

THE MANY ARE CALLED

Michael Pelias

REFLECTIONS ON *MULTITUDE*: *WAR AND DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE*

There is no doubt that I would not have undertaken to write this book if I had not lived in the midst of the most ideologically brutal of Western people at the century's end— of a people who equally deny not only singularities, but even their own ideological phantasms and maximizations.

Reiner Schürmann¹

INTRODUCTION

THE EPIGRAPH CITED above was written around 1990 and is a strong indication of what the American Empire in its drive towards global domination and ideological hegemony has consistently demonstrated in its latest period of Imperial rule— its utter disregard and contempt for other cultures, international laws, and whatever collateral damage it leaves in its wake. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Persian Gulf War, and the incessant pronouncements of the triumphs of neo liberalism (best amplified by the thesis of the end of history given by the right Hegelian Frances Fukuyama and more recently by the sinister world design formulated by the Project for a New American Century (PNAC)), the North American left has been thrown into another crisis of disarray and has anxiously awaited a grand counter narrative to confront the omnipresent and multifarious triumphalism of the new right. Living in a political void, perhaps ironically created by postmodernist readings and practices in the academy, the left found itself confronting a space in which challenges to systemic change and transformative praxis fell primarily on deaf ears. Derrida's *Spectres of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994) was at best a deconstructive analysis of the phantasmagoria of both mercantile and late capitalism, and

¹ Schürmann, Reiner. *Broken Hegemonies*. Trans. by Reginald Lilly. Indiana University Press, 2003. footnote 72, p.638.

in order to be more descriptively accurate, one could easily invert the subtitle to read the debt of the state, the mourning of the working poor, and the lack of a new international. However, there has emerged an innovative theoretical work to fill this void, one which offers the promise of a new perspective on transnational capitalism, an attempt to think beyond the older language of Imperialism and reveal the New World Order at work.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) is the synthesis that had been awaited and holds that the older language of Imperialism is outmoded and categorically inadequate for an analysis of the new forms of domination that transnational capital had taken. Hardt and Negri proffer a new distinction between the disciplinary societies and the more recent form of the societies of control (a distinction borrowed from Deleuze). The disciplinary society belongs to centralized power (i.e. the power of the state, Imperialism) whereas the societies of control (Empire) are dispersed, decentralized with multiple sites of command, and no site, however cardinal or vantage (analogous to the Benthamite panopticon), belonging to the paradox of an ubiquitous decentered power. A crucial conceptual nodal point that Hardt and Negri see operative in the drive towards the "new world order" is that of biopower, which describes the fashion in which Empire functions as a society of control which attempts to chronicle and order alterity and the "Other" into fixed positions that render dissidence impotent.

Taking a cue from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, these authors find a topos in empire (no matter how despotic) of new possibilities of political activism. Deterritorialization and nomadic lines of flight become revolutionary tactics in the age of empire; one no longer employs the tactic of situating oneself against the state (the older language of imperialism) because empire can incorporate such positions. One sees much empirical evidence of reterritorialization in the management of rebellious forces and revolutionary potential particularly in the cooptation and dilution of hip hop culture in recent years; the channels of rebellion have become part and parcel of mainstream market economy. The "multitude," then, becomes an agent of deterritorialization through which revolutionary effects which cannot be resituated within empire can be produced. The early model for Negri and Hardt's conception of the multitude is the 1994 Zapatista uprising against NAFTA in Chiapas. This uprising was described as singular and incommunicable, a thorough opposition to state power without any specific program, a collective energy that cannot be contained nor mapped for its identity and demands. However, this kind of upheaval was not enough for a new revolutionary program; an alternative

paradigm was needed, one in which new forms of production and living labor are to be grounded in creativity and new use of tools; that is, a political ontology founded on a merger of poesis and production, one that does not have a preformulated agenda but an alternative which arises from unique circumstances and in which new political configurations are invented. The hope of “pure” political creativity, for instance, a political body that emerges from its own self, is the real possibility for change put forth in *Empire*.

Negri and Hardt will also hold to three crucial demands, all of which are indebted to the values of Enlightenment thinking. They demand universal citizenship (rights of man discourse) for all, a guaranteed income for all, and equal taking and sharing of the means of production (the marxian discourse of ability and needs). All three presuppose a universal global democracy and in its background a “social space” (Kristin Ross) created from the time of the Paris Commune of 1871.

All of this to say that *Empire*, despite its theoretical brilliance in analyzing the new forms that neo-liberalism and globalization manifest, did not flesh out the possibility of the new exterminating angel of the global transnational system and the concrete possibility of agency *sans* an idealist ideology. We were given new categories for analysis and critique but none for practice. The notion of the multitude did not have a substantive and concrete theory of agency, no theory of class, and ultimately we were left hanging in the usual position of waiting on lefty to be told what is to be done. It is under these circumstances that the sequel to *Empire*, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the age of Empire* (2004) was written.

