

Tales from the Raj

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What is Empire? What is not? Where is it? Where is it not? The most general back-and-forth questions to begin. We could start by asking whether there is now anything outside the Empire of capital. Hardt and Negri declare as their initial task “to grasp the constitution of the order being formed today” (2000, 3). It is undoubtedly helpful to see an increased arsenal of concepts available for the difficult task of naming the conjuncture at which contemporary capitalism currently sits, but a deft handling of concepts requires careful contextualization and consideration. Notions of difference, hybridity, travel, subsumption, dialectic, multitude, and rights are, in various ways, all conjured with terms. There will be reason to examine the tricks more closely. It is also very good news to find these concepts discussed in a “postmodernist” text that does not pretend that the political heroes of the working class are never-to-be-mentioned ghosts. Stalin, Lenin, Luxemburg, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh are cited on occasion; names airbrushed out of the academy far too often are at least given recognition here. A kind of camouflage-oriented airbrushing wafted for many years throughout Western scholarship as demonic and un-American activities were reified and simplified and the notion of Marxism, and the future of Communism, became a congealed orthodoxy. Such misrepresentation is hard to dislodge, and it is welcome news that now at least some attempt to rework the terms has arrived.

With these initial commendations, then, two levels of largely critical reflection are offered to animate readings of this big book *Empire*: the heritage of Marxism misrepresented and deformed, and a barrage of concepts and their uses or abuses. I affirm again that this book is welcome. It releases discussions that should and must be had. However, the fuse starts to burn, the theater lights dim, someone shouts action . . .

The hinge moment in the drama of Marx's own big book, *Capital*, is when he asks us to leave the marketplace and look behind the factory gates. This is a rhetorical flourish that appears to drive the text. The dictates of his chosen mode of presentation required Marx to begin with the commodity, only for this abstracted item to be further contextualized in the market, and the market in production, and so on. This staging occurs because the book *Capital* was designed to provide the working class with analytical tools useful for struggles against capitalism. In a similar way Hardt and Negri claim such a dramatic momentum, and I believe their analysis also abstracts, but does so in order to present a critical and useful set of concepts for intervention. From the start I'm tempted to think that the notion of Empire is not an empirical reality simply "found" first of all, but the name of an enemy, and one that is constituted, or rather, coconstituted through questioning and against which there shall be struggle. Empire is the name given to that system in which "nearly all of humanity is to some degree absorbed within or subordinated to the networks of capitalist exploitation" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 43). Intentionally located within a certain tradition of analysis, then, Hardt and Negri see their book as a draft realization of the two missing volumes of *Capital*, on the state on the world market, that Marx had planned but not written (Hardt and Negri 2000, 236). They pass through their own factory gates . . . but of course the most excellent analyses and brilliant insights providing demystification and ideology-critique are of little use if they remain only entertaining dramatization.

The drama must unfold. I am, I'm afraid, not sufficiently well informed of the factional obligations and patronage structures within which this book is written to know why some Marxists, and some concepts, are favored and others are, with symptomatic dismissive asides, ignored or rejected. No doubt more microscopic, sectarian scholarship would clear up the details of which characters are in and which are out, but the plot contains a variety of twists: somewhat rapid dismissal of the "unidimensionality" of Marx's otherwise much used notion of subsumption; the Frankfurt School extension of this being not as clear as Deleuze and Guattari (Hardt and Negri 2000, 25); Stalin accused of "finally" turning the notion of communist revolution into national sovereignty (112) (why is this considered so final?); Lenin's "tortuous" thoughts running along "the mysterious curve of the straight line" (231) in analysis of imperialism, yet leading directly to the theory of Empire (234); Samir Amin included among those "theorists . . . reluctant to recognize a major shift in global power relations" (9); while conspiracy paranoia is directed against the "sad" agents of the Third International (411); and even world systems theorists are damned with a footnote reference with a bracketed fort-da routine referring to the "in other respects quite impressive" work of Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein (429).

Selecting these moments is not meant to register the complaints of left fandom or of a sanctimonious scripture fetishist, reading texts as gospel and defending stone idols, but it is around precisely the points of dismissal that I think a critique of Hardt and Negri must be mounted. Wrong on any number of things, but rather than the routine deconstructive arabesques and edifying, pointless erudition of post-Marxism,

this book is always audacious and engaging. Certainly some readers will insist that there is no break, no end of the dialectic, and no line in the sand, but at least discussions of these claims are possible because Hardt and Negri are not resigned. They offer vigorous and passionate argument, ambitious breadth and scope and—bonus—exquisite denunciations of the pallid, parasitic and rotten ruling class. Three cheers for this book. Yet. Comrades, what is to be done with these concepts? Up for debate are not the inviolability of the written tradition, but questions of the status of subsumption, of the political and administrative role of the nation-state, evaluations of Imperialism now and in the past, the requisite format of internationalist organization, and the political conception of Empire as a “world system” effect today.

In what may be an unguarded moment, Hardt and Negri sing the Internationale, but only in a refrain. “The ‘Internationale’ was the hymn of revolutionaries” (49; my emphasis). These one-time songbirds now argue that because of changed circumstances—the advent of Empire—where proletarian internationalism and its methods of organizing have become obsolete (50), the old methods of opposition to capital are outmoded, memories, residue. The proletariat was defeated and, paradoxically, this means the shape of the enemy has changed. On the basis of this change—decline of the nation-state, break from Imperialism to Empire, real subsumption, a politics of hybridity and of rights—a new conception of political struggle is also declared. This is manifest in a range of singular struggles and people’s movements (the Intifada, Tiananmen, Los Angeles, Chiapas) which are understood to be related to capital in ways quite unlike the “cycles of struggle” model which made sense of the contagious inspiration of anti-colonial struggles in the Philippines and Cuba, the events around 1917, those in the wake of the Chinese revolution, or the African and Latin American liberation struggles (51). A horizontal cycle model is “no longer adequate for recognizing the way in which contemporary struggles achieve global significance” (57). Instead, a vertical and immediate articulation with “the global level” is the character of singular, local and regional—untranslatable—struggles (54–5).

