty was always postmodern according to Hardt and Negri and the US constitution provides the model for the network power that animates Empire.⁶⁶ The validity of Empire's argument for a sharp break between modern state sovereignty and postmodern global sovereignty

62. See James Petras, 'Empire with Imperialism' [www.rebellion.org/petras/english/negri010102.htm] (29 April 2002) and Panitch and Gindin, 'Gems and Baubles'.

63. Said quoted in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 146.

64. Hardt and Negri mention but never discuss international finance; compare with Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999).

65. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 180-82.

66. *Ibid.*, Section 2.5.

rests in large measure on the plausibility of its analysis of the US in the world.

In this context, their claim that the Tet offensive of January 1968 marked the 'irreversible military defeat of the US imperialist adventures', takes on considerable importance.⁶⁷ In fact, Tet resulted in a military stalemate.⁶⁸ While it certainly was a political defeat for the Johnson Administration and its policy in Indochina, it was hardly irreversible in terms of the wider aims of US Cold War policy in the Third World. The US experience in Vietnam re-invigorated its efforts to find less costly and more effective ways to 'defeat communism', principally through the advising and supporting of Third World military and police forces, foreshadowed in the policy of 'Vietnamization' and codified in the Nixon Doctrine. Even in the depths of its Vietnam malaise, the US was able to sponsor covert operations in Chile, Angola, and elsewhere. Later, the so-called 'lessons of Vietnam' were crucial to the 'Second Cold War' launched in the latter half of the Carter Administration and pursued by President Reagan. The 1980s witnessed a renewal of US interventionism, including a war on Central America and US support for 'freedom fighters' in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The late 1980s saw the development of more effective forms of 'political' intervention, characterised by William Robinson as 'promoting polyarchy', which involved a careful combination of political, economic, military and covert intervention to produce 'stability' in Third World countries and open them up to US investment.⁶⁹

In all of this, it is hard to see how 1968 marks the 'irreversible' defeat of US imperialism. Not only is the inadequate nature of Hardt and Negri's historical analysis much in evidence here, it also becomes very difficult to locate the break at which US imperialism transforms into Empire. As we write, the US is establishing an arc of military bases across central Asia and developing patron-client relations with the authorities there. Such strategies of intervention and imperial control point to continuities not only with past US engagements in the Third World but also with older histories of imperialism. Now, as then, such engagements are also shaping the character of US democracy and society.

In our view, globalisation and many of the phenomena Hardt and Negri describe are better understood by reference to an international state dominated by the US.⁷⁰ Immediately after the Second World War and in the decades since, state power was internationalised through a proliferating

67. *Ibid.*, 179.

68. Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

69. William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

70. See Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The Imperial Peace: Democracy, Force and Globalization', *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 4 (1999): 403-34.

set of institutions and arrangements, with the US always at its core.⁷¹ In this respect, the categories and theories of classical imperialism, with the possible exception of Kautsky's ultra-imperialism, are a poor guide to the world in which we live.⁷² International state power is not reducible to the US alone. But in one domain after another, the concentration of US state power and its international reach is, if anything, greater now than in 1945. Hardt and Negri acknowledge that the main levers of world power remain in the hands of US state agencies. Where then are we to locate the break between US imperialism and Empire?

These continuities and developments in US and international state power highlight additional difficulties with Hardt and Negri's account of political-military relations. In common with other analyses in the 1990s, they argue that the era of major inter-state war is over.⁷³ This is due to the fact that nuclear weapons make

war between state powers . . . increasingly unthinkable. The development of nuclear technologies and their imperial concentration have limited the sovereignty of most of the countries of the world insofar as it has taken away from them the power to make decisions over war and peace, which is a primary element of the traditional definition of sovereignty.⁷⁴

As a result, 'the imperial bomb has reduced every war to a limited conflict, a civil war, a dirty war, and so forth.'⁷⁵ Military operations now take the form of police actions. These claims are fairly significant for Empire, as a world in which international war is alive and well is not one that is 'smooth' and subject to a single 'logic of rule'.

Unfortunately, Hardt and Negri's analysis of international security and the role of nuclear weapons overlooks significant political-military 'striations' in world politics. India and Pakistan directly contradict their assertions, as does the possibility of the use of weapons of mass destruction in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The end of the Cold War arguably made nuclear war more likely, especially given the fact that Soviet weapons, nuclear materials and technical personnel are far from being concentrated under imperial control and indeed may even be available for purchase on the open market. The buyers may well be non-state actors such as al Qaeda who, on the evidence of 11 September, would be far more willing to use

71. See, for instance, Martin Shaw, 'The State of Globalization', *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (1997): 497-513.

