

Empire refuted

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*2025 was the 25th anniversary of the publication of **Empire**, arguably the most important and certainly the most popular of all the books by Antonio Negri over his long career as a thinker of the left, as well as of his co-thinker of his later years, Michael Hardt.¹ A quarter of a century is surely a time span that is appropriate to do a reality check, so to speak, on a book about the world system of capitalism, or, to put it in stricter terms, a confrontation between the very ambitious theoretical project to explain what the authors consider a new stage in the development of the capitalist mode of production, on the one hand, and the historical movement itself, on the other. So, in planning for this issue of **Revolutionary Marxism**, we decided to submit **Empire** to the judgment of history on the basis of incontestable evidence that has emerged in this quarter of a century.*

*However, when we sat down several months later to write up this overview on how **Empire** fared in explaining what was to come in the future when it was written back in 2000, we realised that, in order to assess its merits and failures in the light of the actual historical development in the quarter of a century since the book saw*

¹ Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

*the light of day, we needed to explain to the reader what the main contentions of the authors of the book were. We also realised that a reality check alone would not suffice to properly criticise and put in its place this frivolously ambitious book. For even without a confrontation with historical development that we intended to submit the book to, all the weaknesses and dead-ends of the theoretical edifice of **Empire** were clearly visible when it was first published back in 2000. Moreover, a simple confrontation with the empirical development of this quarter of a century could not suffice to get across to the reader the fatal weaknesses of this much-vaunted book. A full-scale rebuttal on **both** the theoretical and empirical planes was necessary.*

Fortunately, we had, in earlier days, already done the theoretical job that was needed. We had criticised, in all essentials, the theoretical edifice constructed by Hardt and Negri back in 2002 in our native Turkish² when the translation of the book appeared in that language.³ However, we never had the time, in those years, to also write this piece up in English so as to reach out to a wider, this time international audience. (Even this little bit of experience should teach something important to those who work on issues of theory in countries where English is the medium of communication. They usually do not have an inkling of how their counterparts living and working in other climes are at a disadvantage in reaching international audiences even if they are privileged enough to be able to write on complex and subtle matters in English. The latter have to do double-shift, so to speak, if they wish to be in unceasing conversation with their own society and at the same time address international audiences.)

*We had the chance of making up for this to a certain extent by publishing, in 2004, a full-scale refutation in English of the liberal theory of globalisation, which was the rage in intellectual circles both on the right and on the left at the turn of the Millenium.⁴ The article did not go into the specific ideas of Negri and Hardt, but since, as we shall see in a moment, **Empire** is nothing but the replica of the liberal-bourgeois theory of globalisation couched in pseudo-Marxist and authentically postmodernist terminology, the argument in that 2004 article provides an introduction to a critique of the theory advanced in **Empire**. This was necessarily done within the limits of an article of reasonable size. The full-scale argument that we have developed with respect to the concept and the process of so-called globalisation can, unfortunately, only be inspected in our Turkish-language book on the*

2 Sungur Savran, “‘Alternatif Küreselleşme’ mi, Proleter Enternasyonalizmi mi?': **İmparatorluk**'a Reddiye”, *Praksis*, No. 7, Summer 2002.

3 Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, *İmparatorluk*, Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları: 2001.

4 Sungur Savran, “Globalisation and the New World Order: The New Dynamics of Imperialism and War”, in Alan Freeman and Boris Kagarlitsky (eds.), *The Politics of Empire. Globalisation in Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 2004.

question, first published in 2008.⁵

Our position was, to the best of our knowledge, unique in that we not only rejected the almost universal hallucinatory reverie on the left as well as on the right that the process of globalisation was triumphantly marching, Juggernaut-like, into a future with novel features, or, in other words, was “irresistible and irreversible” (Negri and Hardt’s judgment in the very first paragraph of the Preface to the book) but took issue with other main tenets of that theory. We refused to bow to the universally accepted twin propositions, namely the postulation of the disappearance, or at least the erosion (the latter being closer to Negri and Hardt’s position), of the sovereignty of nation-states, thus giving birth to a “smooth world” (Negri and Hardt) and the allegation that all this flowed from the new technology that was quickly taking over. These three propositions (loss of national sovereignty, technological determinism and irreversibility) may be characterised as the **unholy trinity** of globalisation theory, to which all writers on the left and right subscribed. There were of course lone dissenting voices such as Paul Hirst⁶ on the left and Dani Rodrik⁷ from within the mainstream who disagreed on this or that aspect, but, as far as we can ascertain, we were the only writer who refused the entire trinity of globalisation.

Not only, we pointed out, was globalisation not marching forth in unstoppable fortitude, but on the contrary, the contradictions between a world economy becoming ever more internationalised and a system of multiple nation-states, each equipped with mechanisms to intervene in the flows of capital, goods and money to a greater or lesser extent, this contradiction, we pointed out, would inevitably explode the system from within, leading to a crash of immense proportions. (From the Tequila Crisis all the way to the Asian Crisis, all failures of the system had some connection to those contradictions.) Hence, far from being irreversible, globalisation was a very fragile process. This prognosis was entirely confirmed by the so-called “Global Financial Crisis” of 2008, itself followed by what we have been calling, along with other fellow Marxists such as Michael Roberts, Anwar Shaikh and our frequent co-author E. Ahmet Tonak, a new “great depression”.

The only thing that was not an ideological ploy in the globalisation debate was **globalism**. The “ism” immediately suggests that this was not a statement of fact but rather a fundamental element within the overall strategy of attack by the international bourgeoisie (the imperialist strata of that class leading the pack, of course) to disarm and defeat the international working class, by converting the immense pools

5 Sungur Savran, *Kod Adı Küreselleşme. 21. Yüzyılda Emperyalizm* [Code Name Globalisation. Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century], 3rd Edition, Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2022.

6 Paul Hirst et al., *Globalisation in Question*, 3rd Edition, London: Polity Press, 2015.

7 Dani Rodrik, *Has Globalization Gone Too Far*, Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 1997.

of dormant labour power around the world into a unified international industrial reserve army of labour. Of course, the entire web of commodity chains that formed the basis of this operation was also performe a constitutive element of the same process. In other words, “globalism” was part and parcel of the neoliberal strategy of crisis resolution adopted by the international bourgeoisie—it was the international dimension of that very strategy. The myth of the unholy trinity of globalisation was only the ideological buttress to convince friend and foe that this was not an assault but a sea change in the international system based on inescapable objective grounds.

*It was within the framework of this special conceptual framework that we launched our full-scale critique of **Empire** back in 2002.*

*We now leave the reader tête-à-tête with this wholesale critique of **Empire**, here presented for the first time in English. It is at the end of this article that we will draw the inevitable conclusions of the judgment of practical historical development on that book. In reading the **Post Scriptum** placed at the end, the reader will see how damning the historical judgment of practical development has been for that book, which is of no use whatsoever for anyone since the above-mentioned “Global Financial Crisis” of 2008, which set in motion a process called “deglobalisation”, ended the hallucinatory romance of the postmodernist left with a new world of **Empire**.*

One of the most pressing dimensions of the “globalisation” debate from a Marxist perspective concerns the stance to be adopted towards the nation and the nation-state at the beginning of the 21st century. This is such a difficult question, both in terms of its theoretical foundations and its political-programmatic aspect, that in Turkey and around the world, the majority of the labour movement, the anti-globalisation movement and the socialist left are far from even correctly formulating the issue, let alone adopting the appropriate political approach. To argue, as the nationalist left does, that the only left-wing option in the face of “globalisation” is to “defend the nation-state” is to have learned nothing from the lessons of the 20th century. But if the problem were limited to this, the solution would be easy. Unfortunately, a number of currents on the left, while rejecting the “nation-state option”, fail to grasp the issue in its subtle distinctions and complexities, to properly situate the categories of nation and nation-state in relation to “globalisation” and consequently commit serious theoretical and political errors on the issues of imperialism and internationalism.

The extreme form of such errors is, of course, a policy of neutrality between imperialism, implementing its “globalisation” strategy, and the nationalist political

currents or nation-states that oppose it. This neutrality will supposedly save face for the party in question and avoid embarrassment in the face of the “enlightened” democratic public opinion so as not to be seen as “dinosaurs”.⁸ To the extent that this policy means not taking sides between the oppressor and the oppressed and not fighting against the powers at the centre of the reproduction of the world system, it is suicidal for socialists. But the attitude I want to focus on here is not primarily this approach adopted by currents that believe “globalisation” is a good thing.⁹ The main problem is that even some intellectuals and circles who, from a Marxist perspective, view “globalisation” as a capitalist class offensive, face serious difficulties in this era in terms of theoretically addressing issues such as nation, nation-state, imperialism, and internationalism. Two striking types of emphasis occasionally emerge among these circles. One is an approach which argues that, in the period we are going through, virtually nothing can be done at the nation-state level to solve the problems of the working class and labourers. This is, in other words, a stance that holds that struggles at the nation-state level have no value, not even as a first step, for the ultimate and comprehensive solution of the problems of the working class and the labouring masses. The second holds the position that Marxists should now oppose capitalism, rather than imperialism, in an unmediated manner. This position sometimes even reaches the point of an approach that completely excludes the concept of “imperialism” from Marxist discourse.

In short, in the face of international capital’s “globalisation” offensive, even after setting aside left-wing liberalism and left-nationalism, there are very serious differences within the Marxist left itself on a number of issues. The relationship between anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism depends on a correct understanding of the relationship between “globalisation” and imperialism. Understanding the relationship between the question of the nation-state and internationalism correctly depends on a proper theorisation of the structure that the “globalisation” strategy is currently attempting to create in the world. Thus, seeing “globalisation” as a capitalist offensive that must be fought against, but not seeing the nation-state as grounds for emancipation is not, on its own, enough to resolve the theoretical and political problems that arise under present circumstances.

Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire*, a book that has had a major impact in Turkey

⁸ Of course, an even more extreme position is possible: that of openly supporting imperialism against the nation-state that it is having an armed conflict with. The most striking example of this occurred during the Kosovo War: a number of movements and intellectuals who considered themselves “left-wing” openly supported NATO. I do not believe these can be considered as a part of the left.