Emphasizing changed circumstances, Hardt and Negri see their definition of Empire as “in step . . . with the development of the capitalist mode of production” (xvi), an avowedly European and Euro-American conception which sees *Empire* as a contribution to the modes of production narrative—problematically, as I will argue below, because Imperialism and the colonial theaters of accumulation are designated as “outside.” This self-confessedly “Eurocentric” genealogy of Empire might be reconsidered by way of thinking the politics of knowledge production and the constitutive power of terminology, codifications that prefigure. The protocols of Marxist historiography, Marxiological jockeying, sectarian sledging, and academic triumphalism might be usefully rethought in terms that attend to the way the requirements of concepts, or of models or theory, produce descriptions and meaning—and blueprints for action.

So is Empire a break with Imperialism as we know it? Hardt and Negri argue that various groups of theorists have been “reluctant to recognize the globalization of capitalist production and its world market as a fundamentally new situation and a

significant historical shift" (8). This is so whether they have the world-systems theorists in mind, who argued that capitalism had always been an "affair of the world-economy" (Wallerstein, quoted in Hardt and Negri 2000, 417), or when they tackle a similar "reluctance" exhibited by those who believe that "capitalist nation states have continued to exercise imperialist domination over other nations" (9) and that this, for Samir Amin, is a kind of "perfecting of imperialism" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 9). Such inadequacies in existing theoretical responses to postcolonial and post-imperial power give Hardt and Negri their real "point of departure" (9).

The break between Imperialism and Empire hinges on the autonomy of the transnational corporation vis-à-vis the nation-state. Under what might rather be called "millennium capitalism" (I prefer this terminology: capitalism encourages us to think it will last forever, but the seductions of celebration only mask the trick for now), the administrative work of the nation-state is displaced onto newly formed "international bodies" of global civil society, nongovernmental organizations, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and so forth (307). This much is clear, but who is to say that this "articulation" is unique? Is the poststate, minimalist administration, laissez-faire development of capitalism not something with an already long history? Is Empire really a "fundamentally new form of rule" or, despite the authors' rejection, rather "a weak echo of modern imperialisms" (146)? Is it not possible to see Empire as merely an extension of exploitation and brutality, structured via the tricks of surplus-value extraction, operating within a continuing, if convoluted, history of accumulation?

The "primary symptom" of the coming of Empire, for Hardt and Negri, is the "declining sovereignty of nation-states" and their "inability to regulate economic and cultural exchange" (xii). "In a previous period nation-states were the primary actors in the modern imperialist organization of global production" but now the nation-state appears "increasingly" as an obstacle to the world market (150).

Of course there is much to be said about the nation-state. It remains the case that the nation-state continues to orchestrate, and in effect shapes and operates, the sites through which struggles against capital can be waged. The nation-state continues to meddle in everything it can. It is the effective agent of the real subsumption that means the extension of capitalist relations to all aspects of our lives (even phone calls are charged to the second for an ever increasing number of the mobile set). It is very useful in breaking down and delivering a segmented population as workforce for the labor markets. The nation-state remains armed to the teeth and, although transition and subsumption take a myriad of forms and the consequent heterogeneity, graphed onto an already existing multiplicity, can no longer be understood, and never could be, as a fixed model, there are as yet few transnational corporations as heavily armed (proviso: transnational corporations are not yet mercantile and mercenary in the way Clive and the East India Company were, but abundant evidence has shown that this does not disarticulate them from the machines of war). It is the nation-state which protects meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund with water cannon and tear gas. In other fields the nation-state is the "poisoned gift of national

liberation” (134), although I am not sure that Gandhi and Ho Chi Minh can so readily be named in the same sentence as critics of the “perverse trick” that equates nationalism with “political and economic modernization” (133). The nation as defensive weapon in anti-imperial struggle and as vehicle of the autonomy and difference of local revolutionary struggle is not insignificant; the footnote reference is to Mao here (438), but I am surprised that Mao’s greatest contribution is ignored, in which he militated for continued revolutionary struggle against deviations and counterrevolutionary tendencies within the revolution. That Mao, and the Chinese communists, seem to have failed to outflank the “boomerang” effect (Hardt and Negri 2000, 131) of capitalist restitution is a matter of record. The nation-state remains strong even when surrounded and infiltrated by the global. The nation-state must still be discussed. Taking into account many ambiguities, Hardt and Negri recognize that “the contemporary phase is not adequately characterized by the victory of the capitalist corporation over the state” as “state functions and constitutional elements have been displaced to other levels and domains” (307; see below).