FROM INFINITE WAR TO CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

Therefore the prince should never turn his mind from the study of war;
in times of peace he should think about it even more than in wartime.

Machiavelli, *The Prince* ²

Written in the style of a portentous reportage, *Multitude* promises a mosaic that is the sequel to *Empire*, an interweaving of concepts and practical reason that

² Machiavelli, N. *The Prince*. Trans. and ed. By Robert M. Adams. Norton critical edition. 1992. p.41.

hints towards action and will address the contemporary post 9/11 situation:

Our primary aim is to work out the conceptual basis on which a new project of democracy can stand.
... Think of the book as a mosaic from which the general design gradually emerges.³

Beginning with the new state of war and a long exegesis on state of exception from Cincinnatus the Noble to the U.S. exceptionalism of Madeline Albright and the current tightening of borders, Negri and Hardt point to the paradoxes of the “new” war and the prodigious challenges it poses to the realization of their project. The section on War occupies the first one-third of the book and allows the authors to reconstruct their description of Empire itself and use the “Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)” as an extended metaphor for the emergence of Empire. This emphasis on and analysis of RMA serves as an anticipatory moment “in some ways, the forms of biopolitical production of the multitude.” (*Multitude* 44) In general, the “Revolution in Military Affairs” concentrates on the notion of asymmetrical conflict, a new form of dispersed conflict and targeting of population in which everyone becomes suspect. One can see this today in Iraq, especially in the recent “accidental” wounding of a leftist Italian journalist, Giuliana Sgrena, and the killing of her secret service bodyguard. To win, the U.S. employs “full spectrum dominance,” which is designed to produce submission. Hardt and Negri understand that this design is able to combine “military power with social, economic, political, psychological, and ideological control.” (*Multitude* 55) The RMA, for instance, depends not only on state-of-the-art technology but also on the new forms of labor, “mobile, flexible, immaterial forms of social labor”. (*Multitude* 44) Essentially, it is the military theorists who have discovered the concept of biopower and in their own strange way have understood the production of docile subjects (Foucault).

The concept of **biopower** is an explanation of how the current regime’s war machine not only threatens us with a constant death drive but also “rules over life, producing and reproducing all aspects of life” (*Multitude*, 94). It stands “above society, transcendent, as a sovereign authority and imposes its order” (*Multitude*, 94). These characteristics of biopower are strikingly close to the actions of the Bush administration itself, and knowing this, Negri and Hardt, will give a counter position, called biopolitical production,

³ Hardt, M., and Negri, T. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin, 2004. p.xvii.

as insurgent to biopower. Biopolitical production is immanent to society (more Spinozist) and “creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labor” (*Multitude* 95). The power of biopolitical production is drawn from the potential that the insurgency embodies. The multitude becomes a potential threat to Empire and, even though Empire uses all its biopower against the insurgent movements, ultimately, the infinite war will reach its limits and hasten the crisis intrinsic to late capitalism and its incessant drive for new territorialities. Although this falls into the old economic determinism that has consistently failed the radical imagination, it does open a creative possibility for revolutionary subjectivity, especially if one considers politics as war pursued by other means in our historical present; war has become the regime of biopower and in this mode becomes indistinguishable from police activity. It is by working with “surplus” knowledge and skills molded into a real struggle against Power that this creativity begins to show itself. This creativity calls for the multitude’s capacity for exodus and resistance, but more importantly for its constituent power capable of creating a new society.

The first section of *Multitude* sees within infinite war the possibility of a fresh and enlightened emergence of democracy. The authors schematize the hope of regaining democracy’s prior significance (in the sense of 18th century conceptions) since the ending of the cold war. In probably one of the more critically engaged parts of the book, Hardt and Negri reproduce four contemporary arguments concerning globalization and the possibility of democracy, all of which they find insufficient for the project of the multitude.

The first of these is the social democratic claim that democracy is hindered by globalization. Globalization is usually defined only in economic terms in this position, and its validity is seriously undermined by 9/11/2001 and by its reductionist economic tendencies. The second position is that of the liberal cosmopolitan, which claims that globalization fosters democracy, and that through greater institutional and political regulation of economies that are not dependent on the old rule of nation states a greater democratic potential is released, one which results in a multilateral approach to globalization with the United Nations as the most powerful instrument and arbiter of maintaining this multilateralism. This position was obviously unmasked in the March 2003 United Nations sessions on Iraq by demonstrating the futility of speaking truth to Power. In the third claim, United States global hegemony is the benevolent heir to European imperialism and as the last military superpower becomes the watchman over the “end of history,” with military outposts strategically positioned to maximize the

control of resources necessary to the hyper-consumptive populations of the “advanced countries”: “Think of Iraq as a military base with a very large oil reserve (it’s the superstar of the future) underneath– you can’t ask for better than that.”⁴ One may look at The National Security Strategy pamphlet and the work by Robert Kagan on war for greater insights into this attempt towards global hegemony (all written after 9/11/2001).