⁹ I have criticised this approach since the 1991 Gulf War, both in practical political struggle and in various texts. For an example, see Sungur Savran, *Avrasya Savaşları* [Eurasia Wars], Istanbul: Belge, 2001, pp. 35-62 and 126-139.

and around the world, is of great importance in this context. The reason for this can be stated quite simply. Hardt and Negri have two fundamental theses regarding the character of the era and of social and political struggles. First, they argue that with “globalisation”, imperialism has come to an end, with a new era, which they themselves call “Empire”, opening. Second, they contend that in the era of Empire, local struggles will yield no results, and hence struggles must necessarily be global in nature. And they defend all this in the name of revolution, in the name of “the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communists” (413)¹⁰, as they put it in the book’s final sentence. *Empire* is a book that has been published and republished numerous times all around the world. If a book that speaks in the name of revolution and communism can become so popular at the beginning of the 21st century, in the very ideological conjuncture we are all familiar with, there must be certain reasons for this. So, if we dwell on *Empire*, it is not because of its “appeal” but because of its huge sales, of the warm response shown to these “communist” authors by bourgeois circles, the enthusiastic reception given to them by the left, the typical nature of its theses, and the fact that it reflects the spirit of the times and that it is an expression of the *zeitgeist*.

1. A Gallery of Oddities

When considered within the context of present circumstances, *Empire* has been met with a very peculiar reception. In 2000, as soon as the first edition was published by the university press of Harvard University, by far the most prestigious university in the United States if not the world, it began to sell like hotcakes. The paperback edition was released in 2001. In July 2001, it received high praise from some of the heavyweights of the English-speaking bourgeois press, including the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine in the US, and the *Observer*, the Sunday edition of the *Guardian*, in Britain.¹¹ Given all this, it is hardly surprising to find *Empire* displayed alongside Stephen King’s horror novels in airport book stalls! The book went through numerous printings. The English-language copy I have is the seventh edition, published in 2001. Interest in Turkey appears to be similarly high. The Turkish copy I acquired some time ago is the third edition.

It must be admitted that this situation is somewhat unexpected in itself. But there is something even more surprising. The book we are talking about is not exactly

¹⁰ Hereafter, throughout the text, references to *Empire* will be given in parentheses with only the page number referred to. References will be to the following English-language edition: Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹¹ Alex Callinicos, “Toni Negri in Perspective”, *International Socialism*, No. 92, Autumn 2001; John Bellamy Foster, “Imperialism and ‘Empire’”, *Monthly Review*, 53 (7), December 2001.

child's play. In fact, we ought to be more explicit: we are dealing with a book that will challenge even the most ambitious intellectuals, let alone the masses at large. Its references start with the ancient Hellenic and Roman worlds, pass through Machiavelli and Montesquieu, and extend to Richard Falk and John Rawls in the present day. It is defined by an interdisciplinary approach that spans economics, international law, psychoanalysis, and the entire postmodernist canon. Imagine yourself in the shoes of someone who, despite not having read much in the social sciences and philosophy, hears praise for the book, becomes curious, and picks it up. Just looking at some of the chapter and section titles is enough to intimidate anyone: "biopolitical power", "the ontological drama of *Res Gestae*", "subaltern nationalism", "the boomerang of alterity", "virtualities", "*Finis Europae*", "Telos", "*posse*", etc., etc. No wonder the Turkish publishers included it in their "Hard-to-read books" series! (The book is heavy in terms of its volume too, with 412 pages in Turkish and 472 in English).

This paradox needs to be explained. The secret to the explanation lies in the ideological and political climate of the period. If we address the political aspect first, the movement known as "anti-globalisation" is of great importance here. Hardt and Negri's book was published in 2000, that is, immediately after Seattle protests (November-December 1999), but it was written before that landmark action. In this respect, its timing was extremely fortunate. Seattle and the actions that followed it can be interpreted as directly confirming a number of the book's theses in the real world. At least three characteristics of these actions show a striking correspondence to the approach presented in *Empire*. First, these actions brought together protesters of many different types, from trade unionists to environmentalists, from Catholics to anarchists, from militants belonging to revolutionary parties in imperialist countries to members of peasant organisations in Third World countries. This seems to fit perfectly with Hardt and Negri's concept of the "multitude". Secondly, the movement's seemingly international character, without any apparent national divisions, is also a development in line with *Empire*'s perspective. Thirdly, the absence of central structures in the organisation of protests from Seattle to Genoa in 2001, and the almost chaotic nature of the arrangements, seem to fit the network-style organisation highlighted by Hardt and Negri. This is the primary reason for the popularity of *Empire*. We will return later at length to the deceptive nature of this kind of coincidence between theory and practice.

Not only the emergence of the "anti-globalisation" movement, but also the different ideological, political and organisational tendencies within it, are important for understanding the foundations of *Empire*'s popularity. Here, it can be said that different currents, which do not necessarily overlap and may eventually develop in entirely different directions, find their own tendencies theorised in certain as-

pects of *Empire*. British Marxist Alex Callinicos (2001), drawing particularly on Antonio Negri's autonomist past, sees groups such as the Black Bloc or *Tutte Bianche* (the All Whites), some violent, some civil disobedience-oriented, following a line of "direct action" based on conflict with security forces, as *Empire's* main interlocutors. (I believe this observation suffers at the least from one-sidedness.) Beyond this, it is clear that a powerful current rejecting centralised organising and disciplined work would find appealing aspects in *Empire's* idea of network-style organisation. Another trend is particularly strong among youth: within the "anti-globalisation" movement, there is a widespread youth demographic that avoids concrete political struggles and organising in individual countries, especially their own, but militantly participates in actions directly targeting international institutions (the IMF, the WTO, the World Economic Forum, etc.). Hardt and Negri's idea that struggles have no meaning if they are limited to a local perspective and that the struggle must be waged directly against the "global" system will of course be very appealing to them. Finally, and most importantly, the ideas of *Empire* provide a series of extremely important arguments for the reformist wing that has emerged from the split within the "anti-globalisation" movement. As is well known, the approach of ATTAC, which has become the organisational centre-piece of the movement, particularly in Europe, can be summarised as an alternative globalisation counterposed to liberal globalisation. This is precisely the thesis defended by Hardt and Negri in sophisticated language and with eminently conceptual tools. In this case, it should come as no surprise that the concept of "Empire" is used in many issues of the Porto Alegre bulletin "*other-words*", distributed on the internet, as if it were a common concept of the entire left or the "anti-globalisation" movement.

The ideological aspect of the matter is linked to a point that has reflections in the "anti-globalisation" movement, but carries weight in a certain manner independently of it. *Empire* is a book that brings together and systematises all the theories of "total renewal" developed over the last two or three decades on the left, whether based on Marxist concepts or on an explicit rejection of Marxism. In the world of academia and intellectuals, heavily influenced by fashion, the book is highly appealing in this respect to anyone who eagerly follows the trends of the day. Among these theories, even those that were once expressed in terms closer to classical Marxist concepts (consider, for example, the Regulation School on post-Fordism) have become more "up-to-date" and appealing when placed under the umbrella of postmodernism. Conversely, the acceptance, albeit with certain qualifications, by writers who feel "the irresistible lightness of being communist", of even the "end of history" type of theses advanced by explicitly anti-Marxist writers such as Francis

Fukuyama will reassure some in terms of renewal.¹² Especially when all this bears the signature of Antonio Negri, who is not only a respected name in the field of theory within Western Marxism, but who has also lived under the repression of the Italian bourgeois state for years due to his involvement in social struggles! Let us not rush, though. We will return to this aspect later. Let us first see how *Empire* brings together all the theories of “total renewal”.

An encyclopaedia of “Total Renewal”

We are all aware that since at least the early 1990s, a series of new theories that move with the times, so to speak, have come to dominate the social sciences, arguing that the nature of capitalism has changed completely, that nothing is the same as it used to be, and that the problematics or paradigms of the old era must be completely jettisoned. It would certainly be easy to compile a long catalogue, but let us make our task easier by pointing out that some of these theories are decisive in character. The leading theories in this comprehensive “renewal” approach are: globalisation, postmodernism, post-Fordism, and the information society (or post-industrial society). These theories are accompanied, in terms of method, by the predominance of the concept of “civil society”, and, in terms of historical stage, by theories concerning the closure of the age of the decisive nature of class struggle, the end of imperialism, and even the passing of capitalism. *Empire* is like an encyclopaedia of “total renewal”. With one exception (which we will discuss shortly), it fully accepts all of the aforementioned theories (some implicitly). In essence, although it has some original aspects, the book can also be seen as a systematic compilation of all these theories.

Written in the language of Marxist theory, *Empire* is like a catalogue of new concepts and theories that depart from the cornerstones of that theory. Reviewing some of the entries in this catalogue or encyclopaedia may give readers unfamiliar with *Empire* an idea of the concepts and theories Hardt and Negri propose to abandon, which include: imperialism (20), the labour theory of value (54), the law of value (402-404), variable capital (206), dialectics (251), proletarian internationalism (75), the wage labourer as the basis of the proletariat (77-78), capitalist domination (373), the weak link (82) etc. In contrast, today’s fashionable theories and concepts form the building blocks of the book: globalisation, the end of imperialism, post-Fordism or Toyotism, postmodernism, the information society (or informatisation) (293 ff.), the post-industrial society (298), networks (306 ff.), the “new public sphere” (79), the end of history (373), etc.

12 This is what they have to say of Fukuyama: “When Francis Fukuyama claims that the contemporary historical passage is defined by the end of history, he means that the era of major conflicts has come to an end.” (189)

What distinguishes Hardt and Negri from the most extreme examples of “total renewal” theoreticians is their characterisation of all this change as a “passage *wit-hin* the capitalist mode of production” (xiii, emphasis ours) and their emphasis on the continuation of capitalist exploitation (43). Furthermore, as emphasised above, the ideas of revolution and communism continue to exist, at least at the level of discourse. Finally, although one of the defining concepts of *Empire* is “multitude”, the concept of the “proletariat” also comes up from time to time. But its content has changed completely.

All the exceptions aside, in the light of all this, I think it is somewhat easier to understand why *Empire* is popular.

The prison and the university

Since the authors explicitly acknowledge *Empire*'s intellectual debt to postmodernism, particularly to Michel Foucault and the duo Gilles Deleuze/ Félix Guattari, any discussion of kinship in this regard would be pointless. In contrast, the extent to which the book has been influenced by the post-Marxist school is more ambiguous. The ideas mentioned in the footnotes regarding the duo Ernesto Laclau/Chantal Mouffe, the leading representatives of this school, confuse rather than enlighten the reader. Let us first read footnote 26 in the chapter entitled “The Limits of Imperialism”:

It is particularly important to give credit where credit is due today, when we seem to be confronted with numerous versions of historical revisionism. Poor Gramsci, communist and militant before all else...; poor Gramsci was given the gift of being considered the founder of a strange notion of hegemony that leaves no place for a Marxian politics. (See, for example, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe...). We have to defend ourselves from such generous gifts! (451).

