

REVIEW ESSAY

A Global Civil Society in a
World Polity, or Angels and
Nomads Against Empire?



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Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media and International Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 254 pp.

Richard J. F. Day, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto, 2005), 262 pp.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 427 pp.

Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl, eds., *NGO Accountability: Politics, Principles and Innovations* (London: Earthscan, 2006), 288 pp.

Over the past quarter-century, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activist networks have increasingly “gone global.” Between 1973 and 1993, transnational social movement organizations concerned with human rights, the environment, peace, and development more than tripled in number, rising to over 600 organizations.¹ Formerly local and national NGOs and community organizations now regularly operate transnationally: swapping information, networking, coordinating campaigns, framing claims, and locating shared targets. This is a change not only in the frequency of interactions across borders, but also in the networks’ density, adaptability, complexity, and reach. Sidney Tarrow and Donatella Della Porta have called this trend “the most dramatic change we see in the world of contentious politics.”²

Transnational social movements are dynamic networks of multiple organizations and issues, forged in parallel and autonomous international summits, protest events, and via the Internet.³ They have even created their own space, the World Social Forum (WSF), as well as a web of regional, national, local, and thematic forums modeled on the WSF’s horizontal, “open space” format. Here, the movements deepen and broaden their solidarity ties

and joint analyses under the strategically ambiguous slogan that “Another World Is Possible.”

While diverse, the networks are united in the conviction that this alternative should be forms of governance other than neoliberal globalization. Activists decry this current global (dis)order as being characterized by mounting poverty and inequality within and among societies, corporate encroachment of “the commons,” environmental devastation, the feminization of poverty, the exacerbation of conflicts, and the erosion of democracy. They identify and denounce the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) as the main institutional promoters of neoliberalism.

Beyond this shared oppositional orientation, these actors have diverse—and often conflicting—demands, organizational cultures, tactics, and ultimate goals. At the most recent WSF in Nairobi, Immanuel Wallerstein spoke of a “family of movements,” replete with all the affinities, identifications, and squabbles that constitute such relationships. Broadly, the movements divide between “reformist” NGOs and more “radical” direct action social movements and networks. At bottom, the feuds between these two tendencies stem from fundamentally different conceptions of existing global governance and order (as well as their place within it) and from the degree and methods of change that each pursues. Contemporary activist forums like the WSF have brought these different circles into contact with one another and thus have helped to attenuate the polemic between them. Yet tensions remain, and there is evidence that the “other superpower” is both demobilizing and fracturing along traditional leftist fault lines.

But who are these new global actors? What are their points of convergence, contradiction, and outright conflict? And how do they engage with, legitimize, or challenge both the state and the international governance regimes that states have constructed? Finally, what can we learn about the nature of global governance from the movements’ relatively marginal vantage points? These questions orient this essay.

Each of the four books examined here offers a unique standpoint and insight into this upstart clan of nonstate (and sometimes antistate) actors that challenge the patrician families comprising global governance: those of states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and transnational corporations (TNCs). This essay will introduce two contrasting models of global governance to illustrate the divergent positions and visions of the reformist NGOs on the one hand, and anarchists and Marxist autonomists on the other: the *simple polity model* and the *imperial rhizome*, respectively.

The first two books—Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl’s *NGO Accountability* and Clifford Bob’s *The Marketing of Rebellion*—focus on the well-behaved, but conflicted, sons and daughters of an emergent, cosmopolitan, civil society. While rhetorically aloof from partisan politics, in practice these

actors seek greater rights, resources, recognition, and influence within a global polity dominated by states, IGOs, and corporations. These are the prototypical Northern-based, international NGOs (INGOs) with Southern beneficiaries, now frequently called “partners.”

In contrast, the other two works—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude* and Richard J. F. Day’s *Gramsci Is Dead*—exemplify the rebellious, nomadic, and prodigal sons and daughters in contemporary global social movements. These post-Marxists and anarchists battle against the reformers, and among themselves, for the hearts and minds of the anticapitalist youth—as well as those young at heart—within and against an oppressive, all-encompassing global “empire” and toward an open, egalitarian, and horizontally networked—or “rhizomatic”—world.