Hardt and Negri criticize postcolonial theorists “because they remain fixated on attacking an old form of power and propose a strategy of liberation that could be effective only on that old terrain,” mentioning Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gyan Prakash. It might still be worth responding to the suggestion that postcolonial theory is a “productive tool for reading history” but “entirely insufficient for theorising contemporary global power” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 146). It is not that I want to defend the term “postcolonial theory” (on the contrary, it appears to be not much more than a slogan for selling books), nor do I subscribe to any notion of the “postcolonial” except insofar as it refers in a restricted and ironic way to the betrayal of anti-imperialist movements by nationalist elites (see Spivak 1999). (Nor do I advocate the same old “strategy of liberation”—which one?—ascribed to Said, Bhabha, and Prakash). However, the idea of looking to history as a key to theorizing contemporary global power is not, in my view, exhausted. We learn from the past if we are attentive; we err if we gloss and misrepresent. So, in the context of the emergence of *Empire*, there might be cause to question an analogous concurrence in Hardt and Negri’s model between the beginning of the imperialist phase and its end. This is perhaps knowingly tenuous, but if their presentation of the beginning of the imperialist period is carefully examined there are interesting clues to the significance of their claim that it has come to a conclusion. I hold the view that in discussing the initial appearance of the Imperialist state Hardt and Negri posit a significant difference between what would normally have been called mercantile capitalism and what might be called formal colonialism. These are not the terms they use, but they make much of the legislative interventions of the Dutch and British Government in colonial affairs in the middle 1800s.

No doubt there are more competent scholars of the transition who could do better here, and I am not really sure I can muster all the reasons to insist upon the significance of the ways transition to capitalism in Asia was bound up with Europe, or how Europe might be better seen as a kind of periphery to Asian capitalism (reversing

world system conventions as well, in order to recognize the location of accumulation and superexploitation), but I suggest this only as a speculative reorientation: the flash point of extraction and exploitation makes Asia the center of accumulation, London only the site of the banks. The habitual constituting of capital with Europe at its center continues to produce a Eurocentric knowledge even when the productive charge of capitalist accumulation has a financial, resource, and labor-power platform in the so-called peripheral zones. Is it possible to reverse the staging of this development and see, for example, the East India Company as the central player in the Imperial theater and not to disarticulate this from the realities of British colonialism? To do so might suggest new ways to think the “reluctance” of continuist models of Imperialism, Empire notwithstanding. Whatever the case, inverting the world in the mind does not yet redistribute wealth in the real, but it might give us pause to rethink the direction, so far as I understand it, and the manoeuvres required for Hardt and Negri to defend a “quick and rough periodization” of the “different phases” of the “virtuous dialectic” between the nation-state and individual capitalists (Hardt and Negri 2000, 305). This dialectic constitutes a problem in terms of orientation (note that the dialectic is “virtuous” because the state is the executive committee of capitalism in general). What is it that distinguishes the period of company rule—fully equipped with “their own police, their own courts” (305), administrative structures, etc.—from the formal establishment of colonial governance? It is necessary, at this point, to rehearse the “rough periodization”: “In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as capitalism established itself fully in Europe, the state managed the affairs of the total social capital but required relatively unobtrusive powers of intervention. This period has come to be viewed in retrospect (with a certain measure of distortion) as the golden age of European capitalism” (305).

Note that the establishment of European capitalism was founded upon accumulation in the rest of the world (capitalism coconstituted with slavery, usury, mercantile plunder, and other adventures). Possibly also the “unobtrusive” interventions were viewed as part of the golden age because the brutal reality of massacre, ethnicide, slaughter, extortion, disease, and death were less often reported (same distorted story today: one car accident in Paris is headline news, but bus or train disasters in Bangladesh are mentioned on page seventeen and only if hundreds were killed). Expanding the citation, Hardt and Negri continue:

Outside the European nation-state in this period . . . capitalist companies were sovereign when operating in colonial or precolonial territories, establishing their own monopoly of force, their own police, their own courts. The Dutch East India Company, for example, ruled . . . with its own structures . . . The situation was the same for the capitalists operating in the British South Asian and African colonies. [Note: territories have already been renamed colonies]. The sovereignty of the East India Company lasted until the East India Act of 1858 brought the company under the rule of the queen . . . This period was characterized by relatively little need of state intervention at home and abroad. (305)

If accumulation rather than the relation of state to capital were the framing perspective, or better, if superexploitation was, the difference that hinges on the revocation of the company's charter in 1858 might seem less significant. For Hardt and Negri, the Indian rebellion of 1857 provoked the British government to intercede in "a direct response" (306), but a cursory reading of even just Marx's (1947) *Notes on Indian History* (compulsory reading, prepared from an unedited manuscript of Marx's) suggests that the 1857 rebellion was only one of many struggles engaged by Indians against British interests in India over the entire history of its rule and, more telling to the argument here, the question of government intercession was at issue in any case at least since the Act of Parliament of 1780, some eighty years earlier. Certainly from at least the 1770s the British government was heavily involved in company activities: a (sardonic) entry by Marx reads: "1771 Parliament interfered . . . [but] through 'providence' the assessors sent to Calcutta 'lost their lives in shipwreck off the Cape of Good Hope'" (1947, 89). Marx's sympathy for the appointed administrators of the state is no greater than, indeed is the same as, his contempt for the plundering capitalists of the company, but the point is that the distinction between company and state looks less definite when the colonial site and metropolitan administration are taken together as coconstituted in the world system. The correspondences between the lords and the directors of the company, and the comings and goings in India House, would reveal the extent of envy, bribery, and conceit that fueled this long and mutually beneficial (for capital) involvement.

There is then, to some degree at least, confusion as to the status of "the Indian question" which revolves around the establishment of "fully articulated" European administrations over the colonial territories in Asia. Is the formal jurisdiction of the nation-states the only aspect of guarding against crises that matters for capital in this period? What also of the long history of opposition to company rule? The conflagration following the "Sepoy Mutiny," however significant that event may be, was not the first war engaged by British troops in India. Anticipating the circulation of "cycles of struggle," it is clear more could be learned about the anti-imperialism (on rumor as a mechanism akin to "cycles of struggle"; see Guha 1983).