Isn't it clear that the authors find the concept of hegemony, surely a central one for Laclau and Mouffe, one that gives their book its title, “strange”? So, far from feeling close to the post-Marxist school, the authors take such a harsh stance that they seem to despise it. But wait, don't jump to conclusions just yet. Now we move on to the section titled “Resistance, Crisis, Transformation.” Here, the authors say the following about “new social movements”: “The various analyses of ‘new social movements’ have done a great service in insisting on the political importance of cultural movements against narrow economic perspectives that minimize their significance.” (276)

Right here, a footnote enlightens the reader about who conducted these “analyses”. After a name that is of no interest to us here, the following comment is inser-

ted: “The most influential text for the political interpretation of ‘new social movements’ along these lines is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* etc.” (459)

Isn’t it odd that Laclau/Mouffe, who possess a “strange notion of hegemony”, have done “a great service” in analysing the “new social movements”, which, it may be added, stand in an organic relationship to the very concept of hegemony? Is it possible that these two ideas belong to the same author?

In fact, other such contradictions also catch the eye in the book. For example, an entire section (“Cycles”, 237-239, see also footnote 13 to the Chapter on “World Order”, 437) is devoted to emphasising how Giovanni Arrighi’s theory of long-term cycles prevents us from understanding “a rupture of the system, a paradigm shift” (239), but in footnote 5 to the “Preface,” the same author is cited as one of the writers who, “[a]lthough they do not use the term ‘Empire’”, are “oriented in this direction” (415). Or a book that says we should throw away with “no hesitation” “the numerous shelves of our libraries that are filled with analyses of totalitarianism” which “should today be regarded only with shame” (421) also uses the concept of totalitarianism with great nonchalance when discussing Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “naked life” (366).

There may be an explanation for such contradictions. Perhaps these two authors, residing in two different countries (the US and Italy), have not always carefully read chapters or sections penned by each other. In that case, Negri, who had experienced the debates between Italian Communist Party theorists attempting to make Gramsci the father of “civil society” in the face of objections from revolutionary theorists, may have wished to record his indignation at Laclau and Mouffe’s abuse of Gramsci. In contrast, Hardt, who is a generation younger than Negri and American, and who may have been dazzled by the success of Laclau and Mouffe when he began his theoretical career, may have found it meaningful to speak highly of them. It is impossible that Negri, a former Italian communist, did not feel strongly that the concept of totalitarianism was a Cold War tool. But in the liberal environment of American academia, it may be normal for Hardt to find this concept much more “scientific”.

Perhaps so, perhaps not. My aim is not to speculate, but to emphasise what a strange collaboration this book is the product of. Antonio Negri was one of the most important theoreticians within Italian Marxism in the 1970s. During and after the “hot autumn” of 1969, when Italy was shaken with massive strikes, he was one of the important theoreticians of the far left (which was very powerful at the time), to the left of the reformist Italian Communist Party. Along with other theorists in this field (Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, etc.), he was a representative of a school of thought known as *operaismo* (workerism). When the militant actions of the

working class began to decline in the mid-1970s, Negri became the theoretician of autonomist groups that prioritised clashes with the police and “direct action” in the face of the trade union bureaucracy’s conservatism. After this bout of street clashes, when the Red Brigades’ individual terrorism began to shape the political environment, Negri was subjected to an attack by the Italian state, which was already pursuing a “strategy of tension” under the influence of the deep state. He was arrested in 1979 and imprisoned for four years without trial. In 1983, he was elected member of parliament from the Radical Party, which had included him on its list out of solidarity, and was released from prison due to his parliamentary immunity. However, realising that his immunity would be lifted, he fled to France. He returned to Italy in the late 1990s and began serving his sentence in Rebibbia Prison. As far as can be ascertained, he is now only subject to a curfew, meaning he is not allowed to leave his home at night.¹³

Foucault characterises institutions such as schools and universities, alongside those such as prisons, lunatic asylums, and barracks as disciplinary institutions. There is an undeniable grain of truth in this, but it is also important not to overlook the significant differences between Italian prisons and American universities in other respects. We do not know much about Michael Hardt’s life and political interests. But what we do know is meaningful in itself. While Negri was being forged in the great class struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hardt was still a child. It is clear that his development took place as a member of a generation whose theoretical universe was marked by post-Marxism and postmodernism. The fact that he works at a highly prestigious American university (Duke University) shows, in itself, the kind of pressures he lives under. (Yes, the university really is also a disciplining institution!) The topics he studies and the journals he writes for clearly show his tendencies. In today’s America, “literary studies” departments, along with those of “cultural studies”, serve as bastions of postmodernism in universities, and the journal *Social Text*, where Hardt usually publishes his articles, is one of the main outlets of postmodernism. His performance at a panel in New York City indicated for us that Hardt belongs to a very different social typology from Negri. Although the most important thesis of *Empire* is that imperialism is over and has been replaced by “Empire”, when in front of an audience full of socialists and confronting another skilled panellist (the late Peter Gowan) who questioned his theses, Hardt saw fit to say that “*Empire* does not negate imperialism”. Although the book frequently refers to Samir Amin, a theoretician who takes an approach contrary to its own theoretical framework¹⁴, Hardt found it palatable to contend during that panel

13 In his above-mentioned article in *International Socialism*, (see footnote 11), Alex Callinicos provides a good summary of Negri’s political life and its impact on his theory.

14 Foster, article cited, footnote 1.

that attempts to “pit his own work against” the approaches of thinkers such as Samir Amin were misguided. It is impossible not to think that for such people, ideas are not revolutionary tools but career ladders!

Hardt and Negri argue that *Empire* has a hybrid structure. The same can be said of *Empire* in terms of its intellectual and cultural lineage.

The speculative philosophy of the age of speculative capital

Empire is a book that embodies many of the negative features of postmodern thought. In this universe where everything is relative, where the eye of the beholder is more decisive than the object being scrutinised, language games take the place of vigorous thinking. The art of rhetoric becomes a cover for the abolition of the laws of logic. Allusion, innuendo, and analogy take the place of inquiring into causality. To assert something is sufficient in itself. No need to explain.

Let me try to explain what I mean through a few examples. A series of fetish concepts of postmodernism, such as decentralisation and deterritorialization, are presented as a most important characteristic of the category *Empire*, as opposed to European-style imperialism. *Empire* is always an open-ended, deterritorialized, flexible category that can expand infinitely. Hardt and Negri link this directly to the Jeffersonian federalist approach that was decisive in the founding of the United States. The question that must now be asked is: What is the connection? There is an association and an analogy is drawn. But beyond that analogy what kind of relationship exists between the constitutional understanding that was the product of the 18th-century American revolution, with its unique circumstances, and the 21st-century *Empire*, a product of entirely different conditions, that may enable the reader to better understand what is being said? Is it because America has been the strongest national entity since World War II and remains so during the period of *Empire*? Or, if the informatisation of production has completely eliminated the importance of attachment to place, leading to deterritorialization, what does the American constitutional system have to do with this? This remains unexplained. And when it remains unexplained, it leaves behind a series of questions.

Another instance concerns the claim that proletarian internationalism has become obsolete. In the subsection “The Refrains of the International,” Hardt and Negri formulate an extremely sharp proposition on this subject: “Today we should all clearly recognize that the time of such proletarian internationalism is over.” (50) I recommend that anyone wishing to decipher Hardt and Negri’s style of argumentation carefully read the entire passage preceding and following this sentence. In that passage, taken in its entirety, it is explained, on the basis of propositions true or false, how proletarian internationalism was a reality in the past. The following section attempts to reveal how certain concrete actions in the 1990s failed to become “in-

ternationalised.” The fact that such a sharp proposition can be put forward without being grounded in any general trend, but only by referring to specific events, is a perfect example of association taking the place of argument!

Empire is also an extremely irresponsible book. The claim is grandiose: two self-declared communists argue that a new era has begun in the history of capitalist society, upon the heels of the age of imperialism. The opening of new stages in the history of capitalism is a matter of colossal significance that will have decisive effects on the communists’ strategy and tactics. Consider Lenin: when World War I broke out, amidst all his political work, he first studied Hegel (in order to acquire the philosophical tools to grasp the world situation in its totality), then shut himself away in the library for six months to collect concrete data to identify the new trends in capitalism, and only then wrote his rightly famous book, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. He filled his book with statistics to prove that the new era was one profoundly characterised by monopolies or export of capital. However, based on this concrete data (and, of course, drawing on the work of J. A. Hobson, Rudolf Hilferding, and Nikolai Bukharin on imperialism before him), he concluded that capitalism had entered a new historical stage.

For Hardt and Negri, however, facts are unimportant. For instance, referring to a few articles is sufficient to proclaim the overriding importance of “informatisation” and services. They are not concerned that there are major debates even about the definition of the concept of services, or that the statistics used by the (mostly bourgeois) proponents of the theory of so-called “information society” (or “post-industrial society”) raise very serious questions. For example, the outlandish claim that *Empire* is a decentred system is not supported by any concrete evidence. The empirical aspect of the issue is of no interest to Hardt and Negri. Faced with the fact that the US is almost undeniably the “centre” of the world system, it does not even occur to them to empirically investigate the question of the extent to which, for example, the IMF or the WTO, NATO or the UN can act independently of the US. Another example: they put forward the theoretical concept of post-Fordism totally uncritically (without having recourse to any evidence).

Indeed, the flow of *Empire* is based not on a metabolic relationship between theory and the real world, but on a relationship between theory and theory. *Empire* is, in a sense, not the theory of the world we live in, but the theory of theories. Take, for example, the current change in the phenomenon of sovereignty. The subsection “United Nations” (3-8) seems like an ideal starting point for discussing this issue. The reader might hope that it will address the real-world consequences of individual nation-states delegating certain powers to a higher authority, even if on the basis of the persistence of their own national sovereignty. After all, we are only at the beginning of the book, in the first chapter. However, Hardt and Negri address

the question of the place of this concrete institution of the concrete world within the transformation of sovereignty by examining *not* the institution itself, but the ideas of its intellectual father, Hans Kelsen. They conclude that the contradictions arising from this create a dynamic towards overcoming the sovereignty of nation-states, and then... develop the issue on the basis of two separate theoretical variants, referring to Locke and Hobbes. And the United Nations section comes to an end at this point! It is not just the postmodernist method of placing all thought within an “intertextual” orbit at play here, thereby reducing theory to thinking about theory.

It is also a caricature of Hegel’s method, which examines the world as an unfolding of the stages of the development of the Spirit. It is not national sovereignty or Empire that is examined, but their concepts. Postmodernism revives speculative philosophy. But it explicitly rejects the dialectic¹⁵ that gave Hegel the entire power of his philosophy! (251).¹⁶

The Limits of Critique

What has been written so far should not be read as unfair to *Empire*, especially to a historic figure like Negri. *Empire* should be seen, in a way, as a very useful book. As mentioned above, it has systematised, under a postmodernist umbrella, countless theories claiming that the world has changed completely over the last two or three decades, bringing clarity to all these theories. After *Empire*, there is no middle ground. That is to say, one cannot, for instance, use the concept of “globalisation” uncritically and at the same time insist on the Marxist concept of imperialism. While defending all these theories, *Empire* has also exposed them.