Together, these two pairs of books encompass, and indeed lay bare, the family resemblances and the sibling rivalries among activists who are striving to inform—and transform—global governance, the state, and capitalism at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

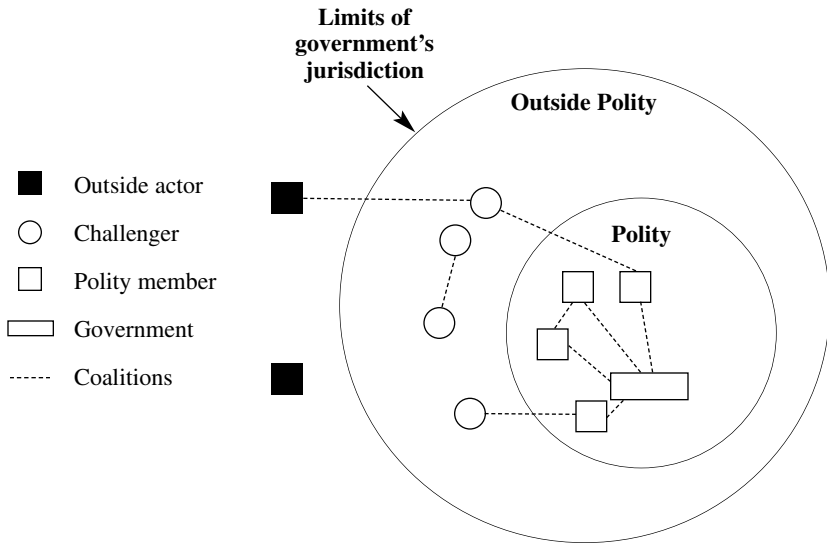
NGOs and the Domestic Polity Model Transposed to the Global Level

While activists, scholars, and policymakers acknowledge the conceptual and practical pitfalls of projecting the “domestic analogy” onto the international level,⁴ civil society actors often betray such a transposition in their assumptions, practices, and goals. Global politics is more complex, entailing a larger diversity of actors, more pathways for petitioning, and greater uncertainty. Yet civil society practices of demanding recognition, rights, and resources from governing agents goes largely unchanged and unchallenged.

This implicit assumption of global governance as the modern, liberal state writ large can be illustrated via the simple polity model depicted in Figure 1. The model represents a *regime*, which consists of *government* and its relations to the *population* that falls under its claimed jurisdiction. While government forms the hub, *polity members*, such as corporations and powerful interest groups, constitute political actors that enjoy routine access to government agents and their resources. Further out lie the *challengers*, that are also political actors yet lack, and aspire to, routine access to the government’s ear and purse. *Subjects* are unorganized individuals and groups who inhabit a government’s jurisdiction. Finally, *outside political actors*, including other governments, reside beyond the limits of jurisdiction, but may, through their ties to subjects, challengers, polity members, and indeed governments themselves, impinge upon the domestic polity.⁵

Transposition to the global level creates obvious difficulties. Instead of one “black box” government, all governance bodies—states, IGOs, and the

Figure 1 The Simple Polity Model



Source: Adapted from Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 11.

legal and normative regimes they establish—are potential avenues to petition for rights and resources. Yet because there is no single seat of authority, the nature and extent of rights differ and are contested while resources are dispersed and dynamic. This creates both threats and opportunities for polity members and challengers that must seek and maintain access to this diverse web of governance sites in order to make their demands, and also must expand as collective actors—often across borders—to enhance their power. Given the disaggregated nature of governance authority, there can be no final arbiter when rights are violated, and so attempts to uphold such rights are inconsistent, controversial, futile, or require force. In the global polity, theoretically there is no “outside” and thus no actors or sites beyond the regime’s jurisdiction. Jordan and van Tuijl’s *NGO Accountability* and Bob’s *The Marketing of Rebellion* illustrate well the difficulties of attempting to transpose this polity model.

Jordan and van Tuijl adopt a somber tone, ruing the INGO’s precipitous fall from grace:

In the final decade of the 20th century, there seemed to be a broad-based consensus that . . . NGOs were a good thing—as shepherds of development, as democratic agents and in making sense of globalization. NGOs

were seen as the core of active civil societies, supporting the delivery of public services and contributing to an ever-stronger wave of democratization that appeared unstoppable after the fall of the Berlin Wall. (p. 3)

In the early 1990s, the commanding heights achieved by the once lowly NGO seemed further proof that history had indeed (dead-)ended into liberal democracy. In this domestic analogy par excellence, INGOs were the vanguard of a nascent global civil society within an international society of democratic states. Via their expanding networks, they contested, petitioned, pleaded, and cajoled; and, in so doing, legitimized and empowered the emerging hubs of global governance. This was seen as the culmination of a longer project of NGOs being partners in bringing history to its screeching post-Cold War halt: from the missionary work that went hand in glove with colonization—and, more recently, the transition from communism—to their changing, but always complementary, roles in overseas development work as modernizer, public service provider, democracy promoter, and good governance watchdog.

