

GLOBALISATION HAS SPREAD AND BECOME EVEN MORE DISSIMULATED AND EFFECTIVE. CHANGE INVOLVES REVERSING THE INVISIBILITY OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

A GLOBALIZAÇÃO DISSEMINOU-SE E É MAIS DISSIMULADA E EFICAZ. A MUDANÇA PASSA POR INVERTER A INVISIBILIDADE DOS MAIS DESFAVORECIDOS

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Hardt, M. & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. London, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

In the end of 2019, in order to celebrate 20 years of the publication of the book *Empire*, its authors, Michael Hardt (scholar) and Antonio Negri (philosopher and political activist, who was arrested for allegedly being a member of the *Red Brigades*), wrote an essay for *New Left Review*, in which they analysed different eras and the process of globalisation. One might say that the book's key idea kept absolutely current because globalisation is increasingly more on the agenda. Its development is more dissimulated, hence more effective. The dominant forces and the control exerted by the global order have not subsided in any way, regardless of the often histrionic positioning of national sovereignty ideologists. The authors, though, advocate that we lack a new international cycle based on a cleverer investigation on the structures of the dominant global order. This supports the notion that, when it comes to teaching, the theoretical work carried out within social movements may prove more effective than a visit to the library. That is why the authors believe that movements such as alter-globalisation (also known as alternative globalisation) may be the first step to challenge and, eventually, overthrow the structures of the "empire", which can ultimately reverse the invisibility of the underprivileged.

The book was written in the mid-1990s and published in 2000, and theorises about the continuous transition from a modern phenomenon which stands for imperialism, focused on individual nation-states, to a post-modern construction created within certain governmental powers which the authors decided to call *Empire*. As mentioned in the book's preface, seen as reference still, it was written between wars: starting long after the end of the Gulf War and being concluded long before the Kosovo War. This is precisely where they wanted the reader, as well as the narrative, to be situated: at the half point between those two events featured prominently on *Empire*. The book's key idea is presented to us right on the first sentence, like a shotgun blast: "Empire materialises before our eyes" (p. XI).

The rise of the *Empire* coincided, then, with the end of national conflicts, being that the new “enemy”, regardless of who it was, became another and quite far from a previous rationale based on ideology. The new enemy was portrayed as some kind of criminal or someone who posed a threat to the current legislation, but no longer linked to a political system, or a nation: in short, the new enemy was embodied in the “terrorist”. 9/11 (2001) could serve as an example since it happened after the book was written, even though both moments were not that far apart in time. The same happened with the so-called second Iraq war, which was sort of an American response to the suicide attacks to the Twin Towers (New York). In this new world order and new context, the enemy is simultaneously trivialised (reduced to an object of routine police repression) and absolutised (posing as a threat to ethical order). The angle of the narrative fits like a glove to New York’s post-attacks moments, just like a prophecy.

The *Empire* consists of a monarchy (United States, G8 and other international organisations such as NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization, IMF – International Monetary Fund or WTO – World Trade Organization), an oligarchy (multinationals and other nation-states) and a democracy (several non-governmental organisations and the UN – United Nations). Part of the analysis is about imagining resisting this state of affairs, bearing in mind that the *Empire* is totalising and, in this sense, resistance comes down to denial in the form of being against. Despite being totalising, the *Empire* does not prevent economic inequality and, as all identities are shattered and replaced by a universal one, the identity of the poor, migrants, and those who cannot access power, persists. This notion distances itself from the concept that uniformity is not the same as homogeneity (Bayly, 2004) and presupposes that there will be certain determinations to consider, such as legislation, which does not mean that people who, at least theoretically, are equal under the law have to be the same as each other. That is why ethics, even if conceptually typified, seems to be out of step with the actions of nation-states. And, despite being in consonance with the determinations of the most important international organisations such as the European Union (EU), the fact is that this dynamic may actually counteract real life experience, which seems to be a little counterintuitive regarding what institutions advocate. If one were to pay attention to the way European state members act on the subject of migrants, one could conclude that diversity, while being a key word within the EU, is constantly being called into question.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasise the fact that, in the past few decades, and as colonial regimes were overthrown, the Soviet bloc collapsed and there was a consequent openness to the western world, globalisation became evident by making economic and cultural exchanges fluid. However, after the end of colonial empires another one remained, taking the role of “political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world”, from which has emerged a new world order and “a new logic and structure of rule – in short, a new form of sovereignty” (p. XI). And, so that no doubts remain, the authors point out that “the Empire we are faced with wields enormous powers of oppression and destruction, but that fact should not make us nostalgic in any way for the old forms of domination”, even though they add

that there are “new possibilities to the forces of liberation” which denote that globalisation is not a univocal process (p. XV).