72. See Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981): 122-26. Compare with Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 229-31.

73. See, for instance, Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

74. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 345.

75. *Ibid.*

weapons of mass destruction than the leadership of a state with a vulnerable homeland. If India and Pakistan, among other possibilities, indicate that inter-state and even nuclear war cannot so easily be assigned to the dustbin of history, al Qaeda and the 'War on Terror' are indicative of new forms of international and globalised war not reducible to the categories of police action. The possibility of US first use of nuclear weapons in such conflicts cannot be overlooked either, and may in fact be the most likely route to nuclear war other than accident. Hardt and Negri's claims regarding the 'smooth' and global nature of Empire's sovereignty are at best premature in the political-military domain.

Conclusion

A world composed of competing and potentially warring powers, whether states or other entities, is not the kind of world Hardt and Negri describe under the rubric of Empire. In direct contrast to the idea that the old imperialism is over, American policy analysts are resurrecting the language of empire and turning to Rome and Pax Britannica for inspiration.⁷⁶ Charles Fairbanks of the Johns Hopkins University has announced that the US is 'an empire in formation' while Max Boot, editorial features editor of the Wall Street Journal, has called for the military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq: 'Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodphurs and pith helmets'.⁷⁷ As with Rome and Great Britain, American imperialism has and will continue to generate resistance. Within the conceptual categories of Hardt and Negri's Empire, these most recent developments in the history of imperial relations in world politics remain invisible.

'One of the central themes of American historiography', observes William Appleman Williams, 'is that there is no American Empire. Most historians will admit, if pressed, that the United States once had an empire. They then promptly insist that it was given away. But they also speak persistently of America as a World Power'.⁷⁸ Perhaps the clearest evidence of the world's lack of 'smoothness' is the widespread resistance to US power. In contrast, Hardt and Negri valorise the US. In a breath-taking lapse into American exceptionalism, they assert that US sovereignty is not like modern sovereignty; the US was postmodern from birth and US experience is 'truly new and original'.⁷⁹ In times past, the US did sometimes

76. Emily Eakin, "'It Takes an Empire.'" Say Several US Thinkers', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 April 2002, 1, 9.

77. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1.

78. William Appleman Williams, 'The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy', *Pacific Historical Review* 24, (1955): 379-95.

79. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 160, 163. See also Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Exceptionalism', in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, eds.

act in imperialist ways but this was always an aberration, inconsistent with the defining essence of the US, the US constitution.⁸⁰ In any case, with the realisation of the world market, US imperialism (indeed, all imperialism) is over. Marxism, postmodernism, and Italy notwithstanding, *Empire* is a deeply American book.⁸¹

It has also been said that IR is a profoundly American social science.⁸² In important respects, *Empire* and IR represent world politics in distinctively American kinds of ways. From its inception, the US was figured as a 'city on a hill', one defined against European power politics and imperialism.⁸³ This opposition between the new world and the old was reinforced after the Second World War as the US literally remade Europe. What kind of work does such an opposition do in these very different settings, in disciplinary IR and in a text hailed as 'a rewriting of *The Communist Manifesto* for our time'?⁸⁴ In IR, the opposition between the US state and European empire is inscribed in post-war IR scholarship and reinforced by the development of area studies as a particular way of conceptualising the peripheral domains, a way tied more or less directly to US state interests and one which facilitated US imperial power. In *Empire*, the US is curiously abstracted from the blood-bespattered politics of the old world and returns only to remake the world as a whole in its own image, as *Empire*. In both cases, the trope of 'America' serves to obscure the imperial realities of world politics, past and present. We have sought to retrieve some of these realities for understanding world politics.

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Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998): 21-40.

80. But see the passing reference to Native American genocide and slavery in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 177.

81. Compare with John G. Ikenberry, 'American Power and the Empire of Capitalist Democracy', *Review of International Studies* 27, special issue (2001): 191-212.

82. Stanley Hoffman, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 41-60 and Steve Smith, 'The Discipline of International Relations: Still an American Social Science?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2, no. 3 (2000): 374-402.

83. Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), Chapter 2.

84. Slavoj Žižek quoted in Eakin, 'What is The Next Big Idea?'