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HARDT AND NEGRI'S POLITICAL ONTOLOGY: THE SCOPE OF THE *MULTITUDE* AND THE REALITY OF THE *REVOLUTIONARY*

ABSTRACT

Hardt and Negri's philosophical approach is deeply shaped by their interpretation of biopolitics, particularly through their exploration of the multitude's power and their analysis of emerging forms of sovereignty. The revolutionary potential within the diversity of the multitude cannot be fully grasped without considering the broader context of their critique of neoliberal political practices and their view of the Empire as a system that creates mechanisms for new political thought and action. A central question posed is whether, in reinterpreting Marxism through a postmodern lens, these authors manage to provide a framework for new, small-scale revolutions, or whether their intense focus on sovereignty has left them disconnected from the very multiplicity that defines the multitude's potential.

KEYWORDS

neoliberalism,
ontology, subjectivity,
Empire, biopolitics,
multitude

Introduction

The argument that Hardt and Negri provide in their most famous book *Empire* begins with the assertion that the Empire is visible to each and every one of us, right in front of our very eyes. Their methodical and descriptive nature is reflected in a multitude of examples and insights on the manner in which the practices of power have evolved over the course of history, transitioning from imperialism to empire. The authors' observations regarding the transformation that takes place inside the power of sovereignty do not pertain to the weakening of the power of sovereignty itself. The diagnostic approach taken by Hardt and Negri demonstrates the gradual erosion of the sovereignty of nation-states, which, as the authors put it, ultimately results in the material establishment of power in the form of global sovereignty, which is brought about by the processes of globalization.

Hardt and Negri outline a shift from the legal system of nation-states to a type of imperial law, which they define as a component of a historical development of legal systems that reached its peak with the establishment of the United Nations. According to their argument, the United Nations, as a supranational entity with many agencies and organs, has a vital role since it serves as a new hub of normative production capable of carrying out a legally sovereign function. (Hardt and Negri 2000 : 4-9) While the United Nations recognizes the legitimacy of individual states, it functions within the wider context of international law. The authors contend that the implementation of this sovereignty is only successful when it transfers sovereign rights to a genuine supranational body. Their emphasis, however, lies not around criticizing the constraints of this procedure but rather on the importance of institutions such as the UN in the shift from an international order to a global system.

Imperial sovereignty signifies a paradigm change and a novel understanding of law according to Hardt and Negri. This transformation necessitates a reinscription of authority, a reconfiguration of the development of norms and legal weapons of coercion, and is essential for the enforcement of contracts and the resolution of disputes. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 212) Foucault and Marx have made a significant impact on Hardt and Negri by highlighting the need for reforms in production and political systems. By implying that the Empire stands for a homogeneous, limitless space, the writers stress the malleability of imperial sovereignty. The Empire is a non-place or *ou-topia* in this worldview because power is pervasive. Power is distributed throughout a seamless and united environment in global capitalism, as borders become increasingly porous. To grasp the structure of the Empire, it's essential to understand Hardt and Negri's view of sovereignty and how it intersects with concepts like biopolitics and biopower. Hardt and Negri repeatedly emphasize that imperial sovereignty signals a change in paradigm, making it distinct from traditional imperialism. Unlike Foucault, who sees the sovereignty paradigm replaced by biopolitics within neoliberal practices, Hardt and Negri argue that sovereignty hasn't been displaced by biopolitical power. Instead, they suggest it has undergone a transformation within the concept of sovereignty itself. The power dynamics of biopolitics are most evident when merely the human body and life, together with the life of the population, are subjected to power, thereby expanding upon the authors of some of Foucault's most significant insights. The authors observe that the achievement of contemporary sovereignty reflects biopower, which extends beyond the control of interpersonal relationships to encompass society as a whole and all its facets. This notion positions Empire, according to Hardt and Negri, as the quintessential manifestation of biopower. From this vantage point, the authors stress that the idea of Empire is intrinsically linked to and devoted to peace, as an everlasting, comprehensive peace. Consistent with its guiding principles of peace and the unflinching promise of justice for all, the Empire exudes an air of calm serenity. (Ibid.: XVI) The concept of the Empire is intricately connected to universal principles and legal classifications, such that its function arises as a political entity that

values, promotes, and strives to preserve peace. In this regard, the singular authority is endowed with the requisite capacity to carry out, when required, fair conflicts at the frontiers against the barbarians and within the country against the insurgents. The authors propose that analyzing the meaning of war and peace in current political practice is crucial for comprehending the manifestation of various types of power in the present day. The Imperial emphasis on safeguarding peace necessitates the defense of peace, which in turn results in righteous conflicts and establishes a perpetual state of war. Hardt's and Negri's perspective on the universality of war reveals a profound knowledge of the reversal of the concepts of war and peace. In reality, the concept of war starts to denote a condition of war that adopts the status of the norm. Hardt and Negri perceive war as *ontological*, manifesting as a paradigm of political action in an unprecedented manner, both in its scope and its structure. Ontological warfare entails escalating forms of domination that permeate various dimensions and domains of social existence. The function of warfare in the Empire's organization is pivotal, as the fundamental political mechanisms have shifted from defensive to security-oriented. A conflict that has transitioned from a state of emergency to an ingrained and accepted aspect of daily life leads to the conflation of military and police operations. Although it is taking place on a worldwide scale rather than within nation-states, the authors contend that the present global battle should be viewed as a type of civil war. So, much like in *Empire*, their investigation in *Multitude* begins with a survey of Hobbes' war of every man against every man. However, *Multitude's* analysis is more narrowly focused on the paradigm of war and peace as the arena in which biopower is most starkly and dramatically displayed. The fact that localized wars are happening all over the world doesn't mean they're unrelated; rather, it shows that the global dimension of the struggle makes any hope of peace seem like a pipe dream. Could it be contended that, following Clausewitz's and Foucault's approaches, Hardt and Negri suggest that politics is really the continuation of war *just* through techniques of war, thereby reversing Clausewitz's and Foucault's original formulations? War and politics are seen as separate but interrelated concepts, and the authors make note of Clausewitz's famous formula, which assumes this to be the case. Also, the authors claim that Clausewitz only considers wars between nations, ignoring the myriad of internal conflicts that occur in society. Hardt and Negri juxtapose Clausewitz's interpretation with Carl Schmitt's broader assertion that actually all political motivations and conflicts are influenced by the differentiation between allies and adversaries. Nevertheless, we are no longer confronted with a public adversary, previously symbolized mostly in another nation, nor is politics itself devoid of a potential condition of conflict. Preserving political activities under normal circumstances, free from military conflicts, was the intention of modernity's sovereignty notion, which aimed to settle civil issues and maintain peace in international relations. There has been a dramatic shift since the new Empire government came into power: from conventional warfare to the „war on terror“ and asymmetrical wars. War was once an isolated incident, but now