No longer is this true. Domestic publics, academics, grassroots activists, IGOs, the media, corporations, and governments increasingly question by what authority NGOs purport to speak for others and aspire to influence domestic and international polities. NGOs have suffered a left-right, one-two punch from the popular backlash against the “Washington Consensus” and the post-9/11 empire striking back. They have drawn fire from the left as the willing handmaidens of neoliberal globalization. In addition, with the rising discourse of nonstate actors as threats to national security, NGOs are being painted by the right as Trojan horses that compromise state sovereignty and security as terrorist consorts (Jordan and van Tuijl, pp. 10–12). In the Foreword to *NGO Accountability*, Michael Edwards scolds NGOs for not heeding his call in the salad days of the mid-1990s to put their house in order. As a consequence, they are now bearing the brunt of the Bush administration’s restrictive measures like Executive Order 13224, the Patriot Act, and voluntary Anti-Terrorist Financing guidelines for charities issued by the US Treasury. Hostility toward NGO involvement in global governance, says Edwards, is a defining feature of neoconservative thinking. The war of ideas is also being waged to discredit NGOs by conservative think tanks aligned with the administration, such as the American Enterprise Institute’s NGO Watch project and the Rushford Report (p. viii).

NGO Accountability thus offers an overdue, internal debate on a growing problem that defies easy solution. The volume addresses questions of NGO rights, roles, responsibilities, and accountability. More broadly, this collection of essays grapples with the proper role of NGOs in local, national, and international governance structures. The thirteen chapters by NGO practitioners and scholars begin by surveying traditional approaches

of legal accountability, certification, and donor regimes. The book then moves to non-Western perspectives on accountability from China, Indonesia, and Uganda, and finishes by critically assessing recent transnational efforts at NGO accountability.

The strengths of a compilation of engaged, empirical case studies are considerable, including the quality and timeliness of the descriptive evidence, the concrete lessons drawn, and the critiques provided by insiders. Yet these strengths often carry with them weaknesses. For example, the book lacks a consistent argument, well-developed theory, and even concluding remarks. So, while useful evidence can be gleaned from each chapter, the work tacitly raises questions that go unaddressed.

The book brings three contradictions into sharp focus. The first lies between NGOs' assertion of autonomy and their admission of dependency. On the one hand, an NGO is a "self-governing, private, not-for-profit and with an explicit social mission" (p. 8). Yet its "intermediary organization with a defined legal body and organizational shape . . . qualifies it to receive assistance from donors" (p. 9). NGOs do not just give charity; they must also receive it. In order to be charitable, they must maintain donor patronage. This double-edged sword of the charitable status recurs throughout the book. For example, Hetty Kovach lambasts the weak accountability mechanisms of NGOs and their donor governments, IGOs, and corporations (pp. 195–210). If NGO accountability exists at all, it is biased in favor of powerful donors. Jem Bendell and Phyllida Cox point out that, while some 15 percent of all international development funds are funneled through NGOs, much of it is "phantom" money (pp. 109–126). Either it is squandered by highly paid consultants before reaching its target or it is bound by aid conditionalities that require purchases from donor country companies. Corporate donors are similarly motivated by self-interest, giving in order to influence public opinion and legislation and also to increase brand loyalty and expand market share. In the face of these mixed motives, it is little wonder that INGOs are reticent to pursue and make public candid assessments of their practices and projects, opting instead for largely glowing reports that gloss over failures or problems. Although the authors rightly blame donors and urge them to reassure INGOs that honest assessments will not result in losses of funding, given their patrons' self-serving motivations, NGOs are wise to keep their accountability cards close to their chests. Their collective resistance to practice greater transparency and accountability demonstrates that they have internalized this lesson.