Periodization has a wider context, of course, and Asia figures as central once again. The modes-of-production debate is far too convoluted to cover in detail here, but the significance of Marx's writing on India, and the issue of "Oriental despotism" feature in Hardt and Negri's argument and so deserve attention. Marx's journalistic articles for the *New York Daily Tribune* provide ample fodder for the working out of various positions around concepts of transition and historiography in Marxism. Hardt and Negri read Marx's recognition of the potential for liberation offered by global capital *and* his horror at the "brutality of European conquest and exploitation" in the context of his writing about British parliamentary debate over the status of the East India Company and his situating of this in the history of British colonial rule (Hardt and Negri 2000, 118–9). The issue here is that Hardt and Negri repeat as constituent formula the passage which has Marx insisting that the arrival of British colonialism

was, despite brutality, necessary for India to escape traditional forms of oppression (“Oriental despotism”). It is, however, and contrary to *Empire*, not the case that Marx saw India’s future as determined “strictly” by Europe (Hardt and Negri 2000, 120). There are several indications in the text that show that Marx is less “unidimensional” and rigid than they contend. In clarification of his wider modes-of-production narrative, Marx explained that the development offered in abstract in *Capital* was merely a “sketch.” The polemic offered by Aijaz Ahmad against Edward Said cites Marx hoping for a “socialist revolution in Asia, a nationalist revolution in India, and the break-up of the caste system” as “preconditions for the ‘masses of people’ even to start reaping any sort of ‘benefit from the new elements of society’ introduced by colonialism” (Ahmad 1992, 236). Even more significant, perhaps, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) has made the point that Marx’s mention of “Oriental despotism,” and discussions of the so-called Asiatic mode of production, belong to a “speculative morphology” required in an activist’s computation as justification for political action. Indulgent renderings with hindsight that excuse Marx for gaps in his knowledge will not do; even Hardt and Negri assert that his “lack of information” is not the point (2000, 120). Spivak shows that the Asiatic mode of production was a “crucial theoretical fiction” needed to “set the machinery of the emancipatory transformation” of Hegelian idealism. The Asiatic mode of production is invoked and named (invoked not just by Marx, who probably used the phrase only once [Spivak 1999, 71]) but not as “a ‘real’ description of ‘actual practice’ . . . [in this particular] . . . place or time” (88). When thinking transition, Marx did not need to think of transition from the Asiatic mode of production to capitalism. It is necessary to settle the account in *Empire*, but the process of formal subsumption is not one which requires the actual agents of transition (mercantile capitalists in the pay of the East India Company or seaworthy British government assessors) to theorize or even act according to a theory of transition. They do need to learn something of local conditions, if only to recruit comprador allies, but although theorists might not always avail themselves of adequate information, to the extent that an adequate assessment of these matters impacts upon political activity now, we do need to be as little misinformed as possible. The danger, Spivak points out, is that those who read the speculative morphology as a blueprint for social justice, in conditions where really existing Marxisms were surrounded by overdetermining hostile political and military opposition, will be forced to promote speculation as orthodoxy (1999, 91).

The point is that Hardt and Negri’s accusation of “Eurocentrism” in Marx does duty to deflect attention from the political aspects of Marx’s concern with the East India Company petition to the British Parliament for renewal of its charter. Did Marx “far too easily” see only the choices of British rule, local domination, or “a path of insubordination and freedom” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 119) modeled on Europe, or was he offering a possible projection and liberatory speculation as a part of a wider political history, consistent activism, and emancipatory ambition? Hardt and Negri suggest that “the central issue is that Marx can conceive of history outside of Europe only as moving *strictly* along the path already traveled by Europe itself” (120; my

emphasis). It is all too common to find Marx fitted into this form of historical determinism, with consequent closure implied for political initiative (spontaneity at best). The clincher against such (unidimensional) distortion is contained in a letter Marx wrote in 1878 to the editors of the paper *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* warning that the chapter of *Capital* which described transition to a capitalist mode of production should not be “transformed” from a historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe to a “theory of the general course fatally imposed upon all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed” (correspondence of Marx, reproduced in Shanin 1983, 136).

The orthodox reification of Marx that Hardt and Negri perpetrate is affirmed even as they suggest that Empire is, like capitalism for Marx, “better than the forms of society and modes of production that came before it” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 43). Although they recognize that Marx was talking about the “*potential* for liberation” (my emphasis) being increased under capitalism vis-à-vis parochial and hierarchical local circumstances, they introduce a teleological tendency of their own and this, I argue, shapes both the questions and answers they deploy vis-à-vis imperialism.

So many years have passed to question the dubious analogy I am suggesting between the history of the East India Company and the post-Imperial Empire of the transnational corporations. The explanatory viability of this analogy might be explored by considering the degree to which there were mechanisms similar to the presently emergent, administrative, global civil society which functioned to manage the operation of mercantile capital, or by discovering at what period the transition to formal colonialism imposed such administration. Cultures-of-colonialism experts shall be deployed to rake over the archival records. The key justification for pursuing this analogy, however, is strangely given by Hardt and Negri themselves when they say that their “first real glimpse of the passage to Empire” comes when they see that the “global capitalist hierarchy that subordinates the formally sovereign nation-states within its order” is one that is “fundamentally different from the colonialist and imperialist circuits of international domination” (134). The subordination of a sovereign administration under a larger Empire is exactly what they describe as having occurred in the legislative containment of the East India Company; the key moment of the break returns.