Let me try to explain what I mean through an historical analogy. After Piero Sraffa’s book *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*¹⁷ was published in 1960, a major debate began in the field of Marxist value and capital theory: some claimed that Sraffa’s theoretical framework refuted Marxist theory, while others argued that Sraffa’s contributions nourished Marxist value theory, helped it overcome its contradictions, and thus propelled it forward. A final group of theorists

15 “Having achieved the global level, capitalist development is faced directly with the multitude, without mediation. Hence the dialectic, or really the science of the limit and its organization, evaporates.” (237)

16 This kind of infatuation with pure theory, oblivious to material facts, is strangely combined with an empiricist reasoning that attempts to leap to theoretical conclusions based on very partial facts and independently of the establishment of a theoretical framework. As an example of this second methodology, which remains secondary to the dominant speculative style, one could cite the overly generalised conclusions drawn from isolated political struggles as proof of the end of proletarian internationalism, as already mentioned in the text.

17 Piero Sraffa, *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

argued that Sraffa's own theory was flawed, that Marxist value theory was robust and internally consistent, and that a synthesis of the two theories was impossible in any case. In 1977, a Sraffian author, Ian Steedman, published a book entitled *Marx After Sraffa*.¹⁸ His book was a typical example of criticising Marx without understanding him at all, but it had one merit: it laid bare the antagonism between the system of Sraffian economics and Marx's critique of political economy. After Steedman, the debate simplified, the Marx plus Sraffa option disappeared from history, and the question became Marx *or* Sraffa. It is at least possible to hope that Hardt and Negri will have the same effect in the debates on "globalisation," post-Fordism, and postmodernism.

Secondly, *Empire* is underpinned by considerable intellectual erudition. From political and legal theory to ancient Rome, it is a journey through a vast theoretical landscape, extending from the entire series of milestones of European political thought to the labyrinths of postmodernism. This book teaches Marxists not only what they should not do (speculative philosophy, theory by association, etc.), but also reminds them (if that were necessary) how much ground they must cover in their struggle against postmodernist thought.

What has been written so far should make it clear that a truly comprehensive critique of *Empire* cannot be accomplished within the confines of a single article. Therefore, we must carefully delimit the topics we wish to take up in the remainder of this article. The two main topics we shall address are the main characteristics of *capitalism qua world system* today and, based on these characteristics, the nature of *the existing dynamics in terms of overthrowing the system*. The first topic, which involves examining the objective structures of capitalism as it has crystallised through processes of class struggles, entails scrutinising Hardt and Negri's theses on "globalisation", imperialism, the nation, and the nation-state. The second topic, which centres on class struggles and the revolutionary programme, concerns the authors' theses on the proletariat, the "multitude", and internationalism.

One reason for this limitation is that *Empire* addresses present-day capitalism not only as a world system but also in its other aspects, namely changes in the sphere of production (themes such as "informatisation", post-industrial society, post-Fordism etc.) and changes in the mode of social domination (the transition from a disciplinary society to a control society, bio-political production, etc.). Each of these contains theses that must be carefully addressed and refuted.

The second reason for this limitation is the diversity of Hardt and Negri's intellectual sources. Faced with an intellectual horizon stretching from Machiavelli and Spinoza to Foucault and the duo Deleuze/Guattari, but also encompassing Piore and

¹⁸ Ian Steedman, *Marx After Sraffa*, London: New Left Books, 1977.

Sabel and the Regulation School, only collective work can yield comprehensive results. Finally, Negri is a thinker who has spent nearly forty years examining profoundly the tradition of European political thought and subjecting Marx's thought to a particular interpretation. To properly and thoroughly evaluate certain aspects of *Empire*, it is necessary to examine Negri's previous work in greater detail.

Of course, all this does not form an insuperable barrier in the way of understanding and criticising the main theses of *Empire*. The reason for this has been stated above. What is more decisive in *Empire* than Negri's intellectual history is the systematisation of the theories of "total renewal" developed by others to date. The topics we will address are thus limited to these.

2. From "Globalisation" to Empire

Hardt and Negri's central original thesis can be summarised as follows: "Globalisation" reduces the power of nation-states, without eliminating it entirely; but the importance of political power does not diminish, as is sometimes argued. "Globalisation" leads to the concentration of sovereignty in a series of different focal points within a hierarchical structure; Empire is the name given to this complex structure. Nation-states, or any single nation-state, are no longer the centre of imperialism; power is exercised in a dispersed and fragmented manner. Therefore, the struggle between imperialists is now a thing of the past. The distinctions between North/South, periphery/centre, First World/Third World have also lost their meaning. This means that we have also left the age of imperialism behind. "Imperialism is over" (xiv) because the cornerstone of imperialism is the sovereignty of nation-states. "What used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary manner, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and post-imperialist" (9).¹⁹

The entire architecture of *Empire* is built on this principle. But even in this principle, the slipshod nature of Hardt and Negri's thinking reveals all its weaknesses. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," because he believed that it was not necessary to define or even describe the act of "thinking". Hardt and Negri say, "globalisation, therefore empire"... but they do not say a single word to their curious readers about what "globalisation" is, this dreadfully controversial concept! Yes, in the "Preface", there are certain affirmations such as "the primary factors of production and exchange—money, technology, people, and goods—move with increasing

¹⁹ If one pays close attention to the language used, it can be seen that we are faced with a good example of what was said above under the heading of "speculative philosophy". Hardt and Negri argue that it is not ideas but the real world that has changed. For this, there must be a new legal fact and a new reality of power. But they speak of a "notion of right" and an "idea of power".

ease across national boundaries” (xi) – the kind of shallow observation that could appear in a daily newspaper article, but there is no clue as to why a development signalled by a quantitative change of the “increasing ease” type should have led to a qualitative change and ushered in a completely new era in the history of capitalism.

In other words, the “globalisation” that forms the basis of the book is a “non-concept” to use Hardt and Negri’s terminology. (One can already foresee how serious the consequences of this must necessarily be for authors who advocate an “alternative globalisation”.) While it is very doubtful that the third entity in the series “money, technology, people and commodities” is able to cross borders with “greater ease”,²⁰ let us assume for a moment that this proposition is correct. The question is: what makes this possible? The bourgeois theory of “globalisation” claims that technological development is at its core. From a Marxist perspective, this is technological reductionism; if international capital had not liberalised the flows of commodities, money and capital within the framework of the neoliberal offensive that began in 1979, new technology could not have facilitated these flows on its own. If technology on its own could have done the job, what need would there be for the World Trade Organisation or the IMF? Why would all the capitalist states of the world, primarily the imperialists, come together in the WTO and engage in round after round of negotiations to liberalise trade?

Hardt and Negri render “globalisation” incomprehensible, like an opaque black box, so we must proceed symptomatically, inferring from their other statements whether their understanding of this concept is based on technological reductionism. The first proposition we encounter is extremely unfortunate for our authors: according to them, “globalisation” is an “irresistible and irreversible” (17) development. It is easy to see that this proposition is almost Siamese twins with the technological reductionist explanation of “globalisation”. If “globalisation” is a product of neoliberalism (and new technologies merely facilitate it), then it is clear that class struggle against the neoliberal strategy is a form of “resistance” and that if this struggle succeeds, there will be a reversal of “globalisation”. But if new technology in the spheres of production, circulation and communication now automatically leads to “globalisation”, then “globalisation” is, of course, inevitable. In other words, our postmodern theorists have fallen into the technocratic trap of bourgeois theories at the very first step.

Secondly, Hardt and Negri defend the idea that “globalisation” has caused a decline in the sovereignty of nation-states. There is neither evidence nor explanation for such a controversial claim. It seems that on this issue too, the authors do not consider that remaining captive to the liberal “globalisation” literature poses a

²⁰ We remind the reader that this article was composed in 2002, and so we are not even hinting at Trump’s immigration policy here [note added in 2025].

problem. Claims about the weakening, or even (though Hardt and Negri explicitly state they do not agree with this) the demise of the nation-state, are the source of major misconceptions about the crucial characteristics of 21st-century global capitalism. Due to space constraints, I cannot go into detail here about this issue, which I have examined in its various dimensions before in Turkish.²¹ However, as this concerns the essence of Hardt and Negri's argument, we must briefly touch upon two dimensions of the issue.

On the one hand, contrary to what Hardt and Negri believe, the process of "globalisation" has not created a "smooth world" (xiii and 332). The proposition that "[t]he establishment of a global society of control that smooths over the striae of national boundaries goes hand in hand with the realization of the world market and the real subsumption of global society under capital" (332) is incorrect. The "realisation" of the world market (or, more accurately, its integration) has been based on the fragmentation defined by national borders (and sometimes supranational borders such as those of the EU). The reason for this is that, regardless of the extent to which neoliberal policies are adopted, each nation-state, due to the very nature of statehood, forms a specific sub-sector within the world market with its national currency, public finance, class relations regime (unions, labour laws, etc.) and general economic structure. The idea of a "smooth" world market, one without the fractures of these sub-sections, once again conjures up the spectre of inevitability, as it plays into the hands of imperialism (or Hardt and Negri's *Empire*) by spreading the illusion that there is nothing left to fight for.

On the other hand, even more importantly, the nation-state is still the arena where class power resides and is defended. ***The power struggle between classes is still fought at the national level.*** Of course, if tomorrow, say, the proletariat in Argentina or Turkey were to seize power and move towards dispossessing the bourgeoisie, countless forces, primarily the US and the EU, will attempt to overthrow this power through economic, political, and even military means. But this does not change the fact that the nation-state is the first rung on the ladder of class power. Because the struggle of the imperialists will now be against ***a state with an army*** on a territory of definite borders. (There is no need to call this a nation-state. The concept of the nation-state is a construct of nationalism, which has dominated political discourse for the last two centuries. None of the existing states are, in fact, states that can truly be called nation-states).²² If this is the case, then it is completely meaningless to say

21 Sungur Savran "Küreselleşme mi, Uluslararasılaşma mı?, (1)" [Globalisation or Internationalisation? Part 1"], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 16, November 1996 and "Küreselleşme mi, Uluslararasılaşma mı? (2)", [Globalisation or Internationalisation? Part 2"], *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 17, April 1997.