it has spread and will likely continue indefinitely. The integration of violence into contemporary political practices has become an omnipresent potentiality, therefore erasing the fundamental differentiation between war and peace. In contemporary society, the era of war has transcended its transient nature and has become an integral aspect of social existence. Our current era is characterized by the pervasive presence of war, particularly in light of the officially proclaimed war on terror following September 11, 2001. The inversion of the concepts of war and peace holds great significance in Hardt's and Negri's comprehension of biopolitics. War, no longer an anomaly, now permeates the social realm as a norm that, by its universal applicability, inevitably impacts life itself and extends across all domains of social existence.

Hardt and Negri argue that the distinctiveness of our time is in the transformation of warfare via the different components of power dynamics, ultimately reaching a stage where dominance alone is unattainable without resorting to violence. War must transform into a regulating and organizing activity that creates and sustains social hierarchies in order to serve its fundamental political and social purpose. It needs to be a form of biopower that is purposefully used to govern and enhance social life. The authors argue that by linking war to the concepts of biopower and security, biopower profoundly alters the whole legal framework of warfare. Biopower, as a form of sovereign power, governs the realms of life and death, enabling the Empire as a mode of government to exert effective authority not only over the lives of individuals but also over the mortality of the entire human race (for instance, by the advancement of nuclear weapons technology). Conversely, security systems are implemented simultaneously at many levels of society, allowing sovereign power as a biopower to exert its influence throughout the stages of conflict at all levels. According to Hardt and Negri, biopower is most evidently demonstrated through warfare, which, when transformed into a kind of governance, becomes enduring and consistent. Contemporary conflicts are defined by the ubiquitous and interconnected use of military force, in conjunction with unrestrained dominance and control across several levels that intersect the whole social sphere. Sovereignty is primarily shown as biopower through the paradigm of war. Continuing from Foucault's point that the regime of government has taken control of people's lives when it becomes an essential part of their daily lives and something that people voluntarily engage in again and again, the authors argue that the government has successfully exerted control over the whole social body. (Hardt and Negri 2004: 18) The authors' points on biopower, being mainly understood in relation to the development and reproduction of life that is challenged, are well-taken – in the sense that it directly affects the organization of individuals in all their activities. When it came to institutional disciplinary administration, biopower in disciplinary states couldn't quite reach all individuals. Discipline failed to penetrate people's minds and bodies to the point where they could be treated and organized in all aspects of their lives; it was only within transition to control society that biopolitical technology was able to seize life to the point where individuals

were completely absorbed in the rhythm of productive practices and productive socialization. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 24) Hardt and Negri conceptualize the event inside the framework of the Empire as an inherent potential, serving as a prerequisite for the creation of a *common* and a *multitude*. In contrast to Foucault, who examines the many and novel manifestations of power, Hardt and Negri emphasize the generic and multifaceted nature of the new subject arising inside the Empire. The concepts of multiplicity in these authors are intricately linked not to diversity and distinction, but rather to the unity and democracy of the multitude, through which they engage in the analysis of affirmative biopolitics in their discourse.

The ontology of the biopolitical of Hardt and Negri diverges in two main directions: one, which considers biopower as intrinsically and structurally linked to the paradigm of war and the exploitation of peace, and the other, as an analysis of the biopolitical generation of the multitude, whose actions effectively include and restore the potential of the whole cultural, political, and social existence. The presence of a political ontology in the works of the authors is most evident in the characterization of the ontological drama surrounding the processes of production and reproduction: “This is when the ontological drama begins, when the curtain goes up on a scene in which the development of Empire becomes its own critique and its process of construction becomes the process of its overturning. This drama is ontological in the sense that here, in these processes, being is produced and reproduced.” (Ibid.: 47; cited in: Dragišić 2022: 123)

The generation of novel living forms is predominantly facilitated by immaterial labor, hence giving rise to intangible commodities. The term *immaterial goods* refers to many forms of information, ideas, intersubjective relationships, and modes of communication. Economic processes are intricately connected to the creation of social interactions and lifestyles, as the cultural, political, and social domains are directly engaged in the global economy, in a completely novel manner. The authors refer to this type of production as *biopolitical* since it involves integration of economics and politics, therefore encompassing the entirety of social existence. This shift from biopower to biopolitical production signifies a transformation in which common social forms of life are established by the utilization of forms of labor. In the realm of biopower, the ability to control and govern both human life and nature leads to the creation of many elements of social existence. Within biopolitical production, there is a shift where production has evolved into an economic-socio-cultural-political process. In this context, the authors observe resistance and possibility of the emergence of a new political subjectivity as means to challenge the Empire. They refer to the interrelation between such production and action, which represents the comprehensive involvement in life.

What is Democracy within biopolitical production?

