

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2004).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude* is the sequel to their *Empire* (2000)—*Empire* being one of the rare books to cross the line between academics and 'popular' literature, largely via the interests of leftists and global reform movements. The theses of *Empire* were on one hand original and on the other hand an amalgamation of already-existing literature from Deleuze and Guattari, Althusser, Foucault, and various sociological and cultural studies in globalization. As the current reviewer noted in his review of *Empire*, that book may represent the work of postmodern Marxism *par excellence* (see *Left History* 8.2). The essential move in *Empire* was to renovate Marxist theory via an Althusserian emphasis on intellectual labour, considerations of modes of post-industrial production and the positing of a radical asymmetry and shifting multiplicity in productive identities. Herein, Marx's bourgeoisie and proletariat became inter- and transnationalized (tendencies already present in much of Marx's work), replaced, as such, by 'empire' and 'multitude'. 'Empire' is the global system understood in what might be thought of as fully global terms. 'Empire' is all material and immaterial experiences, commodities, and identities viewed in connection with the shifting and multiplicitous networks that produce them. The innovation on Marxist theory is that 'empire' plays the role of Marx's bourgeoisie. In the global age, Hardt and Negri assert, it is the *system* that profits and reproduces itself, gaining more power at the same time that it sets up the terms of its own demise. The role of the proletariat is played by 'multitude'. 'Multitude' is the human producers of empire who variously find themselves exploited by it yet establish a common identity in the course of that exploitation.

As a book, *Multitude* is the story of multitude as well as an exercise in speculation on its possibilities. Hardt and Negri are clear to differentiate multitude from 'the people'. Compared with 'multitude', 'the people' presumes levels of identity and experiential homogeneity that Hardt and Negri seek to deny. Instead, multitude is asymmetrical and relative wherein actors assume multiple identities, organize themselves in diverse ways and refract their experiences through the varied communicative mediums and modes of experience. The diversity of those experiences and mediums define multitude's collectivity. According to Hardt and Negri, the history of multitude was forged in the transition in various parts of the world from industrial to post-industrial economics, and then again in the joining of post-industrial, industrial, and agricultural economies into a single global productive and consumptive systematic. As an interconnected system founded upon multiplicitous and shifting identities, this system ('empire') exercises what Hardt and Negri term 'biopolitical power'. This is a thoroughgoing ability to create and react to multiple identities and subjectivities. Hardt and Negri posit 'biopolitical power' as taking into account all dimensions of human experience, from, e.g., the

life of the environment to communicative experience to structures of political administration and bureaucracy.

What gives *Multitude* perhaps its highest level of value is its ability to synthesize and express in direct terms sentiments held by many educated publics concerning the contemporary global order. This is especially the case in the wake of September 11. Central to the text is the relatively simple but nonetheless provocative assertion that the contemporary world is a world of war and conflict. Hardt and Negri comprehend this in traditional military terms as well as in terms of guerrilla conflict, terrorism and the multiple 'swarm' organized global protest movements and events (Seattle 1999, e.g., remains their paragon in this regard). Beyond dematerialized and radically inter- and transnationalized economic networks, the global state of conflict is, in Hardt and Negri's estimation, empire's most effective tool. It goes a long way toward providing and reinforcing the identities of global socio-cultural groupings. This is both in terms of stabilizing long-term, existing identities, accentuating nuances within long-term, existing identities as well as effecting strategic self recodings. Change the conflict, *Multitude* suggests, and so change the terrain of global identities. This is especially the case in the age of decentred, mobile conflicts based on decentred terrorist cells and multiple protest movements functioning via temporary, shifting and strategic alliances.

It is within the decentred nature of empire and the concordant decentring of its war/conflict machine that multitude's possibilities lay. Firstly, as posited by Hardt and Negri, the imperial war machine exists only because of the multiple modes of resistance against it. As such, empire is always in pursuit of its subjects whose diversity empire guarantees because empire, in turn, is based on multitude's multiplicity. To this extent, multitude always carries the seeds and practices of democracy; multitude is based on social communication across a plane constituted of social equals organized in relation to the interests produced because of and in reaction to biopolitical control. Empire thus provides multitude with the opportunity to transform structures of global exploitation into structures of reform and higher levels of egalitarianism. Furthermore, due to its diverse nature, multitude maintains the possibility of avoiding varieties of absolutism. A degree of conflict is built into the multitude due to its asymmetrical nature. Herein, Hardt and Negri propose, multitude is automatically opposed to totalitarian structures and systems. The end of empire and the victory of multitude will not bring a utopia. It will, however, commence an age of global democratic practice conjoined with the opportunity for fairer distributions of wealth and resources combined with a sensitivity to the relativity of cultural values.

Though having written widely-read books (by academic standards), Hardt and Negri's writing style is not for everyone. As with *Empire*, *Multitude* is filled with vast historical claims—claims about the history of democracy, socialism, industrialization, and post-industrialization. At the level of specialized study, each of these claims would have to be compared with existing scholarly literature.

Multitude is also filled with short anecdotes intended to illustrate the authors' quite grand arguments. These anecdotes sometimes fall short in that regard, coming off as trite rather than illustrative. Finally, certain of the authors' propositions are inadequately thought through. Discussing the possibility of a global representative body, or global parliament, Hardt and Negri suggest that such a body might be constituted via either Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or in terms of 'civilizations' (as opposed to simple population counts, which India and China would dominate). These ideas are not explored, however, leaving it unclear how multitude might organize itself at the level of institutionalized democracy. Finally, Hardt and Negri end *Multitude* with the assertion that love, in fact, should be the ultimate, guiding principle of multitude. As they define it, love is the joy brought by "expansive encounters and continuous collaborations" (351). Perhaps, but this definition lacks the power of theses concerning politics, desire and economics developed by, e.g., Deleuze and Guattari. Here, the power of capital is to produce desire. This desire is then taken as psychological, at which point it becomes understood as unavoidable and demanding political and social management. Discourses concerning 'collaboration' and 'encounters' seem a bit weak in the knees by comparison.

To concentrate on such points, however, is to miss the ultimate value of *Multitude*. This value is the text's synthesis of a set of broad-based concerns with social justice and contemporary geo-politics apprehended through theoretical matrices encapsulating large swaths of Marxist, post-Marxist, and postmodern theory. In this sense, *Multitude*—which should be read in conjunction with *Empire*—represents a work that goes a long way toward defining an early-twenty-first century *Zeitgeist*. Its claims are contestable. As an attempt to develop a thesis concerning the "general state of things" in our times, however, *Multitude* is nothing less than indispensable.

Ben Dorfman—Aalborg University

Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Prostitution, Race, and Politics covers the advent and elaboration of contagious diseases legislation in four British colonies—India, the Straits Settlements (Singapore), Hong Kong, and Queensland (Australia). The attempt to police sexual relations in these key colonial sites centred on the regulation of prostitution—the registration of prostituted women, their inspection for venereal disease, and their sanitary detention if found to be in a contagious state. Pioneered in the early-nineteenth century, this way of managing sexual relations across the gender, class, and/or racial divides was by the second half of the century a systematic and characteristic feature of British imperial rule. Modern medical science was accompanied not only by the inevitable authoritarianism, but also by the ideology of racial