22 See Sungur Savran, "Bankalar ve Bayraklar: Uluslararasılaşma Çağında Milliyetçilik", ["Banks and Flags: Nationalism in the Age of Internationalisation"] *Sınıf Bilinci*, No. 12, March 1993.

that the nation-state has lost its importance. There is nothing new in the intervention of other capitalist states and imperialists against successful revolutions. From the Paris Commune to the October Revolution, from Vietnam and Korea to Sandinista Nicaragua, the entire history of capitalism is full of examples of this.

Beyond the theses of inevitability and the end of the nation-state's sovereignty, we know that Hardt and Negri put forward a third thesis, arguing that imperialism has ended with "globalisation". We need to discuss this issue in more detail. Nevertheless, it is useful to draw an interim conclusion at this point. Four years before the publication of *Empire*, in an article written in Turkish in 1996,²³ the author of these lines argued that the liberal theory of "globalisation" has three fundamental characteristics: the claim that "globalisation" renders the nation-state meaningless; the idea of inevitability; and the end of the era of imperialism. Hardt and Negri's understanding of "globalisation" fits this description perfectly. Isn't that striking?

In what sense has imperialism come to an end?

When Hardt and Negri's thesis that imperialism has come to an end is seriously examined, three fundamental arguments emerge: the end of the hierarchical order between nations and countries, the end of the distinction between the "outside" and the "inside" from the perspective of capitalism, and the end of competition between different imperialist states.

Hardt and Negri adopt a stance that can at best be described as frivolous regarding the antagonism between oppressor and oppressed nations within the world system. They argue that the Third World has ceased to exist (19). Since the 1980s, countless prophets have proclaimed the end of the Third World.²⁴ The authors do not even refer to this literature. Yet it is now common knowledge that the world we live in today is woven with even greater inequalities between nations than the world before the so-called era of "globalisation". For example, when considering the differences between countries such as the United States or Germany, where more than half of the population struggles with health problems caused by "obesity," and Malawi, where 70% of the population faces acute hunger, if we were to follow *Empire*, it would be necessary to say that there are "no differences of nature, only differences of degree".²⁵ Such a characterisation may be accurate in terms of height and weight figures, but ultimately it mocks the concepts of "quantitative"

23 "Küreselleşme mi, Uluslararasılaşma mı? (1)", article cited (see n19).

24 As far as I can ascertain, Nigel Harris (*The End of the Third World*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) deserves the dubitable honour of being the first to address this issue.

25 This is what they have to say, word for word: "This is not to say that the United States and Brazil, Britain and India are now identical territories in terms of capitalist production and circulation, but rather that between them are no differences of nature, only differences of degree." (335)

and “qualitative” (and people suffering from hunger)! When the US bombed Afghanistan, which is two hundred times poorer (with a national income of \$160 per capita compared to the US’s \$32,000), these figures can be arranged on a quantitative scale, but to say anything beyond that is a joke! The “Third World” was, from the outset, a flawed concept derived from a flawed theory. After the worlds labelled “First” and “Second” in that theory were overhauled completely, it became a rather shapeless theoretical concept.²⁶ But it still makes sense as a political concept pointing to a reality. Because in the language of millions, even billions of people, “Third World” means countries under the yoke of imperialism. And, in this sense, it certainly continues to exist. Yes, it has fragmented: South Korea and Angola, Brazil and El Salvador, Turkey and Yemen, have become completely different in terms of their socio-economic structures. But in terms of being subjected to imperialism, there is still a common feature among these countries (even if the style of subjugation is different in different cases). In other words, the uppercase “Third World”, a product of a distorted theory, may have come to an end; but the lowercase third world is still agonizing in misery. Say “the third world is no more” as much as you like. The third world continues to exist as the world of those who rejoiced on the occasion of 9/11!

Hardt and Negri’s second argument is that, in terms of the expansion of capitalism, the distinction between the “outside” and the “inside” has come to an end; in other words, the whole world has become capitalist. The argument presented in the chapter “The Limits of Imperialism” on this subject is extremely peculiar. The argument is, characteristically, once again “intertextual”, relying on the reading of theories of imperialism rather than the examination of the developments in the character

26 It is not a question of making a detailed critique of the “Three Worlds” theory here. In summary form, it may be said that the central core of this theory was based on the theses that the Soviet Union was a “social imperialist” country and, moreover, that it was the main rising imperialism against the United States. Within a decade or two of the theory’s grand proclamation, first the Soviet Union’s failure to even lift a finger in the face of the “camp” shift that took place in Eastern Europe in 1989, and then its own collapse in 1991, would shatter both theses. Naturally, after this major change, almost no one remained to defend this ingenious theory. Meanwhile, let us also point out the following: when Hardt and Negri say that “the winds are blowing where the Second World used to be” (19), they are clearly falling into the trap that many people fall into today. According to “Mao Zedong Thought”, the “Second World” at that time did not comprise the countries referred to as “socialist countries”. (Today, the phrase “the winds are blowing in its place” clearly refers to those countries.) This “second world” consisted of the secondary powers of both the capitalist and the “socialist” blocs (primarily Europe on both sides of the Berlin Wall). In other words, imperialist Western Europe was also part of the “Second World”. It is impossible to say that today the winds blow there! On the contrary, this group of countries is blowing like the wind with the European Union! On the other hand, the Soviet Union itself was the rising power of the “First World”. It is normal for young people to make this mistake. From the perspective of an old hand like Negri, who fought in a country where the Maoist movement was very powerful after the Cultural Revolution, this forgetfulness can be seen as a symptom of a general “amnesia” regarding Marxism itself.

of imperialism. The importance of the “outside” in terms of imperialism is explained entirely by relying on Rosa Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism.²⁷ However, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by many Marxists, primarily Bukharin,²⁸ despite all her theoretical and revolutionary sophistication as a Marxist, Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism is based on an argument that is fundamentally flawed by a profoundly underconsumptionist error.

This is where the peculiarity of the matter emerges. When Hardt and Negri first address the issue of the necessity of an “outside” for capitalism, they do not hesitate to add the following footnote:

The following argument raises the specter of underconsumptionist theories, which argue that inability to consume all the commodities produced is capitalism’s vital flaw and will necessarily lead to collapse. Many Marxist and non-Marxist economists have convincingly argued against any idea that the capitalist tendency to produce too much or consume too little will be catastrophic. (449)

I have underlined the phrase “convincingly” myself. This means that Hardt and Negri, like many of us, believe that the underconsumptionist theory has been “convincingly” refuted. But the entire argument about the “outside” is based on this theory! Today, the world has, in its entirety become capitalistic, so there is no outside left. In other words, capitalism has exhausted its ability to transfer its internal contradictions to the outside through imperialism. However, if Lenin’s theory,²⁹ which is based on much more solid foundations than Luxemburg’s underconsumptionist theory of imperialism, had been taken as the basis, it would have become clear that when examining the world as a whole, it is not the inside/outside distinction that is decisive, but the struggle for the division of the world resulting from competition between imperialists. In this regard, there is no difference between the beginning of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, because the fifth point of Lenin’s classic definition of imperialism is precisely “the completion of the division of the world among the imperialists”. If anything, the beginning of the 21st century, on the contrary, bears the stamp of a renewed wave geared towards the division of the world. The workers’ states born of the revolutions of the 20th century had become partially detached from the world market, but as a result of the capitalist restoration process that began at the end of the century, a new cauldron of struggles

27 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London: Routledge, 2003.

28 Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*, K. J. Tarbuck (ed.), New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

29 V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Collected Works*, v. 22, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

over the world economy was once again set in motion.

However, the main problem is that the division of the world by imperialist capital and states may no longer be important from Hardt and Negri's perspective, for their third pillar is precisely the proposition that competition between imperialist states has ended. Negri expressed the importance of this thesis in an interview with the left-liberal British magazine *New Statesman* as follows: "The great change is the impossibility of war between civilised nations".³⁰ Typically, the argument is put forward, but no evidence from the real world is presented to substantiate it. Here, too, the evidence is "intertextual". After Luxemburg, the authors will refer to a second witness who is extremely important for revolutionary Marxists. "... through his political re-elaboration of the concept of imperialism, Lenin, more than any other Marxist, was able to anticipate the passage to a new stage of capital beyond imperialism and identify the place (or really non-place) of emerging imperial sovereignty." (232) It must be admitted that the attribution of the thesis that imperialism has come to an end while capitalism continues to exist (i.e., the entire idea of Empire replacing imperialism) to the chief theoretician of imperialism is a "dazzling" theoretical argument! We would all be ready to pay our tribute to Hardt and Negri for this masterly coup. Except that this "dazzling" argument is a hoax. It is one of the most glaring examples of distortion and revision in the history of Marxist theory.

Those familiar with the theory of imperialism know that the major difference between Karl Kautsky and Lenin on this question lies in the former's prediction of an ultra-imperialist phase in which all imperialists could reach a permanent peace agreement, as opposed to Lenin's view that competition between imperialist capitals and conflict between imperialist states were inevitable. Within the framework of this debate, with his intellectual rigour that always rejected facile wholesale argumentation, Lenin could not help but emphasise a subtle detail. The trend *is* towards a single worldwide trust (Hardt and Negri's "decline of competition" and "growth of monopolies"), but capitalism and imperialism will inevitably collapse before this is achieved. It is on the basis of this strand in Lenin's thinking that Hardt and Negri ground their thesis that imperialism has come to an end at the beginning of the 21st century. But this is to turn Lenin into a Kautsky! For Lenin explicitly linked the realisation of the "ultra-imperialism" stage to a precondition: a single world trust. Yet today, there are competing monopolies of the US, of Europe and of Japan in the world. To claim that Lenin was a proponent of ultra-imperialism independently of this precondition is intellectual dishonesty. Hardt and Negri would have been far

30 "Civilised" nations! How painful it is to see Negri using the same language as his fellow citizen Berlusconi! This quote is from Callinicos's *International Socialism* article (see footnotes 9 and 11 above).

more honest if they had said, “Kautsky was right, Lenin was wrong.” Because “Empire” is indeed the new name for the ultra-imperialist stage imagined by Kautsky. Here, we discover the dark and scheming side of *Empire*. Although Hardt and Negri are the contemporary representatives of Kautsky’s theory, they point to Luxemburg and Lenin as the pioneers of their own idea. This is because the book has not yet abandoned revolutionary rhetoric. Who can deny that Kautsky is not a particularly good reference for this kind of rhetoric?

The attentive reader will recall that Hardt and Negri vehemently opposed the attribution of the pioneering role of the concept of “hegemony” to Gramsci in this era of historical revisionism. Why should Lenin be denied the same attitude? A theorist has seen appropriate to title his work *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Then comes along a duo of authors who bestow upon him the role of pioneer of the idea that there now has come *a stage higher than imperialism within capitalism*. If Lenin were alive, I have no doubt he would respond to this gift offered to him by saying: “No, thank you!”