“The political is not what we are taught it is today by cynical Machiavellianism of politicians; it is rather, as the democratic Machiavelli tells us, the power of generation, desire, and love. Political theory has to reorient itself along these lines and assume the language of generations”. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 388)

Hardt's and Negri's proposed theory of subjectivity should include both the revolutionary and exploitative aspects. It should emphasize that the intangible and communicative labor force serves as the foundation for addressing the issue of value accumulation “at the core of the exploitation mechanism (and hence, potentially, at the core of potential revolt)”. As to Hardt and Negri, knowledge, communication, and language should serve as the foundation for activating factors that will significantly enhance the capacity for resistance. Although Foucault acknowledged the validity of the biopolitical viewpoint, his rigid adherence to structuralist epistemology prevented him from fully implementing his theories. According to Hardt's and Negri's research, Foucault failed to take into account the efficient functioning of social reproduction and the actual processes by which production takes place inside a biopolitical organization. Hardt and Negri, in contrast to Foucault, but also diverging from Deleuze and Guattari, aim to demonstrate how the radical ontology of social production displays its significance and influence specifically within the context of biopolitical society. What are the creative aspects overlooked by previous generations, which indicate the significance of the ontological essence of social production, and whose potential has not been fully explored through analysis? The authors delineate three fundamental elements of immaterial labor in the contemporary economy, which, when examined, would provide insight into the dynamics of “the new theoretical framework of biopower”. (Ibid.: 30) The initial aspect pertains to an industrial production that has been digitized and has integrated communication technologies, hence altering the manufacturing process itself. Second is the immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic work, while a third kind of immaterial labor encompasses the generation and modulation of affect, necessitating virtual or physical human interaction and corporeal engagement.

What is the precise meaning of the authors' statement that while evaluating the requirements imposed by the biopolitical body on the multitude, we must uncover the process by which our history, reality, and existence have been formed? What is the rationale for conducting the study not through ideal forms, but rather within the intricate network of experience? How can affirmative biopolitical production be comprehended when multinational corporations exert biopolitical influence on territories worldwide and directly impact populations and territories, so shaping the evolution of the global market and the biopolitical structure of the world?

Democracy arises as a potentiality when a collective of many individuals comes together, and who can only express their vitality in connection to the *multitude* and the *common*. The plurality and multiplicity are defined by the

infinite number of distinct living forms generated by biopolitical production. This entity possesses a physical form, a bodily tissue, which is evident through various expressions in diverse subjectivities – including political, economic, cultural, and social domains. How do the authors perceive the various options available inside the Empire, and how can the general population actualize its revolutionary capacity?¹

Modern legal theory, grounded in individualism, encompasses all facets of the subject, but in a manner that assigns economic importance to all attributes and characteristics. The problem with this approach is that it seems to be getting more and more difficult to distinguish between individual rights and the right to private property, as the term *private* can mean both. Hardt and Negri attribute the confusion to *the ideology of possessive individualism*, which posits that the differentiation between private freedoms and the right to private property is being blurred. This phenomenon is driven by the framework of contemporary law, which perceives every element or characteristic of the individual, ranging from their interests and desires to their essence, as *properties* owned by the individual. Consequently, all aspects of subjectivity are reduced to the economic domain. According to Hardt and Negri, the legal terminology employed by contemporary legal theory is inadequate and ambiguous in elucidating the true nature of generally applicable and shared principles. The concept of community has traditionally been linked to governmental authority, and it is imperative to adopt post-systemic thinking to identify suitable frameworks for understanding the connection between collective and biopolitical production. The common is unaffected by the conventional concepts of *public* and *community* as it largely pertains to the experience of communicativeness that arises from the interaction of singularities, which, via social collaboration, enable the creation of the *general*. Hardt and Negri define the common as the natural environment, its resources, and the products derived from it, but also as the results of social interaction, including languages, information, emotions and other types of knowledge. The diversity of the multitude exposes its various subjectivities, which arise specifically from common practices, languages, habits, and behaviors—essentially, common and general forms of life.

1 The authors provide an illustration of several feminist and queer theories of performativity that successfully grow and evolve within the framework of postmodernism, therefore executing a type of anthropological metamorphosis. The shift in habits to performance has enabled the emergence of a resolution to the conundrum that feminist theories have encountered, by embracing the uniqueness of the female body as the foundation of its operational framework. Nevertheless, the achievement of performative theories lies in their ability to oppose the physical body and advocate for the collective performance of queer social existence. Through her rejection of the inherent notion of a sexual distinction, Judith Butler creates an opportunity to challenge the rationale behind identification and generate what is universally applicable. The possibilities of *the multitude* can arise, among other things, by comprehending the political importance of the continuous creation and replication of social entities, basically because by means of our daily performances, we can perform in a different manner, undermine those social entities, and create novel social structures. Hardt and Negri (2004 : 199)

The connection between the general and the norms should be comprehended in this perspective, as the generation of norms, for Hardt and Negri, should be predicated on a continuous, unrestricted, and transparent interaction among singularities, which, by means of their communication, gives rise to common norms. (Ibid.: 204) The insistence of Hardt and Negri on substituting the identity-difference pair with the concepts of generality-singularity is evident, as it is the process of interchange and communication that serves as the foundation for the phenomenon of multitudes. *Multitude* refers to the human creators of empire who forge a common identity through the exploitation. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is the sole type of political subjectivity capable of realizing democracy. The diversity of the multitude exposes the many experiences and perspectives inside the group, which arise specifically from shared customs, languages, habits, and behaviors, namely universal and widespread modes of life. The authors interpret the term singularity as a manifestation of the ethical concept of performativity, highlighting that singularities actively and unrestrictedly engage in social interactions and shared experiences.

In the foreword to the *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri assert that the Internet has the capacity to function as a paradigm of the multitude, as the multitude indeed encompasses several entities of production: "... a distributed network like the Internet serves as a robust starting point or prototype for the multitude due to two main reasons. Firstly, the different nodes within the network remain distinct but are all interconnected through the Web. Secondly, the network's external boundaries are flexible, allowing for the constant addition of new nodes and relationships." (Ibid. : XV) Furthermore, the authors place particular emphasis on the concept of carnival and the possibilities it has for developing a global carnival vision. Hardt and Negri argue that literature, by including the concept of carnival, has the potential to disrupt the traditional societal structure. Their vision, while perceived as neither sovereign nor anarchist by some critics, aims to transcend and impose a paradigm shift – to eliminate the concepts of anarchy and sovereignty. This is because without such a shift, the concept of multitude remains ambiguous and fails to achieve its complete potential. Upon reading Bakhtin's work, the writers observe a prominent dialogical narrative in Dostoevsky's dialogues. These dialogues involve a significant number of people who actively contribute to shaping both the subjects of the dialogue and their communication. The theory of carnival culture centers on the distinctive features of Middle Age carnivals, including elements such as carnival laughter, marketplace discourse, dialogism, and grotesque behavior. This highlights a novel viewpoint encountered by human awareness throughout the festivities, whereby the characters exhibit greater freedom, unrestricted, and the ambiance of disorder and humor fosters a sense of camaraderie among the characters, resulting in both their eccentricity and interpersonal closeness. For Bakhtin, the carnival serves as a venue where what is typically unaltered and revered is satirized, but within the context of this festive event, what typically divides individuals is brought together in the familial ambiance of the carnival.