Of course another way of understanding the national economy period of imperialist development is to note that it suited the cause of capital to arrange national economic units in relative autonomy and hierarchy. Nowadays the World Bank continues to make these arrangements with coercive alacrity—at one point tying loans to specific niche or sectoral manufacturing with the less “advanced” technological modes of production allocated to one side of the international division of labor, high tech to the other, and at another point forcing open national boundaries for privatization of “national” industries and so on. Urbanization modifies this somewhat, but the distance between the elite programming class in Bangalore and their service personnel (sweepers, rickshaw wallahs) or even between microchip assembly workers in Kuala Lumpur (usually female) and building development speculators (usually linked to

the prime minister) shows that neocolonial exploitation still thrives in conditions that I would call “semi-feudal-cyber-colonialism” (see Hutnyk 1999).

Yet *Empire* is different. The new world order of *Empire* requires a new set of concepts to organize struggle. The model of struggle our authors offer differs substantially from the “cycle of struggles” conception of apparently obsolete proletarian internationalism. The justification for this change is based on a “break” which composes premature obituaries. Perhaps it is also orthodox understandings of the proletariat that have congealed (see Balibar 1994) in the ways I have questioned above. Nevertheless, rather than waste time trying to resuscitate the grubby “old mole” that haunts Marx and Imperialism (the mole is rumored to be dead [Hardt and Negri 2000, 57]), let us continue to examine the concepts on offer in *Empire*.

Difference, Subsumption, Hybridity: in the first instance, the ways “difference” and “subsumption” were played out in the precolonial and colonial period would be a relevant basis for evaluation. What cultural aspects of the mercantile and Imperialist periods are to be taken into account? (For an excellent examination of the cultural dimensions of transition, see Nugent 1993.) Hardt and Negri align themselves against the “unidimensionality” of a Marx who “had no conception of the difference of Indian society” (2000, 120). In this they side with those theorists who deal with plurality and multiplicity (Deleuze, Foucault), allowing their analysis of subsumption to take in “not only the economic or only the cultural dimension of society” (25). I am not convinced that transition, for reasons mentioned above, was so strictly conceived that culture and difference were not taken into account (on Marx and difference, see Spivak 1999, 78).

What of subsumption and difference now? Are these indicators of something new (the break) or are there continuities which should be stressed? Wasn’t it colonialism that tried to subsume all aspects of the social life of others under new productive codes, to train the lazy natives, to coopt the village headship, to create tribal allegiance (and difference) and national sentiments? The idea of ruling by division—by forging identifications based on difference—was intrinsic from the earliest stage of capitalist expansion. Similarly, does it not seem likely that the way capital thrives upon difference today, forging “communities” of identification and segmentation that replace “outmoded” allegiances or, rather, dangerously universal ones, appears more similar than not to the ways new “community” identifications had to be constituted by emergent capitalism to replace old feudal alliances destroyed when the feudal tenants, peasants, and others were displaced from the land? The constitutive ascription of identity and community (whether racial, gendered, national, or cultural) seems a consistent and necessary strategy of capital’s administrative sector.

Hardt and Negri are fully aware that difference is used by contemporary capitalism, coopted, contained, and consigned to market via the Culture Industry. “Long Live Difference” is the battle cry of power (Hardt and Negri 2000, 138). They argue that a postmodern politics of difference “not only is ineffective against but even can coincide with and support the functions and practices of imperial rule” (142). This is old news for some; capital thrives on making differences and then taking them into ac-

count as equivalents in a trick of the market. Yet when a simple notion of hybridity is criticized, they can still posit a hybridity of a special type as potent. The ways hybridity works as a cul-de-sac for politics is well rehearsed: implies a pure, belongs to the market, biological heritage, cannot found a program (see Hutnyk 1998a). Capital readily coopts hybridity and difference (and, as we shall see, Maoist sloganeering): “The corporation seeks to include difference . . . and thus aims to maximize creativity, free play, and diversity within the corporate workplace. People of all different races, sexes and sexual orientations should potentially be included . . . the workplace should be rejuvenated with unexpected changes and an atmosphere of fun. Break down the old barriers and let one hundred flowers bloom” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 153).

In the second half of their book Hardt and Negri become more and more utopian and finally present the “multitude,” its movement and rights, as the sublated possibility and potential within Empire that will save us all. There is more than a degree of optimism here, as a dialectical hope reworks the old promise that in Empire “there is the guarantee of justice for all peoples” (10). The foundational power of Empire is the multitude, the peoples of the planet, and their constitutive power. The main vehicle, it seems, for this power today is mobility. There have been many critiques of mobility as “travel,” and the ways in which this buzzword of postmodern theory has been deployed to carry creative ethnographic work as well as well-intentioned progressive sociology and diaspora studies is well documented (see Clifford 1997; Kaur and Hutnyk 1999; for a critique of Clifford, see Hutnyk 1998b). Mobility is not always the comfortable privilege it appears to be in the brochures and holiday snaps of the privileged leisure classes. To their credit Hardt and Negri, with a characteristic contradiction, note the pain carried with mobility. The “massive worker migrations” which called Empire into being “are dwarfed by those forced from their homes and land by famine and war. Just a cursory glance around the world . . . will reveal the desperate plight of those on whom such mobility has been imposed” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 155). Yet, mobility is offered as a way out if it is possible to “take control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures” (156). A multitude in “perpetual motion” subject to “hybridization” (60) is capable of “smashing” all old and new boundaries and borders with a “nomad singularity” and the “omnilateral movement of its desire” (363). The condition of possibility of the world market is the same “circulation, mobility, diversity and mixture” that also “overwhelms any binary division” and as “uncontainable rhizome,” it cannot ever be “completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation” (397).

