

**Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004 (pp 448). \$16 paper. ISBN 0143035592.**

**Balakrishnan, Gopal, ed. *Debating Empire*. New York: Verso, 2003 (pp. 288). \$19 paper. ISBN 1859844529.**

Whereas many critics of globalization groan about the disintegration of civil society and organized labor or about the policies of the IMF that only seem to make poor nations poorer, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri are unusual on the left for celebrating globalization as the next stage of capital which enables the emergence of a democratic, global multitude. For Hardt and Negri, the real antiglobalization forces are the multinational corporations, the tools of global capital such as the nation-state, and agencies such as the WTO because they attempt to divide and control both capital and the multitude who are "naturally" borderless, connected, and democratic. Thus, whereas most political theorists address "the people" who gain political agency by belonging to a unified political body (i.e., citizenship), Hardt and Negri address the Multitude of many bodies.

Hardt and Negri call *Multitude* "the sequel" to their international bestseller, *Empire* (2000). Their earlier book, written after the Persian Gulf War and before the war in Kosovo, describes the tendency of the new geopolitical order towards a network form of sovereignty which subsumes the nation-state and which Hardt and Negri call Empire. Because of the rise of transnational capital alongside the tendency of global agencies to disregard the sovereignty of small nations in the name of protecting human rights, restoring order, and promoting economic growth, old forms of sovereignty such as the nation state and old forms of political resistance such as the factory labor union are no longer dominant. How the new form of resistance could work - or might be already working - is the subject of *Multitude*. Although *Empire* received far more hype in the popular media, the new book is more significant not only because of its focus on political resistance and forms of democracy, but also because it is more empirically grounded in concrete, contemporary examples and is therefore much more readable.

Writing during the U.S.'s "war on terror" and its unilateralist and illegal invasion of Iraq, the authors divide their book into three parts entitled "War," "Multitude," and "Democracy" in order to make three basic arguments: (1) the Hobbesian constant state of war and threat of violence perpetuated by both the U.S. and terrorists in an attempt to redesign individual nation-states is an inefficient form of control over the Multitude that is symptomatic of

global capital's weakness; (2) whereas imperialist nation-states in the past have exercised control through disciplinary apparatuses such as armies, prisons, and schools, Empire now seeks to exercise control through the connectivity and interdependence of communicative networks; (3) because the dominant form of labor today is communication, along with the affective production of social relations that pervades all forms of labor including industrial or agricultural production, the Multitude is always already producing its own forms of resistance through the connectivity of their labor. Here we can see traces of Negri's involvement with Italy's radical Autonomist movement of the 1970s (see Alex Callinicos's perspective on Negri's personal history in *Debating Empire* in contrast to Negri's own perspective in *Negri on Negri*) that advocated the autonomy of individual subjectivities to form their own networks of resistance - a bottom-up social action rather than a top-down labor union politics.

As a testament to the impact of *Empire* on the intellectual scene, a multitude of critical responses and fellow travelers appeared almost simultaneously with their new book: *Debating Empire*, edited by Gopal Balakrishnan and also reviewed here; *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, edited by Paul Passavant and Jodi Dean (Routledge, 2004); *A Grammar of the Multitude* by Paul Virno (Semiotext(e), 2004); a republication of a 1980 volume entitled *Italy: Autonomia. Post Political Politics* (Semiotext(e), forthcoming); and finally, an interview with Antonio Negri called *Negri on Negri* (Routledge, 2004). There have been many critiques of *Empire*, each with its own nuance, but the basic exigency of such arguments is the claim that there are no grounds for any determinate political action by what Hardt and Negri call "the Multitude." In other words, according to this claim, while Empire may have further deterritorialized capital because it can move it virtually anywhere (off-shore, for example), the Multitude and its modes of resistance seem to be nowhere.

Eleven of these critiques, each previously published elsewhere between 2000 and 2003, are collected in *Debating Empire*. These lucid explications and responses to *Empire* present a useful counterpoint from a different sort of leftist perspective that is generally skeptical of the postmodernist approach to political action advocated by Hardt and Negri (and in this regard, *Debating Empire* is somewhat different than the essays collected in *Empire's New Clothes*). In the short space of this review, it would be impossible for me to do justice to all of the sophisticated arguments by such a wide range of authors, including professors of social science, political theory, and English as well as a chief labor organizer for the Canadian Auto Workers Union. In

general, the essays repeatedly complain about the metaphorical abstractness of *Empire* and its lack of empirical evidence, which is perhaps symptomatic of Negri and Hardt's focus on political theory in the mode of Machiavelli and Spinoza, and its strange lack of analysis of economic production in the mode of Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