Dialogic connection becomes a form of experimentation, always providing a fertile ground for imagination, emotion, and utopia, so establishing the foundation for a novel universe. The authors stress the significance of the polyphonic understanding of narrative, as it is precisely due to the environment that promotes free expression that singularities relinquish their self-imposed limitations and engage in dialogues without restriction once “the common narrative structures” (ibid. : 211) are established. To what extent is the carnivalesque theory necessary for Hardt and Negri to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how political organization might arise in the contemporary order? The authors have identified theatrical conduct, laughter, singing, and the excitement of the carnival as attributes that can be ascribed to certain modern protests. Within political organizations, active and meaningful interaction and conversation among various sides, rather than pervasive conflict, is expected and indeed occurs.

The (im)possibilities of the multitude

“Any worker with any sense, of course, wants to refuse the authority of the boss, but Bartleby takes it to the extreme. He does not object to this or that task, nor does he offer any reason for his refusal – he just passively and absolutely declines. Bartleby’s behaviour is indeed disarming, in part because he is so calm and serene, but moreover because his refusal is so indefinite that it becomes absolute. He simply prefers not to.” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 203, Italic on original)

An authentic democracy would be characterized by the manifestation and inclusion of diverse groups of people through the process of alterglobalization of the multitude, supporting global cooperation and interaction, still opposing the negative effects of economic globalization. A pertinent inquiry is whether Hardt and Negri provided sufficient specific instances of how affirmative biopolitics might be converted into a genuine manifestation of democracy, and how in contemporary political dynamics, the concept can be relinquished. What is the relationship between elimination of the sovereignty and revolutions of the people from below? To what degree is the writers’ conception of sovereignty sufficient for the practical advancement of democracy, and to what extent does their perspective on the concept of people influence that definition? Throughout history, many systems of governance, including monarchy, oligarchy, autocracy, and even democracy, have consistently entailed the dominion of one or a few individuals over a large number of people, with no apparent alternative. From this vantage point, authors contend that it is hardly surprising that Hobbes’ model of monarchist absolutism resembled Rousseau’s democratic republicanism. Authors such as Hobbes and Rousseau successfully recreated the contradiction that Jean Bodin had first articulated. Hardt and Negri argue that subjecting oneself to the authority of a powerful person or group is fundamental to the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty encompasses the concepts of submission and obedience. One could argue that sovereignty does not exist

outside of monarchies, given that only one person can hold that title. Sovereignty cannot exist in a multi-person or multi-group governing structure because no sovereign can submit to the authority of another. Despite claims to the contrary, there is only one political figure in contemporary sovereignty—a single transcendent power—regardless of whether the political system is democratic, plural, or popular. (See: Hardt and Negri 2000: 102, 103)

In fact, a new form of democracy cannot be based on the idea of people since it represents something very different from the idea of a multitude. According to Hardt and Negri, the idea of the people is a product of the nation-state, and when seen in this light, the people are intrinsically one and the same. The people inherently possess a will that always emerges within the context of an ideological framework and embodies a well-prepared synthesis for the purpose of sovereignty. Contrary to the concept of plurality, the idea of people operates not as number but as a whole entity; the multitude does not aim for uniformity but for diversity; it is unrestricted and limitless.

This interpretation of sovereignty and the concept of people closely aligns with Agamben's perspective on the force of biopolitics as a means of exercising sovereignty. Therefore, according to Hardt and Negri, sovereignty, whether it be the authority of an individual or maybe the authority of the people, is always confined in suppression: sovereignty must necessarily involve control and subordination, since it would not be considered true sovereignty otherwise. The democratic revolution intended to mobilize the masses is very ambiguous, just as the multitude itself lacks a clear definition and gives rise to extensive uncertainties and objections. Can it be argued that the definition of the multitude, as perceived by Hardt and Negri, represents a hypothetical subjectivity that is more a result of imagination than the vision of reality as it could be? Within the early stages of modern history, society was characterized by profound division and fragmentation. It was impossible for a singular institution to arise that could bring together the shared interests of the people and provide an alternative stable structure. As Laclau articulates:

“That the transfer of control of numerous social spheres to new classes is at the root of new forms of biopower is indisputable, but the alternative to this process would not have been the autonomous power of a hypothetical multitude, but the continuation of feudal fragmentation. Furthermore, only when the process of centralization has advanced beyond a certain extent has something like a unitary multitude been able to emerge through the passage of sovereignty from the king to the people.” (Ibid.: 151, translation S.D.)

By means of their modified physical looks, what particular message should the new subject of rebellion communicate? May the authors' focus on the rights of the multitude, specifically the right to disobedience and the right to diversity, genuinely provide us a fresh perspective on how the developing political subjectivity may fully support these rights? Which courses of action are available to the majority and how may this manifestation of the struggle and pursuit of novel aspects of existence offer valuable understanding of the

function of politics in Hardt and Negri's frameworks? The authors propose a systematic approach to improving the conditions of modern society by suggesting the new barbarians and methods of exodus should utilize techniques and tools that will function as *poietic prostheses*. The new barbarians could be understood as individuals who have transcended local limitations but must also reconstruct their life from scratch. As subjects for whom nothing is permanent, they should use prostheses that must be productive and formative, not machinic. That's the reason the term *poietic*, since these prostheses serve to mediate towards collective experience while opening possibilities for transformation within the human body. Within the context of pioneering collective experiences, the group, driven by its will to resist and its desire for liberation, must triumph against the Empire in order to emerge on the other side. What particular action does it require and to whom should it be directed? This is significantly problematic aspect in Hardt's and Negri's analysis, showing their theory of political subjectivity as contradictory and emphasizing its lack of any psychoanalytic component. What does it mean that being human means *being-against* and does it expressly refer to a particular opponent, or does it indicate the general state of the multitude – marked by its resolve to resist and oppose? The authors repeatedly establish that the adversary is a clearly defined system of worldwide relations referred to as an Empire. Moreover, they argue that in modern times, the adversary, like the conflict itself, is both diminished to a simple object of routine police violence and raised to the position of an unequivocal threat to the ethical structure. Does the term *being-against* really support Hardt's and Negri's conclusion that it is impractical to determine the opponent, because the internal disputes inside the Empire stem from multiple sources? The authors themselves emphasize the significance of determining the actual identity of the opponent, as a pivotal matter in political philosophy.