In asking how a “constituent political tendency within and beyond the spontaneity of the multitude’s movement” might be recognized (398), the danger is that the form of the question may project a tendency, inherent in spontaneity, that needs rather to be actively organized. It is not predetermined. The better question to ask comes toward the end of the book, and is, “how can the multitude organize?” (399). If a “new type of resistance” is to be founded that would be “adequate to the new dimensions of sovereignty” (308), it matters very much that the periodization of the “break” shapes not only what would count as adequate but also what counts as object and

context of resistance. If Hardt and Negri are pushing the wrong emphases in their periodization, then their characterization and rejection of “the traditional forms of resistance such as the institutional worker’s organisation” might require reevaluation. Another path to explore would be how far proletarian internationalism might be from the congealed and orthodox (bureaucratic) “trade unionism” that has too often come to be “constituted” as the “traditional” and “institutionalized” forms of worker’s organization.

The point is that consideration of how to sustain organized opposition to the transnational corporations, the complicit civil society/nongovernmental organization sector, and Empire as such, without an Internationalist organization and in the absence of “cycles of struggle,” is not addressed. Just where this book might have broached the party question, Hardt and Negri suggest quite a different content for the political struggle of the multitude. This takes on the form of a claim for rights. The multitude on the move provides the impetus for the first of these: “the political demand is that the existent fact of capitalist production be recognised juridically and that all workers be given the full rights of citizenship.” This abstract demand can be reconfigured: “The general right to control its own movement is the multitude’s ultimate demand for global citizenship” (400). I have argued elsewhere against the discourse of rights, and it is sufficient to point out the compromise that the language of “claim” and “be given” structure into this prostration. A gift is never a gift (see Hutnyk 2000). Rights constituted in law may be violated, and are more often than not violated across differences in power. They have some tactical utility, but the right to “a social wage and guaranteed income for all” (403), the right to reappropriation (of the means of production), and the right to communicate (410) all seem admirable but must be “taken,” not given, and taken in a movement that destroys the existing system of wages, exploitation, and ideological deceit. No matter what admirable rhetoric of “unity managed by the multitude, organized by the multitude, directed by the multitude—absolute democracy in action” (410), I still think we need to explore how the “posse” might actualize this democracy in a way “adequate” to oppose a capitalism with tanks. Note that a curious reference to contemporary rap groups is transmuted very quickly into something very unlike an armed gang and more like the metaphysical ontology of the Renaissance (208). I’m not convinced this escapes the Culture Industry at all.

From their first pages Hardt and Negri had written of the United Nations in terms of rights (4). They offer a welcome critique of nongovernmental organizations as self-elected representatives of “the people” in global civil society. These nongovernmental organizations who claim to represent those “who cannot represent themselves” (314) are, like the media when they position themselves as the “voice or conscience of the People” (311), hardly “democratic.” The media represent, and so “hybrid networks of participation are manipulated from above” (321). Even the militancy advocated at the very end of *Empire*, which is supposedly different from the “formulas of the old revolutionary working class” (which were never so singular), also cannot be representative of the exploited (413). The time to revisit the Eighteenth Brumaire is again at hand.

Representation and the right to communicate have great importance. Our communicative competence is a subject for which interpretative historical and linguistic deployment is also necessary. One reason for such deployment would be to assess attempts to name the current conjuncture. Perhaps I have misrepresented *Empire* by forcing it into history? It might be possible to test this by asking if our descriptive-constitutive terms are adequate to the level of struggle required. This has multiple implications from the most obvious to the more obscure: has the “industrial working class” really “disappeared from view” (53)? A vanishing trick which is coconstituted with the related media blackout shrouding the sites of Imperialist plunder on the dark side of the international division of labor (formerly the Third World or the South, now also selective metropolitan suburbs). On the other hand, is a notion of Empire as speculative culmination and consequence of Imperialism still somehow useful in the way that “Oriental despotism” was useful to name a stasis that had to be interrupted in Marx’s speculation (see Spivak 1999, 97)? The notion of Empire might be convenient for fusing disparate struggles usually little noticed and not much more dangerous individually than Internet hacking or symbolic protest.

So, the defining question for this book and the new thinking offered to make sense of Empire is that of how best to interpret and then organize the struggles against corporate Imperialism. And how to do this so that it is not restricted only to being a community carnival coopted and complicit with a global capitalism in search of “release valves” to let off steam? The performativity of unorganized opposition, like erudite and edifying academic critique, is akin to what anthropologists call the potlatch, what Bataille (1988) called the accursed share, and what Derrida (1972) calls pharmakon. I have in mind the balaclava-clad anarchist trashings of McDonald’s stores in London at an anticapitalist festival and in Prague on annual “Surround the World Bank day.” “More World, Less Bank” is a great slogan, but the McDonald’s stores were trading again within days, the papers sold their front-page stories (“May Day Rioters Heckle Churchill Statue”), and the Sony and Kodak camera supply shops had a field day. How can the multitude organize the circulation of these struggles beyond the one-off flash?