Far from being a pessimistic essay, it aims at highlighting new possibilities of struggle for the liberation of labour subjected to capital during the process of globalisation. It develops a look on a new hope based on an interdisciplinary intersection which tends to bring narrative closer to reality. This is why, according to its back cover, the book is described as a new Communist Manifesto, and a true utopia whose aim is to look beyond the regimes of exploitation and surveillance characteristic of the new world order. It seeks an alternative political paradigm that can be the basis for a truly democratic society, even more so because, as according to the authors, the *Empire*’s fate is to sink into generalised corruption, which is transversal to the logic of domination.

We stand before a comprehensive Neo-Marxist vision of a new world order in which the authors advocate that globalisation is not corrupting sovereignty, rather it is transforming it into a diffuse system of national and supranational institutions, that is, into a new *Empire* which encompasses modern life. Hardt and Negri analyse the multiple processes of globalisation and argue that the new world order is decentralised and deterritorializing. And, even though the *Empire* is responsible for uniting different aspects of structuralism and post-structuralism, the discourse is kept simple, written down in a clear and accessible way. The narrative goes beyond the academia, often kept in a closed circuit, by taking a keen look at the political and economic scene, which is compared to a quagmire that entraps the present.

The authors describe the multitude as the proletariat subjected to the logic of capital accumulation which pervades every aspect of life. The proletariat includes not only industrial workers, but also everyone that contributes to the production of the so-called services, on a global scale. They start by mentioning that the social conflict between the *Empire* and the multitude creates a considerable revolutionary potential. This being so, apart from the consolidation of the imperial dynamics, which privileges capital above anything else, the multitude must build up counter-*Empire* forces that originate a new biopower, different, though, from the one coined by Michel Foucault in 1977 (besides Foucault, the book addresses authors such as Machiavelli, Espinosa, Hegel, Hobbes, Kant and, obviously, Marx). To this effect, they propose a few possible directions, such as creating some kind of global citizenship related to the end of restrictions regarding workers all over the world; the right to a social salary, regardless of the productive framework; the right to the collective control over production means; and the right to political self-determination in all quadrants. Hardt and Negri’s narratives challenge the establishment and provide some encouragement to the people excluded from globalisation, urging them to fight the system, and create an alternative *status quo*.

In the essay that they published in *New Left Review*, to mark 20 years of the publication of the book, the authors analyse social reality and try to connect it with past works. Two decades ago, globalisation was just starting to impose itself on the world scene. Nowadays, despite being still the centre of attention, political commentators of the establishment – especially in Europe and North America – go on regretting the decline of

the international liberal order and the death of the Pax Americana, announcing its post mortem on a regular basis. Just like before, even if more emphatically, the forces that the authors call “newly dominant reactionary” ask for the return of national sovereignty, undermining commercial pacts and anticipating trade wars, denouncing supranational institutions and cosmopolitan elites, while feeding the flames of racism and violence against migrants. This situation is transversal in the political spectrum and “even on the left, some herald a renewed national sovereignty to serve as a defensive weapon against the predations of neoliberalism, multinational corporations and global elites” (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 67).

They applaud alter-globalisation movements by pointing out that “the extraordinary virtue of these protests was their theoretical practice” (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 91) because they have built a global critical view and were able to make readable the political meaning of the relatively obscure dominance of global economic institutions. Furthermore, instead of a movement, they could be better perceived as a vast collective research about the nature of the emergent world order. Activists knew that big corporations and dominant nation-states, like the USA, were massively powerful but also, intuitively, that world order could become something more. Every event lit up yet another knot of the emergent network of the global power structure: big world organisations, trade accords and so forth. The cycle of alter-globalisation movements was, therefore, a massive pedagogic project to those who took part of it and those who were willing to learn from the process.