Hardt and Negri argue that the people's opposing of imperial sovereignty based on desire entails directing attention towards imperial sovereignty and seeking suitable methods to challenge the authority of sovereignty. However, the authors could provide more specific frameworks to address this challenge, as their explanation of the emergence of the multitude appears to be overly simplistic. Does their analysis adequately consider the intricate framework of contemporary social conflicts and is any change feasible without the political expression of precise objectives and strategies? Does it not appear that the several forms of resistance that emerge among the diverse populations can be hindered, or, at least in this disorganized and dispersed fashion, diminish in power and prove ineffective in generating a unified platform for fighting imperial authority? For instance, Laclau argues that a comprehensive historical change cannot occur without replacing the specific battles of individuals with a larger determination of the collective. However, this necessitates the understanding of what we have referred to as the logic of equivalence in our work, which entails exercises of political expression – precisely the horizontal link that Hardt and Negri have disregarded. Opposing is, once again, a distinct indication of the inherently anti-political inclination of *Empire*. Laclau, for

instance, regards the notion of *anthropological evacuation* as an abusive metaphor, since he perceives it as a *martial conception* rather than a genuine expression of a solution to the complexity of our current world. Contemporary physical transformations for Hardt and Negri signify this exodus and embody a significant, yet still unclear, aspect of the republican configuration in opposition to imperial culture. Indeed, Hardt's and Negri's demand for us to challenge conventional lifestyles and reject the transformation of our bodies into instruments of power for the Empire lacks any justification for why this kind of resistance and motivation should be a fundamental aspect of our future struggle. The multiplicity of social groups, together with the several factors contributing to migration, give rise to an ambiguous depiction of the migratory process and its role in the uprising of the masses against the imperial system. Laclau contends that this approach results in the loss of the essence and precision of the concept of migration, as each historical transformation, whether positive or negative, can be perceived as migration. A well-crafted metaphor unveils, by virtue of analogy, a heretofore concealed facet of reality – but, this is seldom the case in this particular instance.

Hardt and Negri, referring to Melville's interpretation, ought to contemplate whether *Bartleby* can genuinely symbolize complete rejection as the authors intend. If that is the case, what implications does it have for their theory of multitude and the formation of the common and the general? What about giving up on the revolutionary potential of the masses and submitting to capitalism's control through embracing and working within the parameters of present *democratic* processes? Is rejection power a way to describe *Bartleby's* power? In such case, what kind of authority does it possess? Consider Žižek for an instance. Not content to merely lay the groundwork for the second, more constructive stage of the new alternative system's construction, he insists that *Bartleby's* attitude is its fundamental cause. Again, parallax is the defining feature that differentiates *Bartleby's* withdrawal gesture from the launch of a new system. A persistent "I would prefer not to" pushes away the extremely hectic and demanding procedure of creating a new order. It is just as difficult to picture *Bartleby* in a position of authority as it is to picture the *New*. (Žižek 2006: 382)

The question is whether the choice to "prefer not to" rather than *participate* in the operations of imperial institutions and systems founded on imperial law matters, or if rejection is merely a symbolic act of resistance. If you want to build a new community, Žižek says rejection isn't the way to go. On the other hand, he maintains that doing nothing is preferable to performing localised acts whose end goal is to facilitate the system's operation (such as making room for the myriad new subjectivities, etc.). Nowadays, the real danger is not indolence but the impulse to "be active", "participate", or otherwise hide the nothingness of the situation. (Ibid.: 334)

Where is Hardt's and Negri's political expression situated, if plurality is an inherent consequence of the numerous engagements of the singularity? How can the multitude unite to create a unified entity? Should Hardt and Negri fail

to address current political issues through their theoretical analysis, they may be inclined to reassess certain political tendencies until they align with their political ontology. Some writers argue that Hardt and Negri's cognitive framework represents inherent and unsolved tensions within poststructuralism: how can we reconcile the skepticism of the poststructuralist legacy towards any common political identity with the implicit demands for contemporary activism that we often mention? The significance of collective conflicts in real political affairs, such as those expressing issues of race, class, or ethics, can be understood through this important part of Hardt and Negri's research, sometimes called Deleuzian individualism: Hardt and Negri see any political system that isn't characterized by a *multitude*, or a collection of persons, as a representation of a muddled Hegelian multitude that leans too much toward nationalism or statism. (Koljevic 2015: 125) Such a type of blurred multitude would refer to a subjectivity that relies on the entire moral world of mankind, the moral world of law, the family, the economic world, and the commonwealth. To what extent does Hardt and Negri's theory effectively address the practical challenges arising from the intricate interplay of influential state actors? Current technological progress has exacerbated the gravity of this predicament. Is *Empire* well prepared to address the present trends that demonstrate politics as a cooperative endeavor rather than an individual one? As per Hardt and Negri, the present global order is characterized by a reduced influence of the United States. Consequently, the United States urges its allies to initiate a strategy of armed containment and/or repression against the present adversary of the Empire. This idea has superseded the old global order as the governing framework for military actions. The positions of center and margin appear to be constantly changing, avoiding any fixed locations, the authors contend, which complicates the determination of the precise state of imperial power inside the Empire. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 37-39) The assertion is made that this process is virtual and that its efficacy resides in the virtual realm. The proliferation of multinational corporations and their extensive worldwide networks has made contemporary nation-states irrelevant, leaving the Empire in their stead.