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Hardt and Negri offer up Tiananmen, the Intifada, Los Angeles, South Korea, Chiapas, and so forth, as examples of struggles that are no longer best comprehended within the “cycles of struggle” model that animated understandings of the proletarian internationalist movements. Given mediation by the “much celebrated age of communication,” these singularities paradoxically become all but “incommunicable” and cannot be linked together as a “globally expanding chain of revolt.” These struggles “fail to communicate” because they cannot be “translated” into different contexts; other revolutionaries “did not hear” these struggles as their own (Hardt and Negri 2000, 54).

I am not sure that this is the case, though the white noise of the censor distorts reception. What would happen if we were to add Seattle, Prague, S11 in Melbourne, and so on, to these singular struggles and consider these to have a direct or “vertical” relation to the global level? What is more important: that these protests are against

the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, or that their containment by tear gas and water cannon is provided by the armed forces of individual nation-states?

Hardt and Negri lament, though only a little, the “cycles of struggle” model. The new struggles are said to have “gained in intensity” although this is perhaps more necessary for the notion of Empire than it is a descriptive or empirically verifiable reality. Intensity is so heavily mediated by channels of communication; the capacity to “leap vertically” (55) relies crucially on a satellite uplink, operative Internet connection, news broadcast programming priorities, and interpretative fashions. The unorganized and spontaneous aspect of struggles like Tiananmen could be emphasized by interpretation. It may have “looked like a weak echo of Berkeley” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 56) precisely because on television it functioned as a festival for CNN reportage. Station executives were just as interested in the Chinese government’s close-down of the uplink (the stain on our screens as the satellite went dead, over and over in slow motion) as they were in the “democracy movement” of the Chinese students. The pixelation of the Los Angeles uprising, broadcast live from helicopters, began in the courtroom, stop-motion analysis of the Rodney King beating tape. It is, however, less the case that these events are “hypermediatized” on television because of their own intrinsic nature as spectacle (the students were also protesting for reform within the Communist party, Rodney King was savagely beaten by the Los Angeles Police Department), and it is not necessarily the case that these struggles are “written in an incomprehensible foreign language” for activists in other parts of the world (57). Rather, the writing, interpretation, concepts, and code words favored in relatively privileged, mediatized and postmodern academic circuits are predetermined to ensure that these events appear as spectacle. The grim practicalities of battle in Chiapas or neighbouring Guerrero in Mexico are a very great distance from the self-declared Zapatismo of lap-top activists in Texas, Italy, or Madrid, where it was possible in 1995 to buy souvenirs at the European Encentro such as a Zapatista balaclava, Zapatista T-shirt, Zapatista baseball caps and, presumably for igniting cocktails, Zapatista cigarette lighter. Similarly romantic revolutionary support for the rebellion in Bougainville in the Pacific, for Maoists in Nepal (cheering when the “Communists take Everest—because it was there”), or for Peruvian comrades in occupation of embassies, does not often translate into adequate comprehension of the levels of engagement involved. Jane Fonda’s support for the Vietnamese was a spectacle of solidarity. It is no accident that “just when the United States was most deeply embroiled in an imperialist venture abroad, when it had strayed farthest from its original constitutional project, that constituent spirit bloomed most strongly at home” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 179). The antiwar, civil rights, Black power, student, and feminist movements—the evil in Vietnam countered by love-ins at home. Live Aid and famine. Seattle and structural adjustment. It would be wrong to consider all revolts and all opposition processed through the media as contained, but it is also necessary to consider seriously the carnivalesque element of performative protest and the great disjunction of the “uplink.”

There is of course some evidence to the contrary, but most contemporary forms of internationalist solidarity that make it into the mass media appear to work through for-

mulas of romantic, sensationalist, and exotic appropriation. Political subjectivity today can present itself in attendance at world music and alternative festivals (Womad, Glastonbury, anticapitalist carnivals). Revolutionary consciousness is signaled by wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the image of Che, passing knowledge of one or two phrases from Subcomandante Marcos, preference for veggie burgers over Big Mac and fries, and so on. It is of course important to take seriously the new subjectivities formed on the basis of anticorporate struggles and those mobilizations, usually called social movements, in favor of flexibility in work, relationships, living arrangements, life styles, mobility, and so on. These, as Hardt and Negri argue, can be said to have forced capital to restructure. But new subjectivity is not enough to win: forcing capital to stop profiteering in one way and being coopted into a new mode of profiteering is rather less a victory than might be required. Now we might well ask what was the difference between East India Company rule and the Raj? The new production of hybrid traveling queer subjectivities does not seem to have been so unwieldy that the cultural industries and institutions of the commodity system could not adapt and adopt these new subjectivities as principles for profit. Bataille's suggestion that "the sexual act is in time what the tiger is in space" hints at the terrible necessity for release (1988, 12). The shape this takes under capitalism is noted, in less prosaic terms, where "Empire recognizes and profits from the fact that in cooperation bodies produce more and in community bodies enjoy more, but it has to obstruct and control this cooperative autonomy so as not to be destroyed by it" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 392).