On a wider scale, still not very legible, migration is still a strong herald for internationalism and a continuous insurrection against nation-states’ border regimes and the global system’s spatial hierarchies. Most migrants, however, may not be able to articulate the political nature of their flight let alone regard their actions as part of an internationalist struggle, since “there is no central committee, no platform, no statement of principles” (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 77). The authors mention the spectacular pilgrimages to and across Europe in the summer of 2015 which, meanwhile, were replaced by the Mediterranean crossing that threatens Europe’s own border regimes. The same way, they point out the caravans made of children and families coming from Central America that crossed Mexico heading for the United States border, in autumn 2018, which helped uncovering the crisis of American borders. But, because it is an unusual kind of internationalist insurrection, those highly mediatised events are hardly recognisable as political. They are merely seen as peaks of a varied range of global migrations, not only from the South to the North, but in all directions: from Nigeria to South Africa, from Bolivia to Argentina, from Myanmar to Bangladesh, and from rural China to urban China.

Regardless of being for officially sanctioned reasons, like fleeing from war or any other type of persecution, or as a simple quest for adventure, migrants state their freedom through mobility, which may become the basis for other sorts of freedom. One would have to go back in time to grasp what is at stake and “appreciate the political significance of global migrations as an ongoing insurgency” (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 78). The dominant authorities recognise the threat, with the insurgency power being corroborated by cruel and costly counter-insurgency strategies migrant-related, “from

the EU-backed concentration camps in Libya, to the barbaric policies at the US border" (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 78). Migrant insurgency, then, threatens to make "the various walls that segment the global system crack and crumble" (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 78).

They maintain that a precarious life aims to grasp the way legal, economic and governmental changes have increased the insecurity of a wide range of populations already or at risk of becoming subordinated (women, transgender people, gays and lesbians, people of colour, migrants, the disabled and others). This means that "there is a notion of precarity that speaks the language of the working class and another that promotes an intersectional vision". By joining the two, we will find a solid basis for theorising the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 86).

Even though the relative positions of the various powers within its mixed nature have simultaneously increased and decreased, the forces that rule over and control the world order certainly did not lose visibility, they have just become less visible and legible. The authors mention that we are in need of a new international cycle which includes cleverer kinds of struggles, in the sense of investigating the structures of the dominant global order. Besides, the theoretical work performed in the area of social movements seems more useful and educational than whatever material we might find at libraries, which means that "reversing its invisibility is the first step towards challenging and, eventually, overthrowing the Empire frameworks" (Hardt & Negri, 2019, p. 92).

The fact that there are those who perceive globalisation as *post mortem* is no different from the dissimulated process indicated by the authors 20 years after the book's publication. Right away they find the process to be more effective because it is more socially naturalised. This fact does not even has to do with the so-called fragmentation of the time period which results from acceleration but, rather, from discontinuity (Han, 2016).

Also, the way power is generally exercised has always been more detrimental to the ones with less access to decision making, like the marginalised populations. If you take a look at history, the struggle between the parts is quite visible, and it does not show any signs that it might stop. On the one hand, it embodies the authors' sense of hope, since they wrote *Empire* 20 years ago, but also more recently when they published the essay which marked the date. The fact is that the process of radicalisation is mutual and benefits both sides of the conflict. According to Fathali Moghaddam, groups and nations push themselves towards the extremes. This radicalisation is automatically boosted thanks to social networks, which does not seem to make regimes weaker, just the opposite. The author quotes Donald Trump as an example, in a context that is apparently distant from an eventual war, but in which the tension among parts (whatever they may be) is necessary as to keep power on the rise. In order to counteract that narrative, the author upholds a different process from the one suggested by Hardt and Negri, which has to do with a shift in mentalities based on the idea that it is necessary to foster our understanding towards the other. He, therefore, advocates "omniculturalism", which is nothing but an interaction approach based on the similarities towards the other, instead of the differences, an idea that distances itself from the logic of diversity so popular and promoted by international institutions (Borges, 2020). Byung-Chul Han (2018) had

already made clear that unifying globalisation and erasing the “other” does not envisage a positive outcome for the dissemination of what is similar and responds to the stimuli determined by capitalism in the same way.

Unlike Hardt and Negri, who assume that confrontation may be necessary to reverse globalisation, since it excludes the underprivileged like migrants, Moghaddam focus on strengthening democracy because it needs time to get consolidated. This may pose a problem since “in order to learn from history we need to learn History” (Borges, 2020, p. 11). Such a statement remains in the antipodes of the current presentism (Hartog, 2003), in which there is a risk that history ends up compressed into contemporary history.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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