Did Hardt and Negri underestimate the importance of nation-states by claiming that their positions were embraced by the supranational institutions of the Empire? Furthermore, did they overlook the fact that although the United States independently imposed many 'police actions' as invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, international organizations and institutions were really a continued manifestation of American imperialism? To what degree may the response of the United States to the 9/11 attacks be interpreted as an expression of its imperialistic objectives, and also to what degree are the various international monetary, financial, and other institutions ultimately auxiliary to American global hegemony? According to Michael Rustin, Hardt and Negri's argument is largely influenced by their theory of the state. Rustin believes that although they identify as libertarian communists rather than anarchists, their position on the state aligns more closely with anarchism. Within this particular framework, the author contends that the understanding of the United States

beyond the imperialist paradigm following the Vietnam War lacks precise clarity. (Rustin 2003: 3, 12-13) Moreover, he proposes that the Tet attack should not be regarded as a conclusive military setback to U.S. imperialist pursuits. The US administration has viewed September 11 as a chance to demonstrate that its loss in Vietnam was an outlier, primarily attributed to its own self-control and erroneous assessments. In the future, the military capabilities of the said entity may and will be effectively deployed wherever necessary, regardless of the preferences of other sovereign governments.

For example, there is major relocation of different activities, especially manufacturing and world market shares from Western Europe and SAD to East Asia have moved from South Asia and Western Europe to East Asia. (See: Arrighi 2003). This is especially true of manufacturing and worldwide market shares. Bull contends that the possibility of merging with Asian lineages is ignored by Hardt and Negri, who solely focus on the Euro-American lineages of Empire. (Bull 2003: 93) In Malcolm Bull's analysis, Hardt and Negri neglect to recognize the true influence of the United States. Based on the present situation, it seems that nearly all of the authors of the book *Debating Empire*, which examines Hardt and Negri's concept of the Empire, hold the belief that the American reaction to the 9/11 attacks validates the notion that acquiring power is synonymous with acquiring America. In this exposition, Bull posits that the most effective approach to effect political transformation may include governments wholeheartedly adopting both the legal and practical concept of American sovereignty. It is a political transformation through the acceptance of epitomized Orwellian control, which was established by the Bush administration's "Total Information Awareness" (TIA) program. The *war against terrorism* demonstrates that, as long as the US administration is able to read the mood at home, it can afford to be indifferent to its most powerful friends. According to Bull's research, even though you can call yourself American, not everyone living in the USA is a citizen, and not having a US passport makes you a voter without a voice anywhere in the world. Alex Callinicos claims that Hardt and Negri make a valid point about the shift in ideological language. A new hybridized form of sovereignty has emerged with the emergence of global governance organizations, which permits the violation of other states' rights not out of national interest but to protect the human rights and humanitarian needs of their citizens. (See: Callinicos 2001) However, he strongly insists on separating this change in ideology from the allocation of geopolitical power in modern society.

On one hand, Hardt and Negri espouse Deleuzean individualism, emphasizing the need of many struggles and resistances that need to be addressed on an individual level while simultaneously dismissing local struggles that are associated with sovereignty. On the other hand, their systemic argument for the downfall of the Empire through the ascent of the masses is rooted in a strong conviction in the creation of the general and the common. This philosophy is linked to the belief in the existence of numerous new democratic organizations that are built upon the ruins of sovereign exceptionalism and capitalist economic management practices.

It is clear that the political ontology that Hardt and Negri have presented does not adequately reflect the actual conflicts that are experienced by certain groups of people in contemporary political society. More specifically, the following conflicts are not adequately expressed: “We may wonder where the place is (sic) of Maori tribal activists striving for self-determination or members of Aloha Ain’s party from Hawaii, in their struggle for sovereign rights. And why would ‘non-sovereign’ violence [being] legitimate and justified, and sovereign peace of ‘people’ [being] illegitimate both be the result and the manifestation of the Empire? (...) Sovereignty is the “poisonous gift” of colonial Europe that indigenous peoples must exchange for the ontological emancipation promised to them by migration and exile.” (Koljevic 2015: 125)

Hardt and Negri, who undoubtedly support a stance similar to Marx’s, analyze the alternative course of Indian society, which is situated between the savage British colonization and the conventional Indian culture characterized by diverse social institutions and devotion to Indian rulers. In reference to the articles written by Marx and published in the “New York Daily Tribune” in the year 1853, the authors underline that Marx’s acknowledgment of the brutality and savagery of the British should not be a prerequisite for embracing the condition of Indian civilization that has already been formed. From that standpoint, Hardt and Negri argue that Marx perceives the only *alternative* path as the precise one that European civilization has already pursued. Marx, conclude the authors, may not have a comprehensive grasp of the disparities within Indian society and the diverse capacities it harbors. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 120) One of the fundamental problems is that Marx is only able to view history outside of Europe as progressing in a predetermined and unchangeable manner following the same route that Europe has historically followed. Do Hardt and Negri fail in a manner similar to Marx, as they adopt a similar methodology and don’t take into account the one-of-a-kind experiences and challenges that non-Western cultures face in their pursuit of freedom and a democratic structure? These cultures may give emphasis to artistic, ethical, or cultural aspects in their pursuit of freedom. Do they not, as a result, restrict their own understanding of the multitude, by denying the existence of any manifestation of communal identity? Without a doubt, the authors fail to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of collective disagreements and the degree to which they can be effectively molded by controlling the ethical or cultural dynamics that exist inside the group environment.

Our world differs significantly from the ones portrayed in *Empire* and *Multitude*, and though the ontological map put forth by Hardt and Negri doesn’t seem to be able to handle the problems given by empirical evidence. Okur argues that the main actors in the modern world order’s ontological framework are best described as nation-states. The United States, China, and Russia are the new geopolitical superpowers. (See: Okur 2007: 70) At the same time, multinational regionalization tendencies are becoming more apparent in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Europe. In addition to the socioeconomic sphere, the idea of regionalization should include the participation and demands of

regional power centers in the functioning of international organizations in the ideological, cultural, political, and military spheres. The dominant powers' imperialist aspirations have changed in some areas, but the results of the *new* imperialisms are being felt today. One of these is the rise of new identity policies that aim to foster subjectivity within national or civilizational frameworks; another is the diversification of economic nationalism; still another is the expansion of efforts to improve nuclear capabilities; and yet another is the decline of the impact of international organizations.