A second contradiction arises from this notion of charity. NGOs aspire to be charitable organizations serving the "public good" and thus to stand above the political fray and beyond repute. Yet in practice, they pursue greater recognition, resources, and rights for themselves and their beneficiaries. They thus seek (in the language of the simple polity model) certification as *polity*

members as opposed to mere *challengers*. This dissonance between self-perception and action involves, on the one hand, a continual reaffirmation that their “moral authority” (read: power to influence) is “embedded in civil society, as distinct from political society.” NGOs are above and outside of politics, which is the (dirty) realm inhabited by political parties and others “struggling for control of the state” (Edwards’s “Foreword”; chapter 1). While admittedly not aspiring to the dictatorship of the nonprofit organization, their distinction seems unduly purist, and breaks down in actual practice. Corporations, too, do not seek to capture the state, and yet NGOs often denounce their undue political influence. Truth be told, there is a growing battle of interests and ideals between at least two types of challenger/polity members, the NGO-led advocacy network and the TNC, over who gets what, when, where, and how. To claim that either actor, by virtue of its pro-social motives, stands above or outside politics belies the nature of their conflict and its consequences. And because the liberal democratic terra firma upon which NGOs could stake their universal claims has eroded after September 11, 2001, they are forced to take overtly political stands. The previously uncontested “public goods” of human rights promoted by a vibrant civil society sector are under attack. No longer viewed as apolitical service providers, NGOs are now partial advocates and impartial watchdogs of other global political actors. Jordan and van Tuijl aver that, as NGOs contest the status quo, their credibility and legality are challenged in a variety of ways: by attempted co-optation or corruption; by disruption of their operations; and by violation of their fundamental rights (pp. 6–7).

A third contradiction evident in this book most clearly reveals the flaw of the “domestic analogy,” namely, that NGOs increasingly employ a rights discourse in a realm of global governance that lacks a liberal, democratic government capable of granting such rights. This perceived need to demand that their civil rights be recognized and protected betrays their rearguard action in these dark times: exposed as “charity cases” as much as charity givers; wings clipped by donors’ dictates and dubious motives; and halos tarnished and gowns soiled by their stooping to the political level. No longer hovering above the political terrain, they have come crashing to earth and are confronted with the fact that they are small-time players in the game of global politics, beholden to big actors whose state-centric or profit-maximizing interests they do not necessarily share.

This book reveals INGOs to be dependent and conflicted challengers that grudgingly aspire to global polity membership on a par with TNCs and other powerful interest groups. Yet to whom can they petition for this change in status from fallen angelic challenger to full-fledged polity member? While demanding that their civil rights be recognized in every domestic polity and at the global level, they are at the same time aware of the conceptual, legal, and practical difficulties of wresting rights out of hostile

domestic governments, let alone weak international organizations. Jordan and van Tuijl acknowledge the difficulties in constructing the global liberal polity issue by issue. Yet their book's contributors see little option but to press on in this quest for "rights-in-parts" from the local to the national to the global levels of governance.

Bob's *The Marketing of Rebellion* is a Zapatista-style "basta ya!" to all this NGO hand-wringing and soul-searching. He advises NGOs to "get real." You cannot change human nature or society, he avers, so it is better simply to embrace the rational, self-interested logic and try to beat other actors—or at least survive—within a competitive political market where scarcity increases the further out from the regime's core that one is located. Bob presents a more systematic and scholarly treatment of the anxieties and issues that the NGO insiders raise in the Jordan and van Tuijl volume. As a self-defined "skeptic" regarding the putative moral motivations of NGOs, Bob strives for a "more realistic" explanation of transnational networking, in which the fittest NGOs and social movement organizations are the most strategic. His work challenges more normatively liberal and constructivist international relations theorists who champion the NGO-led advocacy networks and the moral norms they help embed in global public opinion and political practice. While not completely dismissive, Bob demonstrates the obvious that NGOs have their own needs of organizational and mission maintenance, and therefore must first and foremost please their donors and members (pp. 1–8).

Bob seeks to shift the discourse away from a "global civil society" spawned by an emergent "global consciousness" eroding the realpolitik world of self-interested, competitive, and rational states. It makes more theoretical and practical sense, he says, to extend the logic of the latter into the former. It is, Bob argues, a jungle out there where solidarity is in short supply. Global civil society is thus more accurately viewed as a crowded, Darwinian terrain wherein needy groups must compete and differentiate themselves (p. 8).