The fourth position given on globalization and democracy, the traditional-values conservative, focuses on the cultural, and its central thrust is that globalization threatens democracy because it threatens a conservative value system. Even though there are some similarities to the social democratic position, the ideologues are quite different; Pat Buchanan (with characteristic xenophobic force) is the chief spokesperson for the traditional values argument.

For two reasons are these four positions inadequate to a rethinking of democracy. First, from all of the four different perspectives, it is the process of globalization and permanent global war that throws democracy into question. Although democracy has been considered to be “in crisis” for at least two centuries by various groups such as liberal aristocrats (in the nineteenth century and among many thinkers of civil society) and contemporary technocrats, today’s situation calls for a “leap in scale” from the nation-state to the whole globe, and democracy must be dislodged from its traditional meanings. The four arguments given earlier do not adequately confront the “scale of the contemporary crisis of democracy” (*Multitude* 236). Second, it is clear that all of the arguments either undercut or postpone real democracy (rule of everyone by everyone, where the people rule and the government obeys). In fact, the liberal aristocratic position’s call for liberty first and then democracy fundamentally becomes the apology for the absolute rule of private property. Kant’s idea of Cosmopolitanism is not adequate to the task of thinking democracy from below, and the current task of the “unfinished Democratic project of modernity” is a return to eighteenth century conceptions of democracy because this era manifested a crisis of the practices of democracy prompted by another leap of scale. One might see this crisis in terms of “the people” as a force. New conceptions and practices had to be thought as well as a thorough recasting of representation, and Negri and Hardt find in Max Weber’s three basic types of representation

⁴ McQuaig, Linda. *It’s the Crude, Dude: War, Big Oil, and the Fight for the Planet*. Anchor Canada, forthcoming, 2005. Citation from Fadel Gheit, oil analyst at Oppenheimer & Co.

(appropriated, free, and instructed) a fresh political task of transformation, i.e. of changing appropriated forms into more liberal and free forms, which, in turn, are transformed into instructed ones which make for stronger connectivity between those represented and the representatives.

In their analysis of the nineteenth and early twentieth century socialist and communist traditions, they show the movement of “democracy from below” that was intended to neutralize the notion of the autonomy of politics. Citing inspirations of democracy and representation taken from the Paris Commune, Hardt and Negri point towards the “government of the people by the people” (Marx) and the “fuller democracy” (Lenin) that became new avenues for political representation and essentially the beginning of direct democracy. These precious moments from these traditions are to be retained and examined in the light of what they call a Madisonian-Leninist synthesis, a new science of democracy to encounter the tyranny of the global order of the twenty-first century: this science’s first objective is to consistently destroy sovereignty (or the Power of the One) in the name and practice of democracy (a new Leninist moment, but this time not only abolishing the state but the entire global order). Coinciding with this destruction of one rule is the Madisonian moment of creating new democratic institutional structures, which would protect with a system of checks and balances, rights and guarantees against corruption and dissolution. This new science of democracy is built upon “the common,” which emphasizes the collaborative nature of today’s biopolitical production. Put in other terms, social life is not only produced in common but is also produced in the common, and the creation of the common reverses the logic of private property (the drive for originary accumulation). In this reversal a state of second nature is created, and the multitude is the new revolutionary subjectivity that is immanent within this second nature.

It is debatable that such a transformation would come out of “an intensification of the common” (*Multitude* 213) that is to say, a new humanity. Even though signs of the common abound— the internet, confrontations over who owns genes, who holds patent rights, file sharing, decentralized networks— we can certainly ask on the one hand if the conditions for the birth of a transformed and truly liberated humanity are fundamentally there or, on the other hand, is the “common” in its alienated and highly capitalized form simply fodder for the new right and its designs? The U.S. presidential election certainly demonstrates that a “Republican” proletariat has been won over, and who is to say a similar scenario won’t develop with the multitude?