A number of academics have argued that Hardt and Negri's analysis of migrants and nomads is too Eurocentric and fails to take into account the unique reasons people migrate nowadays. Traveling and not settling down represent an effective and unplanned backlash against imperial postmodernism, according to Hardt and Negri. The nomads bear the weight of both the positive and negative aspects of globalization. On one hand, the negative aspect is manifested in abandonment and exodus. On the other, the positive aspect includes an abundance of desire and the accumulation of expressive and productive abilities. The upshot of this movement is an optimistic outlook. However, according to Malcolm Bull, modern migrations are typically prompted by the desire for a better quality of life. (Bull 2004: 224) Specifically, migrants aim to escape from a substantial economic disadvantage and achieve more than just financial wealth. Also, instead of seeking revolutionary freedom, the massive migration from Africa could be seen as a way to survive. This fact exemplifies how the authors of the *Empire* were so Eurocentric that they ignored the distinctive features of non-Western cultures and their movement. (Dunn 2004: 156) Hardt and Negri ask: who should head the migratory wave, what should they represent, and how can various spontaneous movements around the world bring out their revolutionary potential?

The leap, actuality and fall of the revolutionary

The editors of *Empire's New Clothes* stipulate: upon reading Hardt and Negri, it becomes evident that their ideal migrants are individuals belonging to the world-traveling global elite, who are becoming more numerous but still limited in number on a worldwide level. These individuals are characterized as individualistic and "rootless cosmopolitans." (Deacon 2005: 109) Deacon questions the role of politics in the writings of Hardt and Negri and how we may interpret their connection to political activity, as their political ontology appears to conceal the proper definition of genuine political action. The question that must be posed is where the politics in *Empire* is located. What strategies can be employed to mobilize the masses into action? *Empire's* ontological landscape through self-affirming and foundational labor, state Hardt and Negri, it's planted with a virtuality (of activity and the alteration of material conditions) that hopes to become real. Several detractors portray the immanence of empire (as the empire that has no limits) and the virtuality of the multitude as, at best, politically complacent, relinquishing the authority of

the state to others, and at worst, fatalistic and quietistic. (Ibid.: 108, 109; Pas-savant and Dean 2005: 109)

An approach to address these inquiries could be to focus the analysis on three distinct forms of multitude in Hardt and Negri. Firstly, there is the ontological multitude, which signifies the fundamental nature of reality as a collection of many elements and their arrangement. Secondly, there is the multitude *per se*, which represents its original condition and is therefore essential for political and social existence. Contrary to *local* multitudes, the first multitude is distinguished by its lack of time and is described in a manner that highlights the ontological multiplicity of the multitude. This multiplicity symbolizes the revolutionary capacity of sociality, which is considered a crucial and determining characteristic of the human being. Consequently, another multitude is derived and expressed from this multiplicity. Hardt and Negri do not dismiss the local nature of individual conflicts, as the second multitude emerges as a political multitude, a logical extension of the ontological multitude. This places the multitude in a dual temporal realm, that oscillates between a constant state (ontological multitude) and a state of non-existence (political multitude). (Koljevic 2015: 115-116; translation S.D.)

But when trying to understand Hardt and Negri's political ontology, the question that arises is whether the many pairs that they use—for example, identity/difference, first multitude/second multitude, being/phenomena, local/systemic, unity/multitude—are the product of binary rationality. To what extent does the biopolitical aspect of their paradigm address the concepts of otherness and relationships? The biopolitical aspect of the multitude's production is not an ancillary element in the analysis of economic, legal, political, justice, and freedom categories; rather, the biopolitical category should not be perceived "... as a supplement that gathers up all that has been left out – considering it the merely social or the merely cultural – but rather as the fundamental category that demonstrates how all of the others are mutually implicated." (Hardt and Negri 2004 : 282) Biopolitical conflicts emerge in fields like ecology and knowledge management due to the interconnected nature of fundamental life questions with more generalized issues of law, culture, and economy. Problems in the ecological realm, argue Hardt and Negri, are the major vehicle for bringing attention to the need to restate the common goal on a worldwide scale. The reason behind this is the strong connection between national climate change programs and global events. Different indigenous peoples' efforts and the work of many anti-racist and feminist groups and movements, Hardt and Negri see as biopolitical, encompassing all facets of existence, including legal, political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Understanding Hardt and Negri's stances on biopolitical conflict—which include knowledge control—is crucial to understanding how they perceive the evolution of general knowledge. For them, the incorporation of scientific knowledge into economic production has shifted the paradigm in economics from the manufacture of things to the product of life itself. They claim that it's hardly surprising that economic powers would put their stamp on knowledges

and subject knowledge production to profit-driven standards when knowledge becomes so closely tied to production. They continue by saying that even seeds, traditional knowledge, genetic material, and even living organisms are becoming private property due to patents. (Hardt and Negri 2004: 282-285) Hardt and Negri believe biopower drives the generation of life and, by extension, strengthens control over human nature. Does this necessitate a new theory of knowledge growth and a different way of looking at human relationships? There are many unanswered concerns regarding the communication that enabled the multitude to spread, the potential response of Hardt and Negri's political ontology to the intricacies of human connections, and their omission of this particular subject. They criticize Habermas' position without investigating the structure of the Empire in regard to communication and ethics, even though they do say that control over language sense and meaning and communication networks becomes an increasingly central issue for political struggle as communication and linguistic cooperation become the fabric of production and the structure of productive corporeality, respectively. (Hardt and Negri 2004: 404)

Since Hardt and Negri argue that the people's actions only become political when they directly oppose the oppression of the Empire, their identification of three demands serves as the apex of *Empire*. The three requirements should establish a foundation for a significant battle that, while ideologically distinct, remains predominantly abstract and subject to interpretation in light of emerging understandings of global political processes. The initial stipulation pertains to the autonomy over one's own mobility, as interpreted within the framework of global citizenship law: hence, undocumented populations should also get full citizenship, and the movement of labor under prevailing capitalist conditions should be acknowledged. The second criterion pertains to the entitlement to social wages, indicating that all individuals are eligible for some form of recompense. The third requirement concerns the right to reappropriation, signifying that the means of production are not privately owned but rather constitute public, communal property.