Given this harsh environment, Bob seeks to answer how and why some local challengers become global causes with a network of supporters while others whose circumstances are equally, if not more, dire remain obscure and unassisted. He first sketches the dimensions and dynamics of this "transnational market" and then compares two contentious milieus: one being the Niger Delta and the other rebellious provinces in southern Mexico. Bob shows how the Ogoni struggle and the Zapatistas of Chiapas prevailed over their domestic challengers to win international support, attributing their success to strategic and organizational factors. His findings are sobering. Most local movements fail to attract international solidarity. When one of them succeeds, it sparks an upsurge in mobilization by others seeking support. But the price of "winning" is the need to reframe the movement's demands

in ways that have international appeal; for example, as environmental threats, human rights violations, or malfeasance on the part of powerful corporations or IGOs. While this reframing seems necessary to garner INGO patronage, it also diverts attention and resources from a group's original grievances and goals. The local movement may also take risks by overanticipating international support and transnational intervention. These actions will draw attention, forcing governments and other targeted polity members to respond. But apparent acquiescence or accommodation on the part of powerholders can give way to repression against "traitorous" challengers (pp. 181–185).

Viewed more abstractly, Bob's book fleshes out, advances, and even embraces the projection of the liberal, pluralistic polity model onto the international level. Although a skeptic, he is a sympathetic one, seeing transnational movements and NGOs as potentially valuable counterpoints in a global order dominated by state and corporate actors and their interests. To Bob, global civil society is embedded within a nascent global polity of unequal competition, replete with power differentials and tensions. Desperate and disadvantaged domestic challengers are relegated to subject status when viewed within the global polity context. Thus, they must contort their demands and compete against those who might otherwise be local allies for the attention and gifts of more powerful actors. *The Marketing of Rebellion* transposes the NGO sector onto a global liberal polity model. In order to move from the position of "subject" to that of "challenger," local movements must throw the "boomerang" and try to hitch it to an INGO, preferably one that is close to the core with maximum resources, credibility, and access.

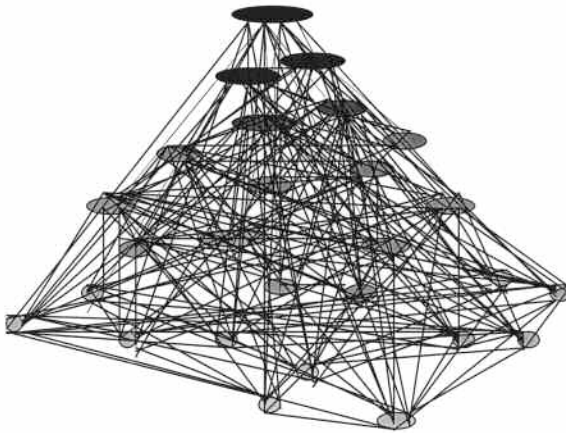
Taken together, *NGO Accountability* and *The Marketing of Rebellion* reveal the NGO to be an organizational type conflicted over its self-definition and motives, its relationship to its "stakeholders," and its role in an emergent global polity. Returning to the family metaphor, NGOs appear as confused, conniving, or petulant children, fashioning themselves as little angels in order to stay in their father's good graces. Yet their incessant cries of "You're not the boss of me!" are each day less credible and, indeed, have grown annoying and embarrassing. Yell too loud or get too far out of line, and the purse strings are yanked, exposing the myth of their pious autonomy. In the final analysis then, NGOs are forced by their constitutions to remain the more-or-less well-behaved sons and daughters of their powerful patrons. They do not—and indeed cannot—fundamentally challenge the state, the corporation, or the structure of international governance. Rather, their aspirations run parallel, and indeed complement, the two-level game of the domestic and global polity. Within both, they seek to move from the role of challenger to that of a more prominent polity member enjoying greater access to governing agents and resources. In so doing, they help to construct the pluralist polity model and its logic of demanding rights at the global level.

Post-Marxists and Postanarchists Within and Against Empire

A decidedly different vision of global governance and power emerges from the more radical wings of contemporary social movements. While social-democratic currents denounce corporate encroachment of the state's responsibilities and authority, and thus call for reembedding economies within reinvigorated welfare states, recent neo-Marxist and anarchist thought has largely converged around Hardt and Negri's model of the *rhizomatic empire*. I have attempted to sketch this tendency toward a globally networked political order in Figure 2. According to the authors:

Empire is materializing before our very eyes. . . . Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world. . . . The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered and deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command.⁶

Figure 2 The Imperial Rhizome



Source: Author's depiction of Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's "empire."