3. Pure revolution or proletarian internationalism?

The end of imperialism and the beginning of the era of Empire has, from Hardt and Negri’s perspective, an extremely important consequence in terms of social and political struggles. The meaning of all kinds of local struggles has now disappeared. In one of the best sections of the book, the authors, adopting an orientation contrary to their postmodernist bent in other areas, emphasise that local struggles based on “identity” politics can play into the hands of the “imperial machine” (44-46). However, pointing to such a danger is one thing; an absolute rejection that leads to condemning all struggles based on place and locality in a wholesale manner is another. The fundamental proposition of *Empire* in terms of contemporary social and political struggles today is in line with the latter approach. In short, Hardt and Negri’s approach to this issue can be summarised as *the need for struggle to be global in an unmediated manner*. The programmatic goal accompanying this general proposition (and expressed in rather vague terms) is the *struggle for an alternative globalisation*.

We know that Hardt and Negri call the social subject they see as the bearer of this programme of struggle the “multitude”. The authors sometimes use this social category interchangeably with the proletariat. This proletariat is different from Marx’s doubly “free” wage labourer. According to the authors, today the proletariat encompasses all strata that are subject to capitalist discipline in one way or another, whether under the wage-form or otherwise, and which are “within” capital and keep it afloat (52-53 and 402). It is clear that this kind of class definition contains some highly debatable points, but we will not delve into this issue given the limits we

have set for ourselves above: we will continue to confine our subject to the characteristics of *capitalism qua world system* and the struggle against it.

The “multitude” as a revolutionary subject

Hardt and Negri believe that the multitude possesses a “revolutionary nature” and is an “uncontainable force” (394). The reasoning they develop “to confirm this hypothesis” is the most pathetic, nay grotesque, part of *Empire*, even as the book is riddled with numerous other flaws. To demonstrate the revolutionary potential of the multitude, the authors first advance the highly controversial thesis that the multitude “produces autonomously and reproduces the entire world of life” (395). However, this is followed by the following passage: “One might object at this point, with good reason, that all this is still not enough to establish the multitude as a properly political subject, nor even less as a subject with the potential to control its own destiny.” (395). To counter this very valid objection, the authors first resort to the heights of speculative philosophy, claiming that the multitude inevitably contains a “telos” (395); then, descending to the real world of the working and labouring masses, they ask once more: “How can the actions of the multitude become political? How can the multitude organize and concentrate its energies against the repression and incessant territorial segmentation of Empire?” (399). Now we are back to square one. The authors make a second attempt to resolve this problem. “The only response we can give to these questions is that the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire” (399). But this “only response” is not an answer, it is a *tautology*: both the subject and the predicate of this sentence say the same thing, because this is the definition of politics (at least revolutionary politics)! Hardt and Negri sense that they cannot resolve the difficulty and return to the question: “This task for the multitude, however, although it is clear at a conceptual level, remains rather abstract. What specific and concrete practices will animate this political project?” (399-400). The issue has not been clarified even at a conceptual level, but the authors themselves ask the second and correct question, wanting to move to the concrete level. Their answer is pathetic: “We cannot say at this point.” (400) End of the argument. An admission of helplessness!

Those who do not believe that Hardt and Negri’s argument, presented to justify their claim that the multitude is an “uncontainable force”, is so hollow can read the passages in the book mentioned above and decide for themselves. What concerns us in this picture is not the questions the authors ask and *cannot* answer. Because, in our view, there are no answers to those questions. What concerns us is this: why is it so difficult to explain the revolutionary potential of the category “multitude,” which encompasses the international working class, labourers, and all the oppressed

of this world who are subjected to the constant exploitation and oppression of the imperialist-capitalist world system? Our answer is neither abstract nor speculative: *Empire*, with its conceptualisation that leaves all national power centres outside the picture, has itself eliminated the possibility of discovering the dynamics of the revolutionary potential of the world's working and oppressed masses. The imperialist-capitalist world system is a whole; but this whole still bears the stamp of national class divisions and nation-states. Therefore, the yoke upon the oppressed masses, as well as the struggle they will wage against this yoke, do not arise in relation to imperialism in an unmediated manner. The working class of each country begins with partial or total struggles against the power of the bourgeoisie of their own country. Imperialism is materialised and takes concrete shape within the existing nation-state system. Therefore, the *unmediated* power struggle against imperialist capitalism can only be waged against the individual bourgeois states within the existing nation-state system.³¹ The struggle against imperialist capitalism as a system will necessarily pass through the mediation of nation-states. Those who ignore this mediation will be abstracting from the *concrete* conditions of the exploitation and oppression of the masses and will therefore be unable to discover the *concrete* dynamics of insurrection and revolution.

Of course, in the imperialist era, the world system is not limited to nation-states, and therefore the forces that the revolutionary struggle of the workers and oppressed of any country should target are not limited to nation-states. In the era of imperialist mega-capital, known as multinational corporations, which is the main socio-economic force behind neoliberalism and the strategy of "globalisation",³² some of the functions of the bourgeois state have begun to be shared with a series of international organisations (alongside the IMF-World Bank-World Trade Organisation triad, the UN, NATO, the OSCE and a number of less important organisations). Consequently, these organisations can confront the masses at every stage of the struggle. The masses' response should be to fulfil the requirements of the struggle against these organisations, either within individual countries or through international action.

The basis for the existence of the "anti-globalisation" movement is also a product of this specific structure of contemporary world capitalism. It should be noted that the "anti-globalisation" movement has organised two types of action since Seattle. Those that can be described as "anti-globalisation" in the narrow sense are directed against international organisations that guide the totality of world capitalism at a real (WTO, IMF, NATO, etc.) or symbolic (World Economic Forum, i.e. Davos) level. The other type of action, inspired by Seattle but as a matter of fact targeting

31 The EU is an original case: here, the struggle will be waged both against individual nation-states and against the EU as a state in formation or a proto-state.

32 See Savran, "Küreselleşme mi, Uluslararasılaşma mı? (1)", article cited (see n19).

a single bourgeois (imperialist) state under construction is the struggle against the EU. The actions in Nice, Gothenburg, Genoa, Laeken, Barcelona and Seville all fall into this latter category. As can be seen, it is possible to situate the “anti-globalisation” movement in terms of classical imperialism theory and explain the basis of its originality without resorting to mystification.

This explanation also allows us to emphasise the following crucial fact, which the explanation provided by *Empire* fails to do: if “anti-globalisation” actions do not develop in conjunction with the concrete class struggle and the efforts for the liberation of all oppressed people in individual countries, they are ultimately doomed to failure. Because even at the beginning of the 21st century, the seat of power in the imperialist system is still the nation-state, which is also the seat of armed force.

Before leaving this point behind, it would be useful to address a possible objection. The following might be asked: “Doesn’t the existence of organisations such as the IMF, the WTO or NATO show that we have indeed moved to a new structure of sovereignty, as Hardt and Negri describe?” The answer is simple: such an inference is based on, or creates, the illusion that these organisations are *neutral* vis-à-vis different nation-states. The IMF, the WTO, and NATO are instruments of power used by imperialist countries, primarily the United States. They are instruments of domination over the Third World, which Hardt and Negri have decided to abolish. Therefore, for example, as the IMF grows stronger, the domination of the United States, the EU, and Japan over the Third World does not diminish, it increases! In other words, a situation without the IMF, say in the 1930s, compared to today, is a situation where formally independent countries (such as Latin America and Turkey in the 1930s) have more room for manoeuvre than today. It is more instructive to put it the other way around: As the IMF’s dominance increases, the United States (and, secondarily, other imperialist nation-states) wield an increasing ability to politically interfere in the internal affairs of formally independent countries. The logical endpoint of such a development is international colonialism.³³ Thus, the inclusion of these international organisations in the picture does not, contrary to what Hardt and Negri believe, distance the current development from colonial imperialism, but rather brings it closer!³⁴

Proletarian internationalism

Hardt and Negri completely misunderstand proletarian internationalism: “prole-

33 This concept can be applied in a narrow sense to many examples today, primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. See Savran, *Avrasya Savaşları*, *op. cit.*, particularly pp. 93-95.

34 I did not find Hardt and Negri’s identification of imperialism with colonialism (a point also addressed by G. Balakrishnan in his article “Virgilian Visions” [*New Left Review*, new series 5, September-October 2001] worthy of criticism in the main text of this article. This is because contemporary imperialism is not moving away from colonialism, but rather moving closer to it. Therefore, the distinction that must be made between these two concepts becomes secondary in this debate.

tarian internationalism”, they contend, “was anti-nationalist and therefore transnational and global”. (74) Let us set aside the anachronism of the concept of “global.” But from Marx’s emphasis on the national form of the proletariat’s struggle for liberation to begin with to Lenin’s prioritisation of the national question, the entire foundation of classical Marxist theory and politics contradicts Hardt and Negri. Organisationally, too, with the exception of the First International, all Internationals were built on national sections. So, contrary to what the authors say, it is not “transnational” but “international”. A whole world lies in the difference between these terms.³⁵

Since we are discussing the contemporary world, it is useful to briefly place this issue in the context of the general structure of imperialism. With a trend that began as early as the 19th century, it is clear that later in the age of imperialism, the development of productive forces has entirely transcended the borders of individual countries (just consider satellites). Intertwined with this, it is indisputable that capital has created a single world economy and world politics. Therefore, it is an axiom of Marxism that a classless society, which should be superior to capitalism in terms of productive forces and culture, can only be established on a world scale. However, it is one thing to say that socialism and communism can be achieved on a world scale, i.e. that a classless society can only be established worldwide, and quite another to ignore the fact that the victory of revolutions must be secured in individual countries. A transnational internationalism is meaningless because it ignores the national form of class power. This much we have already established.

However, in the era of imperialism, another development, “overdetermines” internationalism, to use a concept popular with many. Since the nation-state has appeared on the historical stage, all nation-states, almost without exception, have had a structure in which one oppressor nation subjugated one or more oppressed nations. But this relationship was, by its very nature, regional. With the era of imperialism, the antagonism between oppressor and oppressed nations becomes a structural feature of the world system. No political issue can now be concretised without taking this relationship between nations into account. That is why, in Lenin’s words,

*The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a whole series of democratic and revolutionary movements, including the national liberation movement, in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations.*³⁶

35 Hardt and Negri’s “transnational” internationalism is, even morphologically, a contradiction in terms.

36 V. I. Lenin, “A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism”, *Collected Works*, v. 23, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 69, emphasis in the original.