Most of the authors do agree with Hardt and Negri on three basic points: the global political landscape has changed because of the rise of transnational capital; working conditions have changed due to the rise of "immaterial labor"; and finally, these changes were caused by - and indeed are capital's response to - the activity of labor unions, feminists, civil rights activists, and third-world liberation movements in the 60s and 70s. However, as they summarize *Empire*'s argument, the authors point out a number of its factual errors in order to deny Negri and Hardt's assertion that the new global political landscape is smooth rather than uneven: (1) the economic divide between First and Third-world nations in terms of GDP has not changed significantly or has grown worse (though recent developments in India, China, and Brazil since the publication of *Debating Empire* lend credence to the tendency Hardt and Negri observed happening in South East Asia in the mid-90s); migration of the "global multitude" is actually less than it was in the nineteenth century, not more; the so-called rise of immaterial labor is not part of the daily lives of most people in the world (e.g., only 6% of the world population has access to the Internet); and rather than producing something analogous to a world proletariat, capitalism has exacerbated local ethnic conflicts and atomized labor more than ever.

More importantly, however, the authors level some insightful critiques of *Empire*'s core logic. For example, Sanjay Seth notes an absence of any sustained discussion of contemporary Third-World struggles and argues that a formal subsumption of social life to capital does not mean that all social life is really thus subsumed. Both Seth and Timothy Brennan argue for the need to work through the differences "within" Empire that are not necessarily "of" Empire in order to understand the specificity of capitalism's effects as well as precise strategies for political resistance. Brennan, Ellen Meiksins-Wood, and Malcolm Bull outline disturbing similarities between the argument of *Empire* and that of neoliberalism in regards to Hardt and Negri's optimism about globalization and the utopian promise of American democracy. In particular, Bull questions whether Negri and Hardt's understanding of power can escape a logic of "might makes right." He turns Hardt and Negri's dialectic of the Multitude's constituent power (*potentia*) and Empire's constituted power (*potestas*) on its head (or back on its feet) when

he argues that Hardt and Negri do not fully recognize the powerlessness of the Multitude and the ways constituted power controls and shapes its constituency for its own ends (just as capital has also used the nation state for its own ends). In a similar vein, Giovanni Arrighi questions whether Hardt and Negri fully take into account the damaging effects of capitalism's essential instability on the forms of community that might enable more enduring means of resistance and political transformation.

Readers who were frustrated with the apparent contradictions of *Empire* might also be dissatisfied with *Multitude*. Like the earlier book, their new book argues that the old forms of political resistance - labor organization (the party unity model) and identity politics (the difference model) - are not sufficient and that a transcendent form of sovereignty such as a world parliament is impossible; yet, at the same time, the book celebrates the cacophony of grievances and unfeasible, even contradictory, demands articulated at the antiglobalization protests around the world by such groups as labor, environmentalists, and queer activists. (In *Debating Empire*, Alex Callinicos observes that leaders of the G8 summit protest in Genoa used Hardt and Negri's vocabulary but seemed stymied as to how to effect real change.) How could a fluid Multitude of singularities with no defined unity demand anything like a living wage, human rights, and peace from a world order that has no sovereign, adjudicating body? Who is demanding, and from whom?

Negri and Hardt see no contradiction. While their thought experiment about the possible forms of global democracy reveals that no transcendentally sovereign government of the globe is possible, they see the activists' demands as expressions of the immanent desire of the multitude for a better world. (Tom Mertes's article in *Debating Empire* also describes the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre along these lines.) Such macropolitical expressions of political desire are just as much a part of the Multitude's tendency for global connectivity as the micropolitical social production of their daily lives. The Multitude, its very bodies, and its forms of resistance are everywhere.

Referencing the 1977 film *Star Wars*, we might jokingly retitle Hardt and Negri's book, *The Multitude Strikes Back*. Indeed, considering that the penultimate chapter is entitled "May the Force Be With You," it is hard for the reader not to be aware of both Hardt and Negri's epic vision and of their sense of irony. As an epic, the book sometimes reductively pits the good Multitude against the bad Empire, but in the spirit of irony-wielding revolutionaries such as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos of the Zapatistas,

the book itself performs the polyphonic movement of the Multitude, which produces its commonality through communicative innovation. Interspersed within their argument are literary vignettes, digressions, and thought experiments that build on their argument at the same time that they comment on the new world order. Ultimately, what Hardt and Negri present is a politics of continuous affective social production and connectivity, which - with Spinoza - they call love.

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