“Empire,” as elaborated in Hardt and Negri’s book with that title, is a considerable innovation in theorizing postmodern sovereignty and global governance. It infuses Polybius’s tripartite governance structure of imperial Rome with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizomatic network in which nodal points proliferate on an open plane and connect with all others.⁷ The top three tiers, or plateaus, of the rhizome constitute Polybius’s imperial *monarchy*, which exercises control through the destructive power of the bomb. The United States holds the position of the pinnacle node, wielding a monopoly of force. Its powerful allies reside just below, using IGOs to regulate international monetary exchanges and exercising power over culture and so-called “biopolitics”—that is, the power to regulate social life from the inside. The two center plateaus comprise what Hardt and Negri term the *aristocracy*, which exercises financial control via judgment. Networks of TNCs bring the command structure of the higher monarchical tier to life. Below the corporate nodes are states, which have the function of filtering the powers above and disciplining their subject populations. Finally, the nodal points and relations at the base of the imperial pyramid constitute what Hardt and Negri call the matrix of *democracy*. Here, we find governments of the Global South, operating alone and through forums like the UN General Assembly. Also at the base is a wide range of groups seeking to capture, tame, mediate, and “represent” the popular interests of the multitude. These actors include NGOs, religious organizations, and the media. The multitude is regulated by and made *subject* to this “ethereal” web of control primarily through superstition and fear. There is no possibility of escaping the imperial rhizome, no ground upon which to construct collective actors or a political program beyond empire.

Yet empire is neither merely an apparatus of control nor a theoretical model or paradigm. Hardt and Negri also seek to chart—theoretically and politically—the possibility of subverting imperial power. It is precisely this lowly multitude that holds the potential to act *within* and also *against* empire. Imperial control is conceived as parasitic, feeding off the productive energies of its multitudinous host. This constitutive power of the multitude makes empire possible; thus the multitude can also destroy it and construct a postimperial, global order.⁸

In their sequel to *Empire*, under the title of *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri further theorize the bases for counter-imperial, democratic social structures. Toward that end, they rethink concepts such as power, war, resistance, democracy, the proletariat, and the commons. Hardt and Negri are ambitious, in that they liken their two works to Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, now written at a new and equally portentous historical moment. Hobbes gave definition to the social body and citizenship for the nascent bourgeoisie and articulated a form of absolute authority that would develop into the modern notion of national sovereignty. In a similar vein, Hardt and

Negri theorize an emergent global sovereignty—*empire*—as well as a counter-hegemonic global class—*multitude*—that is capable of creating an alternative global society at the cusp of postmodernity. “Hobbes Is Dead” could be the *Multitude*’s grandiose subtitle, and in his stead resurrects, and reconstructs, Marx. Here, “multitude” recasts the proletariat and class struggle in much broader terms. The industrial working class cedes its counter-hegemonic position to a new formation in the shape of immaterial social production (e.g., communications, relationships, and even forms of life). This shift to immaterial production, Hardt and Negri argue, creates the possibility for “real democracy,” which they define as “the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom” (p. 67).

Although *Multitude* is less obtuse than *Empire*, the sequel is still a Byzantine read. Only its conceptualizations of global order and change are addressed here. *Multitude* identifies two countervailing tendencies within the imperial rhizome model of global governance. From the top, “Empire spreads globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict” (p. xiii). Yet simultaneously, the multitude produces “new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters” (p. xiii). While both forms of power are “biopolitical”—in that they engage the entirety of social life—they do so in different ways. The top-down “biopower” of empire emanates from command nodes and casts itself as a transcendent sovereign authority that imposes order. In contrast, the multitude is involved in bottom-up “biopolitical production,” which is immanent to society and creates relationships through collaborative forms of labor and gives content to democracy. Whereas the vertical biopower creates a *people*, the *nation*, and indeed a *civil society*, the horizontal, biopolitical production constitutes the *multitude* as a multiplicity of identities or subjectivities that cannot be reduced or subsumed under a single unity (pp. xiv, 93–95).

How is this multitude to maintain its diversity while managing to communicate, build solidarity, and act together against empire? This is not just a philosophical or academic question. Indeed, it is perhaps the most pressing concern of contemporary activists. Now that the “unity” politics of workers’ movements and political parties is largely discredited, how do today’s social movements recognize shared affinities and establish solidarity among diverse groups that wish to maintain their autonomy? Furthermore, do Hardt and Negri present a convincing case to abandon the politics of demand and its project of extending the liberal state and rights regime to the global level of governance?