THE MULTITUDE AND A VIEW FROM NORTH AMERICA

History, conceived as pure science and become sovereign, would constitute a kind of closing out of the accounts of life for humankind. Historical education is wholesome and promising for the future only in the service of a powerful new life-affirming influence, of a rising culture for example...⁵

Herbert Marcuse in his 1966 political preface to *Eros and Civilization* (1955) wrote that “Today, the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the political fight.”⁶ This radical statement resonates even more true today, and Hardt and Negri give us an attempted political ontology of a force, “the ‘always already’ multitude” and the possibility of a ‘not yet’ multitude whose constituent power is founded on the rage and love of the historical present in which the slogan, “another world is possible” becomes significant. Not only does the multitude have the capacity for exodus (Deleuzian lines of flight with weapons) and resistance but it has also the capacity to create a new society through shared social, experiential, and informational networks. These new struggles are encapsulated at the end of *Multitude*:

We can already recognize that today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living- and the yawning abyss between them is becoming enormous. In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future. This will be the real political act of love.⁷

For the authors of *Multitude* the political fight is the biopolitical (the fight for life) against Biopower (ironically, both the fear of and incessant drive towards death). However, a new constitutive temporality is not articulated, and one is left in the abyss of the “not yet” temporality that has become a commonplace of postmodern politics from Derrida to Agamben, one that plays upon Heidegger’s declaration that “Possibility is Higher than Actuality” (*Kant’s Thesis on Being*) and not on the utopic “not yet” of Ernst Bloch or the messianic temporality of Benjamin. Although *kairos* is mentioned as both the dialectical counter weight to the linear accumulation of time and as the authentic moment when a decision of praxis is to be taken,

⁵ Nietzsche, Frederich. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* trans. by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980, p.14.

⁶ Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, p.xxv.

⁷ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* New York: Penguin, 2004, p.358.

no criteria for measuring and evaluating nor descriptive characteristics of this time of rupture are given. After such a breathtaking and detailed analysis of the contemporary war machine, the historical background and future criteria of the democracy to come, we are caught in the remains of a theoretical paradigm without a clear sense of role of current institutions, of labor struggles especially in times of “jobless recoveries” (Aronowitz), diminishing returns, and a rather romanticized notion of the poor.

In order to build and construct a “rising culture” we must recognize that we are located between the Scylla of a Gramscian optimism of the will and the utopist hope of Ernst Bloch and the Charybdis of the mandarin pessimism of Adorno and his understanding of the ease in which the culture industry assimilates dissent, whether it is artistic or guerrilla warfare. *Multitude* may be seen as marking this topos of ambiguity and becomes a starting point for discussion within an open ended theoretical matrix that would include recent works by Kojin Karatani (*Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*) and Stathis Kouvelakis (*Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*). A new temporal understanding of the possibility of the political (beyond the ethicist notions) today requires a program of principles and a grasp of politics that simultaneously takes hold of the everyday struggles and the event of revolutionary rupture. Hardt and Negri give us a new understanding of the space we inhabit in the new world order and the march towards globalization but do not conceptualize the new temporality necessary to overturn the new behemoth engulfing the globe. From their bird’s eye perspective, we can await (I would imagine) a third volume that engages the question of the time of revolution.⁸

But we can seriously doubt that a third volume will answer and/or substantively address the pressing questions in North America of what are the predicates of new struggles in our institutions, especially the question of labor unions; even though they may be considered institutional dinosaurs, they remain a force for major organized actions such as general strikes. And we can ask about the role of the “multitude” in our educational institutions, those mired in a “generation debt” mentality before they become part of the work force. Can this generation face their grim realities and

⁸ Negri, Antonio. *Time for Revolution*. Trans. by Matteo Mandorini. Continuum, 2003. In this work Negri begins to develop a theory of constituent time but unfortunately his insights are not significantly developed in *Multitude*.

become critically conscious of the force of making revolutionary demands upon the social field they inhabit and the institutions of which they are a part? Will there be a concerted and critical acknowledgement of the civil war materializing in the United States?

Marx knew well, as Stathis Kouvelakis⁹ reminds us, that by its entry into the newspapers, by becoming a newspaper correspondent, Philosophy assumes its critical mission and becomes worldly and attuned to everyday struggles. In this reflection upon the empirical field the politics of the “multitude” eludes rather than confronts the concrete agency needed today. By not having a new theory of class and evading the existing struggles from the “century of hands” (Rimbaud) and by lauding the new century of brains and its cyberpunkish vocabulary and sloganeering, Negri and Hardt have still not produced a viable and substantive theory of historical agency. Surplus knowledge is a constant for transnational capital but whom does it liberate? Spinoza’s multitude were those without church in the seventeenth century and let’s hope that today’s non-secularized many do not fall into the neo conservative evangelical fix and neo fundamentalist movements.

⁹ Kouvelakis, Stathis. *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, Trans. by G.M. Goshgarian. London: Verso. See the remarkably lucid and original chapter 5, pp.232-274.

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