It is useful to add a proposition from another one of Lenin's works: "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it."³⁷ Here, we are confronted with the consequences of Hardt and Negri's rejection of dialectics, which leaves them deprived of the category of mediation. While they posit an unmediated (i.e., "pure") opposition between Empire and the masses, Lenin, that great representative of proletarian internationalism, links the defeat of imperialism by social revolution to a series of mediations; this is why internationalism is not "transnational". For the proletariat of the oppressor nations to unite with the proletariat of the oppressed nations, the proletariat of the oppressor nations (and the masses they lead) must inspire confidence in the proletariat and broad masses of the oppressed nations. In other words, internationalism does not mean closing one's eyes to the fact of nations, but rather the liberation of oppressed nations.³⁸

4. Political Conclusions

Our discussion of empire can serve as a starting point for finding our way on the political map of opposition movements against imperialism, which today has adopted the offensive of "globalisation" as a strategic approach. In this concluding section, I propose to discuss the issue on two levels: at the level of the "anti-globalisation" movement and at a more general level.

It seems appropriate to begin with Hardt's (2002) essay on Porto Alegre.³⁹ In this article, Hardt identifies two tendencies within the "anti-globalisation" movement: the tendency that aims to oppose globalisation by strengthening the nation-state, and the tendency that seeks to create an alternative that is itself "global" (what Hardt calls "democratic globalisation"). It is abundantly clear that Hardt (and, of course, Negri) would support this second tendency. The analysis in this article should have demonstrated that the political stances against "globalisation" cannot be limited to these dual outcomes. A third position is possible and exists: one that opposes "globalisation" as a whole, aims to dismantle the imperialist system worldwide, but does not ignore the relationships between individual nations and the importance of nation-states. The first two positions converge in terms of reformism in relation to this third position: the nationalist solution aims to create a partial barrier against the tide of "globalisation" by strengthening existing bourgeois states, while the second does not oppose "globalisation" but only aims to reform this system through certain

37 V. I. Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", *Collected Works*, v. 22, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 356, emphasis in the original.

38 Sungur Savran, "Globalizm, Milliyetçilik, Enternasyonalizm" [Globalism, Nationalism, and Internationalism], *II. Tez*, No. 12, 1992.

39 Michael Hardt, "Today's Bandung?", *New Left Review*, new series 14, March-April 2002.

changes. In contrast, the third approach aims to lay the foundations for another international civilisation by ending the rule of capital through the struggle of the large oppressed masses, primarily the working class (based on alliances that vary in line with the concrete conditions in each individual country), defeating the power of the international bourgeoisie and the class offensive called “globalisation”. This third tendency is a concrete reality within the “anti-globalisation” movement. It may be weaker than the other two, but it is strong enough to make its presence felt. Unlike narrow nationalist tendencies and the conciliatory “democratic globalisation” tendency based on civil society organisations, classical proletarian internationalism is embodied in this current. Which current will prevail within the movement depends on concrete political and organisational developments.

Once we grasp this three-cornered structure, it becomes clear why we have been using quotation marks when referring to the “anti-globalisation” movement since the beginning of this article. This is because a section within the movement aims only to soften the system through partial demands such as the Tobin tax⁴⁰, dialogue with the World Bank and other summits of the system, etc. Therefore, it is not correct to label the entire movement as “anti-globalisation”. Of course, it is even more incorrect to label the movement as an “anti-capitalist movement”, as some currents do.

While on the subject of the “anti-globalisation” movement, we should also briefly mention that *Empire*, written before Seattle, appears to have been confirmed in some respects by the events of Seattle and afterwards, as we noted in the introduction to this article. This “confirmation” is only superficial; what actually happened was a fortunate coincidence between a book and a historical conjuncture. As will be recalled, the appearance of “confirmation” emerged on three levels: the movement’s

40 The “Tobin tax” takes its name from a proposal made in 1972 by James Tobin, the famous American Keynesian economist who advised John F. Kennedy in the 1960s. (Tobin passed away last March.) The proposal is for each country to levy a small tax on international capital movements. The organisation ATTAC, first established in France and now spread throughout Europe, has made this proposal a cornerstone of its fight against “globalisation”. Even the organisation’s original French name is based on this tax: *Association pour la taxation des transactions financières pour l’aide aux citoyens* (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Benefit of Citizens). It is highly ironic that the Tobin tax is presented and perceived as a measure against “globalisation”. The original aim of its creator, Tobin, was to promote the development of free trade by bringing stability to international currency markets. In other words, the tax is only against speculation; it fully supports “globalisation” as a whole. In the words of Paul Krugman (“Missing James Tobin”, *New York Times*, 12 March 2002), a widely read American economist today, Tobin conceived of this tax as “a way to encourage free trade by ensuring that countries could open their markets [to the outside world] without exposing themselves to the disruptive movements of ‘hot money’” Irony knows no bounds: the “anti-globalisation” movement began in Seattle with a fight against the free trade imposed by the WTO. Yet today, one of its most important elements has become one of the central slogans of a movement developed to encourage free trade!

indirect international character; its unification of different social, political and ideological groups; and its reliance on a loose, federalist, “network” style of organising. The first two are directly related to the character of the “globalisation” offensive. This offensive targets the workers and oppressed of every region and nation-state, thereby creating the material basis for the formation of a formidable international coalition to confront it; also, by ruthlessly removing obstacles to capital in all areas from labour to the environment, it has provoked the emergence of a broad spectrum of socio-political forces standing in its way. The third feature actually relates to a current weakness of the international left and the working-class movement: a series of factors, from the neoliberal offensive to the collapse of the bureaucratic workers’ states, has destroyed the idea of centralising and strengthening organising and movements on the left and among the working masses in general, which is why the “anti-globalisation” movement initially emerged with a fragmented and scattered structure.

But all three elements had to be temporary in the face of the reality of life; indeed, developments have clearly demonstrated this, even though less than three years have passed. First and foremost, as outlined above, the national and regional power structures of the bourgeoisie are of great importance in terms of the struggle, and the movement is becoming increasingly mediated. One example of this is the gradual separation of the anti-EU wing of the movement. Another example is the decision of the World Social Forum, established in Porto Alegre, to organise separate social forums for each continent. Secondly, it has been clear even since Seattle that all social and political forces were not, from the outset, a classless, indistinguishable, homogeneous mass as implied by the concept of “multitude”, one of the key concepts of Empire. Trade unions, turtle lovers and anarchists came together, but their aims and methods were different. To mention just one or two examples, while Seattle was generally known for its frontal opposition to the WTO-IMF-World Bank triad (among these “frontal opponents” there were, of course, revolutionaries who wanted these organisations abolished and reformists who advocated for their reform), just four months later, concerning the action in Washington D.C., American trade unions limited their main activity to visiting the nation’s capital before the action to pressure the US government against China’s accession to the WTO!

Another example can be drawn from the actions at EU summits: a by now traditional feature of these actions is that on one of the two days of protests, usually peaceful marches are held around much milder slogans with the participation of trade unions (Genoa and Gothenburg being exceptions), while on the other day, much more radical “anti-globalisation” groups stage demonstrations that also feature clashes. Such differences were not very pronounced in Seattle, but they have become increasingly evident over time.

Finally, the demands for a tighter level of organising and centralising of the struggle led the movement to gradually move away from network-style arrangements towards classic centralised forms of organisation. Today, forums are emerging that are structured across all countries and continents, with crystallising working methods and binding political texts. The contrast between the spontaneous activism of Seattle and the current picture could not be more striking. Forums can still be democratic. To be surprised by this is only for those who believe that organising efforts and centralisation must necessarily be undemocratic. Unfortunately, today's crystallisation and structuring have become a means for the reformist tendency emerging in the leadership of "alternative globalisation" to establish hegemony over the mass movement. At this point, groups that fetishise "network" style organising and support the ban on political parties participating in forums organisationally, "in order not to stifle the initiative of civil society organisations", thus find themselves supporting reformist social democratic parties that can represent themselves through the unions or the municipalities they control that have become almost part of the system, while excluding revolutionaries who are weaker in mass organisations.

Mapping the opposition to imperialist capitalism

The objective structures of world capitalism in the imperialist era have led to the emergence of different tendencies of opposition to imperialist capitalism on the left. At the end of the 20th century, the deepening internationalisation of capital and the collapse (or at least the decline) in different manners of experiences of a socialist nature, confined within restricted borders, led to an increase in the number of these tendencies. In Turkey, liberalism and nationalism, the two poles that have shaped the EU debate within the ruling classes, also give the impression that a pro-EU left liberalism and, in stark contrast to it, a chauvinistic left bourgeois nationalism have exhausted the possible "left" alternatives in the face of "globalisation". Fortunately for us, there are options beyond this dichotomy, both of which contribute to the reproduction of bourgeois hegemony in different ways. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, opinions in this area are not very clear. The problem essentially revolves around the triangle of imperialism, nationalism and internationalism. To clarify the issue, it needs to be addressed on two levels.

At the first level, there is the perception that opposing "globalisation" in general, and the EU in particular, is tantamount to opposing historical progress, and the concern that such opposition will inevitably lead to nationalism. At this level, a clear distinction cannot be made between Marxist internationalism and "globalisation". Hardt and Negri's concept of "alternative, democratic globalisation" is influential in this context. However, as pointed out above when criticising the silence of the

Empire authors on the subject of “globalisation”, this process is not the “inevitable” result of technological developments, but rather the integration of the world on the basis of the “free market” that is, with the aim of removing obstacles to the international movement of capital. Therefore, “globalisation” is not a neutral concept in the struggle between classes. There can be no alternative globalisation for the oppressed. The alternative for the oppressed is certainly not nationalism. It is, in classical terms, internationalism.

At the second level, again out of a concern to escape nationalism, there is a tendency to replace internationalism with an approach that is completely indifferent to national issues. Here, the alternative may no longer be called “globalisation”. (When the problems of the two levels overlap, this also can come about.) But the alternative is formulated in a way that has no connection whatsoever with the power structures known as nation-states. From here, it is possible to make the leap to rejecting the concept of “imperialism”: since nationalists have made the struggle against “imperialism” a fetish in their discourse, then internationalists should not oppose imperialism in any way. This may stem from a conscious reasoning, or perhaps from a psychological reaction to the repugnance felt towards the nationalist left, which tends to ally itself with the most repressive and reactionary tendencies in various countries (in some places with the military, in others with fascists, in still others with anti-Semites). But the result is the same: the theoretical and political concept of proletarian internationalism, “imperialism”, is being abandoned to the nationalists. Internationalists then can only oppose capitalism in an abstract and indirect way.

It should be emphasised that these tendencies do not arise from the influence of this or that theoretical current. The dynamic behind these tendencies is the objective structure of the imperialist world system and the polarisation it creates in countries under imperialist domination; it is into the void created by this dynamic that the influence of studies of the kind of *Empire* can nestle. The importance of the book we are criticising stems from the fact that it is the most influential of such works.