In their defense, *Multitude* is a philosophical work, not a how-to guide for activists. Yet as a self-styled latter-day Marx and Engels writing on and indeed participating in an actual global rebellion, it does not seem too much

to ask that Hardt and Negri provide the rough contours of a concrete project. Strewn throughout the text—which is their maddening way—are clues. On page 69, they advocate “resistance, exodus, and the emptying out of the enemy’s power.” On page 347, they applaud “new political weapons,” such as carnival, mimicry, street demonstrations, and illegal immigration. A weeklong “global biopolitical strike” that “would block any war” is casually suggested, but not elaborated (p. 347). We are scolded throughout that it is “not a matter of taking power and commanding the armies but destroying the very possibility” (p. 347). In this war against war, there will be martyrs—not suicide bombers, mind you, but those who will be killed as a consequence of their Lutheran love and rage (pp. 346–353).

In such a manner, do Hardt and Negri convince us that it is even possible, let alone likely, that the multitude can move beyond empire? They assure us that the historical moment is ripe for an emancipatory “event,” but they also acknowledge that the multitude might be recaptured in a “new regime of exploitation and control” (p. 212). The unilateralism of the United States is today being checked by “aristocratic” state powers and TNCs who demand a “new magna carta” to reinvigorate global productive forces via poverty reduction, debt cancellation, and technology transfer for poorer countries. This potential “new deal” with the aristocracy would not bring about global democracy, but instead a more multilateral form of imperial control. Hardt and Negri view this moment as a strategic opportunity for the multitude to build alliances with aristocratic forces that could lead to revolutionary change. Perhaps, but such alliances could just as easily lure the restive multitude back under the imperial command.

The preceding two paragraphs illustrate the scattershot and slippery nature of Hardt and Negri’s reasoning. They have a predilection to reinterpret every defeat to the proletariat cum multitude as a victory deferred. Every potential threat is an opportunity to somehow, spontaneously be grasped. This optimism gives their critics as much fodder as it gives hope to their sympathizers. But after wading through 400 pages of cryptic fortune-cookie logic, I came away with little more guidance on the feasibility or wisdom of bringing down empire.

Like Bob to Jordan and van Tuijl, Day’s *Gramsci Is Dead* attempts to get a little more real than Hardt and Negri. Day is hesitant to appropriate the terms of “empire” and “multitude,” regarding them as “Eurocentric, androcentric” and “class-determinist,” and so simply renames empire “the neoliberal project” (p. 6). This is not necessarily a bad move because while running broadly parallel to Hardt and Negri, and engaging with many of the same authors, Day’s argument is considerably clearer and more accessible. He engages quite masterfully with anarchist, Marxist, and liberal traditions before transitioning to poststructuralism and finally locating himself within postanarchism and autonomist Marxism. This is the only position, Day

argues, from which to chart a path of global governance that can bring about progressive social change that responds to the needs and desires of diverse identities without unifying them forcibly under a single common project.

In contrast to Hardt and Negri, Day is skeptical about recent mass mobilizations against existing forms of global governance. He dismisses the “elitist practice” of summit hopping that drains resources. “Many do not lament the demise of this phase of struggle,” and Day is apparently one of them (p. 3). Large protests only temporarily impede or marginally reform existing structures, he opines. These actions fail to address fundamental problems associated with capitalism and the state.

Yet as a scholar-activist, Day knows better than to misrepresent street demonstrations as solely “brought to you by Ryanair.” If governments have managed to chase people off the streets through outright repression, nationalistic propaganda that instills fear of the terrorist “other,” or disillusionment in the face of flouting the popular will, is it not a defeat and a cause for concern and reflection?

Not so, says Day. On the contrary, this is an ideal moment to embrace a more “radical” tactic, such as writing books, bartering, and cooperative squatting. For him, mass mobilization is not necessarily the way to move forward in struggle. Instead, Day makes a virtue out of marginality, as anarchists often do. We are urged to break once and for all with the “popular fiction” that effective social change comes through massive revolts on large terrains. Marxists, liberals, and post-Marxist reformers are all seen as trapped by the same majoritarian logic, the politics of demand, and the hegemonic notion that revolutions generate comprehensive transformation (pp. 8, 65).