This control is built into the code words, but there is still a circulating opposition. Hardt and Negri write that the working class has disappeared from view (53). They follow Debord's spectacular argument that "only what appears exists" and note that the "media have something approaching a monopoly over what appears to the general population" (322). It would be conspiracy theory to think this was "consciously and explicitly directed by a single power" (323), but we could go further to insist on the possibility of informing ourselves of the criteria of accumulation, exploitation, ideological manipulation, and representative misinformation that occurs in this Wizard of Oz cartoon, and which implies "the impossibility of traditional forms of struggle" (324). The victories of the previous century were not nothing; there were media and concepts that were not mere wizardry. The work of books like this should be to extend the tools. The task is to understand the composition of class under current conditions and this will require, I would argue, an operation to correct the myopic and racist blindness that fails to see how the proletariat has always been international, that the metropolitan city and the colonial theater of exploitation have always been coconstituted, and that the identification of the "working class" as a wholly economic category was always an error. Why is this no longer heard? We need to ask about the class interests of those who, living adjacent to the portals of new media, advocate a convergence of other-love, difference, rhizome, hybridity, connectivity, and bandwidth and yet claim solidarity with mediatized events filtered through the corporate screen. Looking to the production of subjectivity and abstract celebration of resistances, refusals, and exodus is not yet adequate to win even as it is a necessary step, but there are also other moves to make.

If the time of proletarian internationalism is over (Hardt and Negri 2000, 50), what comes to take its place? Surely both the declaration and the search for substitutes are premature if a wider view is taken; certainly the short period in which the rise of local and identity politics at the subnational level and the period of contraction and reaction in the twenty years since perestroika are not yet enough to declare that the project of international proletarian unity is forever stalled. Reformasi struggles in Indonesia against Suharto, in Malaysia against Mahathir, inspired by student and union organizations in South Korea, movements against Marcos and later Ramos in the Philippines, in Mexico against the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, and many more examples are indicators that counter a too fast transposition of deindustrialization in the “advanced West” to “globalization” as indicative of the end of proletarian internationalism. The interconnected cycles of struggle, forcing reorganization on the part of capitalism, work across borders many postmodern theorists refuse to traverse. Evidence of this is that capitalism thrives on the coconstitutive exploitation of so-called periphery and center. Why have analysts been so unable to break with the structuring myopia of these terms and only now come to realize the reality of the Empire against which so many have for so long fought? In one sense at least, *Empire* allows us to think these things anew, but there has always been Empire and there has always been an opposition to organize.

Organization is the key, but for too many there is only spectacle and spontaneity, resting hopefully on the maturity of the multitude to come. “The only event we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather the insurgence, of a powerful organization” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 411). Organization matters, but it must actually be organized, not simply named. The point at which more must be demanded from this book is again explicable with reference to Marx’s writing on colonialism in India. In a footnote, Hardt and Negri find a “resonance in Marx’s articles” which they use to defend the views of Kautsky against Lenin’s criticism. Did Marx pose a “linear tendency of imperialist development towards the formation of a world market” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 451) in a way that exonerates Kautsky for his “reactionary desire to blunt the contradictions” of the situation of twentieth-century imperialism? The objection Lenin made to Kautsky’s argument for ultraimperialist subsumption was not that there was no trend toward cooperation of finance capital, but that this utopian future was used as an excuse to avoid action on “the contradictions posed by capital’s present imperialist organisation” (230). In his book *Insurgencies*, Negri had already cited Marx on the necessity of organization (Negri 1999, 230). Organized how is the issue? Is subjective rebellion and revolt—unorganized and spontaneous—more than a constituted, singular eventuality ripe for recuperation? What this book might have done would have been to sew the series of oppositional events together: to translate, communicate, organize. If the 1857 Rebellion is interpreted as a singular event (as the Sepoy Mutiny) to which the British state makes a founding response (it was not its first intervention), the ongoing opposition to British rule is spectacularized. This is necessary only if the “cycles of struggle” model is to be jettisoned—theoretical demands force a rewriting—but when the Rebellion and response are then read as significant for understanding contemporary Imperialism, that

excludes from discussion the necessary problems of how to sustain and organize any “cycle” of anti-Empire spectacular events. The discussion of an organized international solidarity that might work against cooption and complicity is not on the agenda and has, in fact, been ruled “outmoded” and dead. Even a grubby old mole could work out that of course we cannot look to the congealed institutions and mediatized formations for direction in this, however progressive some of them may seem: the transnational, the postmodern, the hybrid, difference, or history will never be the vanguard. What may be, however, is a reconstituted proletarian internationalism informed by attention to a politics of knowledge production, rethinking how conceptual apparatuses shape our understanding and reclaiming Marxism and Communism from misconception and reification—even as these are only the microtheoretical version of general ideological enframings, and our decisions must be tested in action, not by appeal to something like the true.

Perhaps we should learn more about the opposition to imperialism that comes from outside, at that moment of transition: the wars fought against colonialism from the earliest days of the East India Company through to the postindependence struggles against the Indian client state (Tebhaga, Telengana, Naxalbari, Bhirbum; for a start see Banerjee 1984). These struggles were sustained and severe; our sanctioned ignorance of this anticolonialism and its history, our Eurocentric focus and parasite carnivalism, our romantic, naive solidarities and our failure to organize adequately, condemn us to continued complicity if we forget.

At the end of section 1.1, Hardt and Negri offer as a “final analogy” for their “world to come” a reference to “the birth of Christianity in Europe and its expansion during the decline of the Roman Empire” (2000, 21). Two millennia on and Hardt and Negri would prophesy a new ethical and ontological basis for a subjectivity to challenge Empire. At the very end of the book the “ontological power of a new society” (413) is found in the god-bothering Christian figure of St. Francis of Assisi. The terminology turns evangelical, but there is no need for hand-wringing and flagellation, complaining that this book wants to be everything and everywhere: it has already proclaimed itself the update of unwritten *Capital*. Fantastical utopian spontaneity and errors on any number of points do not prove irredeemable. Readers, strip this book of its holy costumery (St. Francis), whip them into shape with disciplinary rigor (history, the Party), and deploy them in organized squads. There is a world to win . . .

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