These are errors that are fraught with serious political implications. The cover of the Turkish edition of *Empire* bears a caption reading, “The Communist Manifesto of the Twenty-First Century.” This is not merely a simple advertising gimmick by the publisher. It summarises the opinion of one of today’s most eye-catching left-wing thinkers, Slavoj Žižek, on Hardt and Negri’s book. Žižek is Slovenian by origin. In other words, he is a thinker who was born, raised and educated in what was federal Yugoslavia. We must assume that he knows that type of country well and is sensitive to its problems. In an article written after NATO’s Kosovo War, Žižek adopted a stance that maintained an equal distance from imperialism and Yugoslavia. Neither Marx and Engels, nor Lenin, Trotsky and other second-generation Marxists ever

remained neutral between these two categories of countries simply because those countries that were under the yoke of 19th-century Western capitalist great powers or the 20th-century imperialist powers were badly governed.

This truth remains valid in the 21st century: internationalism is predicated on the liberation of oppressed nations. Socialism will only achieve the fusion of nations by providing guarantees to oppressed nations and, moreover, by doing everything possible to achieve not just formal but real equality between oppressed nations and others. Marxism is a comprehensive theory and practice of emancipation not only from class oppression but from all other forms of oppression. Therefore, its programme must respond to the needs of the liberation of all the oppressed throughout history, from women to young people, from races despised and denigrated to nations oppressed and pillaged.

Post Scriptum

*We now pass on to the judgment that a quarter of a century has passed on **Empire**. Perhaps no book has been so swiftly and so completely refuted by the march of history. We will keep this post scriptum very short so as to make everything simple and clear. This aims to prevent the fans of Negri and Hardt from evading issues by taking refuge in irrelevant argumentation. We wish to force everyone to look the naked truth in the face. With this purpose, we will proceed on the basis of several key words, which in fact say it all. We will nonetheless offer a few paragraphs for each so as to make clear what is at stake under each rubric.*

Deglobalisation

Not only has globalisation been dealt a severe blow by the 2008 “Global Financial Crisis”, but an entire process of changes at the level of the world economy been set in motion, which many experts in the field have summed up under the general appellation of “deglobalisation”. We have treated this question as the basis of the rise of fascist movements around the world in the aftermath of the storming of the Capitol by MAGA hordes on 6 January 2021. We cannot go into the connection between deglobalisation and fascism here, in an article already very long, with a long introduction and a Post Scriptum. However, we provide in that article the objective economic indicators which show that almost on all fronts the so-called process of globalisation has been reversed.⁴¹

We need to be very blunt: what happens to the dictum that globalisation is “irresistible and irreversible” when merely in the space of at most two decades (say between the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the “Global Financial Crisis”

⁴¹ “The Meaning of the Storming of the Capitol”, *Revolutionary Marxism 2021*, pp. 89-92.

in 2008) the entire edifice that was variously called “globalisation” or “the Washington Consensus” collapses in great pandemonium and din? Can anyone take seriously a book declaring something that is going to collapse on its own in the space of eight years as “irreversible”?

Tariffs

The reader will remember that the theory of globalisation rose on the premise that nation states had become powerless to intervene in any significant processes and national sovereignty had dwindled to the degree of becoming irrelevant. This was true of trade flows, which were becoming ever freer, as well as finance and productive capital flows. Let us take the most salient of the three, free trade. Today the whole world is convulsed by the high customs tariffs that Donald Trump is imposing on many countries, “friend” and foe alike. And this did not have to wait for the second term of Trump, but has its roots in his policies during his first term in office. However, even more importantly, tariff and non-tariff barriers did not have to wait for Trump in order to come on the agenda of the world economy. To quote from our comments on deglobalisation in **Revolutionary Marxism 2021**,

[t]here can be no doubt whatsoever that world trade fell headlong immediately after the onset of the depression. The average ratio of imports to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined by 18 per cent in the first three years of the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s while the damage was much higher in the Third Great Depression [i.e. the present crisis] when the decline was 31 per cent in three years.⁴²

So, there is a spontaneous element at work in all countries during the depression as well. It is not only Trump, nor is it only reciprocal punitive measures. Protectionism is a generalised tendency.

The question here is this: How is it that in a world in which national units have lost their sovereignty, all governments, not only Trump’s but also the Chinese and others can resort to these discretionary measures in order to control their trade flows? Once again, refutation from the empirical world in the most blatant fashion.

*Gone is the Washington Consensus. Gone is the age of the erosion of the sovereignty of nation states. Gone is the “smooth world” of Negri and Hardt or *The World is Flat* of Thomas Friedman,⁴³ the glitz hunter columnist of the *New York Times*,*

⁴² Ibid, p. 90.

⁴³ Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat, A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005. In his *The Age of Extremes* (London: Abacus, 1995), the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm had recounted the story of “The Short Twentieth Century 1914-

keeping good company with the “communists” Negri and Hardt.

ICE

If we were writing during Trump’s first term, this rubric might have been labelled “the wall”, the wall that Trump was trying to build on the US-Mexican border. Now, of course, it is ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement service of the Department of Homeland Security, which goes hunting for undocumented migrants in US cities, also indiscriminately attacking longtime established immigrants, most of whom now have been naturalised, and even American-born US citizens. And lately it has started killing, in cold blood and among American-born US citizens!

What happened to the proposition of Negri and Hardt, who, as if uttering the most trustworthy statement for now and forever say, again on the first page of their preface “the primary factors of production and exchange—money, technology, people, and goods—move with increasing ease across national boundaries.” The authors are defining an era, a stage in the history of capitalism. And yet it will take only sixteen years for this sentence to become an idle phantasy! The US-Mexican wall was an insult on this more than naïve view of what was happening in the world.

And it was not only the wall. It was almost around the same time, in 2016, that after a deluge of immigrants in the summer of 2015, from all around Western Asia (the so-called Middle East), that Europe started to form concentration camps in the shape of countries around the Union, Morocco to the west, Tunisia and Libya to the south, Turkey to the east, and lately an unsuccessful attempt on the part of Italy to set up camp in Albania. How have national frontiers become meaningless, when not only ICE but also Frontex, in its own manner, kills those trying to migrate to a promised paradise?

This is not the age of the free circulation of labour but the age of racism and exclusion.

Venezuela

Declaring the end of imperialism in a world full to the brims with inequalities, exploitation and oppression is either a shameless or alternatively a shameful act. Since Maduro was abducted on 3 January 2026 the Word “imperialism” is in everyone’s mouth. And this is only the beginning. What else to add, when the president of the most powerful imperialist country in the world, Trump, declares himself the “Interim President of Venezuela”?

1991”, which is the subtitle of the book. By this token, it seems Friedman has accomplished the feat of narrating the “extremely short history of the twenty-first century”. According to his analysis, the history of our century will have come to an end as early as 2008! Much ink spilled for nothing! Best-selling rubbish!

Greenland

According to Negri and Hardt, perhaps the most distinctive feature of Empire as opposed to imperialism is the absence of any possibility of competition or conflict (9) between distinct nation states that Lenin and his followers consider to be “imperialist countries”. For Empire is the diffusion of sovereignty throughout a multitude of organisations, national and international. Gone are Lenin’s days. Although they do not say this, as we have shown above, they subscribe to the “ultra-imperialism” of Karl Kautsky.

Lo and behold though! The skirmishes that started during the first term of Trump over the differential contributions of member states to the military capacity of NATO in financial terms and the diversity of attitudes to be adopted vis-à-vis the Russian Federation have now turned to projects of land grabbing and open threats among what we would call imperialist countries. Alongside Venezuela, Trump is threatening Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark, and it will probably only be a matter of time until he returns to the project of gobbling up Canada as the 51st state of the Union.

Is this anything but competition and conflict between nation-states? In fact, there is very little precedent in peacetime regarding what Trump is planning to do to Greenland in the annals of modern history, excepting Hitler’s seizure of other European countries’ territory.

From solitary confinement in the prison of the bourgeoisie to voting for imperialist Europe

*We are now leaving behind the theoretical aspect of **Empire** and turning to a single aspect of Negri’s politics. In 2005, during the referendum over the European Constitution, he militated for a “Yes” vote. This is how he explained his vote to **Le Monde**: “I am deeply opposed to liberalism, but I am even more against all forms of nationalism. One can once more give Europe a real momentum against liberalism, on one condition: by saying no conclusively to a Europe of nations and yes to a European federalism.”⁴⁴*

*One can see here in action the entire logic of **Empire**. “Empire is better” Negri and Hardt say, compared to the past, for it does away with cruel regimes of modern power (43-44). This is opting for liberalism in the age of neoliberalism and globalism. The reader can benefit from reading what the Europe Negri voted for in 2005 looks like in 2025 in the article by our comrade Burak Saygan in the current issue*

44 Brigitte Salino, “Il faut dire définitivement non à l’Europe des nations”, June 11 2005, *Le Monde*, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2005/06/11/il-faut-dire-definitivement-non-a-l-europe-des-nations_661042_3246.html

of *Revolutionary Marxism*.

Summing up

Probably no book has been so thoroughly refuted by practical life as *Empire*. The authors have set out to give systematic form to the entire literature on what was considered to be a new stage in human development and every main pillar of the edifice constructed came off at the seams in no longer than eight years.

The loyalty Negri and Hardt fans have demonstrated to their idols despite this clear and complete refutation is phenomenal. No less scandalous is the insistence that Negri was a Marxist all the way until his passing away. Negri abandoned all the concepts and propositions that could, somehow, justify his being a follower of Marx. The authors of *Empire* constantly speak “from our postmodern perspective” (64) or “our postmodern intellectual world” (xvii). Negri has even abandoned the proletariat, which was the life spring of his view of modern history and the source of inspiration of his militancy in the 1970s, in favour of a diffuse and amorphous mass called the multitude. Whatever his theoretical mistakes may have been in the 1970s and those intermingle with self-sacrificing militant combat, it is his escape to France right into the arms of a city suffused and permeated with the decadence of postmodernism that changed Negri forever. The author of these lines was carrying out postdoctoral research in that city and is, therefore, familiar with, and abhorred, the intellectual climate of the time first-hand. This was the city that Perry Anderson was to call “the capital of European intellectual reaction” in a 1984 book of his.⁴⁵ This is where Negri was won over to postmodernism and liberalism.

We are face to face with a very strange phenomenon nowadays. Even the most Leninist of Marxists may speak of the powers that be as “the empire”. It is an urgent task to prevent the confusion that we risk. Do not call any power “empire”. Empire has been refuted by history. There is no such thing as “empire”. What exists is spelled out: *i-m-p-e-r-i-a-l-i-s-m*.

⁴⁵ Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 32.