Day argues instead for the progressive potential of “micropolitics,” or the politics of minority rather than majority. Micropolitics pursues nonuniversalizing, nonhierarchical, noncoercive relationships based on mutual aid and shared ethical commitments. Contemporary radical activism, or what Day terms the “newest social movements,” entails “conscious attempts to alter, impede, destroy or construct alternatives to dominant structures, processes, practices and identities” (p. 4). These struggles “seek change to the root . . . to address not just the *content* of current modes of domination and exploitation, but also the *forms* that give rise to them” (p. 4). These are the “non-branded” strategies and tactics of independent media (“Indymedia”), affinity groups, Reclaim the Streets, and the direct action black, pink, and yellow blocs seen at street protests. These practices are also revealed in indigenous movements among the Mohawk Nation, the Zapatistas, and aboriginal provisional governments in Australia and New Zealand as well as among radical feminists and gay activists. What makes these movements unique and potentially subversive is that they do not—in

the way of liberal and Marxist traditions—aim to take over the state or to reform capitalism. Rather, they seek to recover or establish their ability to determine the conditions of their own existence while encouraging others to do the same.

Day seeks to convince us that the “hegemony of hegemony” of old-style radical politics is being overtaken by new politics of “affinity for affinity.” The *politics of demand* is being replaced by a *politics of the act*. Radical social movements today are realizing that, by demanding rights and freedoms to be gifted from the state and other corporate forms, people only perpetuate their oppression (p. 15). Recalling Figure 2 above, the newest social movements are no longer letting the parasitic empire feed upon their labor and retain them as subjects. They are breaking this relationship by avoiding making such demands in the first place and instead networking directly among themselves. These newest social movements point the way, via direct action and a rejection of the state and corporations, toward other ways of being.

Yet one cannot escape the paradox that the tactics and movements that Day champions are by definition *micropolitics*—the politics of a minority—and seem destined to remain as such. Moreover, Day admits that the decentralization of power within global governance does not necessarily mean greater freedom: “Much more likely under current conditions [it] means a shift from modern discipline to postmodern control” characterized as hierarchical and authoritarian (p. 216). This realistic assessment contradicts Day’s otherwise optimistic, even utopian tone. Here we glimpse a future world that looks much like our own, where imperial control persists and the politics of demand seems to be the only global game possible to play.

Returning to the schism between reformers and radicals, Day avers that “civil society . . . is not only superfluous, but dangerous, as it presumes and reinforces both the state and corporate forms” (p. 213). *Gramsci Is Dead* provides the most theoretically detailed and conceptually clear explanation of why this cleavage exists and is unlikely to be sutured. Day’s measured analysis reveals these disputes to be much more than merely semantic, for they spring from irreconcilable conceptions of the state, global governance, democracy, and the possibility of human agency and freedom, resistance, and alternative forms of social organization. NGOs and other reformers in practice project the liberal, pluralistic polity model onto the international level. They seek to transform civil society actors’ roles from marginal challengers to formidable polity members on par with TNCs and IGOs, and thereby gain greater access to governing agents and resources and rights protections within an emergent global polity. However, anarchists and autonomist Marxists envision a decentered and deterritorialized, yet all encompassing, global network of rule and resistance to it. Within this imperial rhizomatic terrain, radical social movements must practice nonuniversalizing, nonhierarchical, and noncoercive relationships based on mutual

assistance and shared ethics in order to destroy and replace dominant statist and corporate structures and practices.

Yet as disparate as these two tendencies are from one another, they nonetheless share some affinities and common practices: NGOs and anarchists both bristle at the notion of engaging directly with their adversary, which they attribute to their own superiority, but in the process betray their real marginality and lack of power or influence. NGOs claim an autonomous sphere and pure motive above and beyond the dirty game of politics while de facto they engage in and even transpose the politics of demand to the global level. Anarchists advise withdrawal into experimental ghettos in the hopes that the state and corporations will wither and die as a consequence. Neither seems like a particularly honest self-appraisal nor a winning strategy in the face of mounting oppression, inequality, and injustice. Contemporary transnational activists by and large acknowledge this fact by seeking out broad-based coalitions that avoid one extreme or the other. Via their praxis, they articulate new forms of global governance that fall somewhere between, or beyond, the two ideal typical models depicted in this essay. Scholars and policymakers alike could learn much from studying these alternative worlds in the making. 🌐

Notes

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1. Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco, eds., *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 47–52.

2. Sidney Tarrow and Donatella Della Porta, *Transnational Protests and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 6.

3. Mario Pianta, “Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society: An Update,” available at www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role/conf.htm

4. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977); Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Richard Falk, *The Promise of World Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

5. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 11–12.

6. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. xi–xii (emphasis in original).

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 304–350; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

8. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. xv, 359–361.



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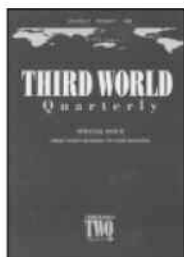
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