Having said that, they fail to offer a precise description of how to go about doing so. The authors contend that these three factors should lay the groundwork for a global struggle that is ideologically obvious but largely theoretical and open to interpretation based on new knowledge of the features of international political processes: in the context of global citizenship legislation, the right to self-regulation of movement is the first requirement; this will allow undocumented populations to become full citizens and guarantee that capitalist economies can accommodate workers' freedom to move around. The second requirement is that everyone should be able to get social wages, which means that everybody should be able to earn money in some way. Thirdly, the means of production must not be privately owned but rather collectively held by the public, which is connected to the right to reappropriation.

It is intriguing that even this practical, affirmative aspect of Hardt and Negri's theory has been heavily criticized. Even authors who agree with these

requirements have their doubts. For instance, Laclau argues that all their requirements are based on law and demands, stressing that rights and demands “... must both be recognized and the instance implementing the recognition cannot be in a relationship of total exteriority vis-a-vis the social claims.” (Laclau 2020: 157: translation S.D., italic in original) Hardt and Negri’s explanation of spontaneous vertical fights is based on the notion of plurality, which is incompatible with all demands, and therefore cannot be directed against the virtual center of the Empire. Laclau asserts that the multitude, although it influences the many multiplicities of individual conflicts, cannot inherently transform into a plural entity; the shift from unity to multiplicity, from singularity to plurality, necessitates deliberate political effort. Hardt and Negri’s explanation of spontaneous vertical fights is based on the notion of plurality and therefore cannot be directed against the virtual center of the Empire. Also, since Hardt and Negri don’t appear to have any specific plan for how genuine democracy might be established, one could wonder if it’s good to make demands that are so far-fetched. They are adamant about the possibilities of real democracy, but it is unclear how it will rise from the multitude. Asserting the substance of the three demands, Žižek argues that it is paradoxical that Hardt and Negri, the poets of mobility, variety and hybridization, call for three demands stated in the vocabulary of universal human rights. An inherent problem with these requests is their oscillation between being entirely formal and entirely radicalized, which is clearly inconceivable. (Žižek 2001: 192)

Conclusion

Hardt and Negri not only fail to recognize a pivotal moment for new revolutionary or progressive initiatives in the autonomy of the political sphere, but they also regard such autonomy as a hindrance. The novel technologies of resistance and life change in authors cannot be associated with a power that is non-sovereign, which appears to be the source of numerous limits in their theory. It appears that many of the theoretical constraints stem from the fact that the authors’ new resistance technologies and life-altering innovations cannot be associated with any power that is not non-sovereign. In offering a theory and requiring such action to represent a political ontology, they essentially detach the constitutional power from its legal foundation and meaning. This detachment removes many ideas from both their literal and historical value and meaning. The writers’ foundational principles for bringing together the vast multiplicity of groups and movements into shared political and social projects are communication, sharing, connections, and common languages. By examining specific social movements like the Black Lives Matter movement and others, Hardt and Negri proved in their *Assembly* that the claim that their discourse shows a noticeable lack of empirical research on specific phenomena of modern politics is not entirely true. But they don’t seem to go too far in their research, leaving us wondering what non-sovereign power looks like. Whether this causes them to have a vague understanding of social movements,

which they then brush off as unimportant when discussing issues of national or religious identity or aspirations for sovereignty, is unknown. In their examination of right-wing ideology and actions, the authors assert that liberationist goals are obscured by a skewed reflection of right-wing ideology, which they say turns identity into a paramount value while democracy is delayed or even rejected. (Hardt and Negri 2017 : 45-47) Their arguments seem to contradict Foucault's evaluation of biopolitics, even though their biopolitics might not be considered as anti-political; it is unequivocally post-politics, and it seems to reject politics and political expression fundamentally.

In this article I tried to demonstrate that Hardt and Negri base their stance on the particular connection between politics and ontology. According to them, multitude can be understood as an ontological, first-multitude, and second-multitude concept, alluding to the created political set, and it also exists as a possible new subjectivity. So, the second set is the second because it is based on and derived from the first set, which is the ontological multitude. Hardt and Negri both reject the ideas of sovereignty and people as concepts that need to be transcended, while simultaneously expressing a certain ambivalence in their insistence on the multitude's multiplicity and distinctiveness. Despite Foucault's indisputable influence on their theory, the authors offered a considerably different view on political subjectivity and biopolitical formation. The authors argue that the opposition to state biopower is primarily motivated by the rise of post-politics and the concept of the universal human condition. To be sure, Agamben's biopolitical theories share many commonalities with those of Hardt and Negri. Postmodernism and globalization had a significant impact on these initiatives, which sparked concepts like the singularity-community relationship and the community of whatever singularities. Their theoretical perspective revolve around the idea that sovereignty and international law can't create modern conditions for revolutionary subjectivity to emerge. Hardt and Negri failed to address the theoretical necessity of articulating the modern biopolitical realities of the 21st century, as evidenced by their focus on theories of individuality, singularity, and multiplicity.

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Sara Dragišić

Politička ontologija Harta i Negrija: domet množta i stvarnost revolucionarnog

Apstrakt

Filozofski pristup Harta i Negrija u velikoj meri oblikuje njihova interpretacija biopolitike, posebno kroz istraživanje moći množta i analizu novih oblika suvereniteta koji se pojavljuju. Revolucionarni potencijal unutar raznolikosti množta ne može se u potpunosti razumeti bez uzimanja u obzir šireg konteksta njihove kritike neoliberalnih političkih praksi i njihovog viđenja Imperije kao sistema koji stvara mehanizme za nove političke ideje i akcije. Ključno pitanje koje se postavlja jeste da li su, reinterpetirajući marksizam kroz postmodernu prizmu, ovi autori uspjeli da obezbede okvir za nove, male revolucije, ili ih je intenzivna usredsređenost na suverenitet udaljila od multipliciteta koja definiše potencijal množta.

Ključne reči: neoliberalizam, ontologija, subjektivitet, Imperija, biopolitika, množstvo

