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### Entering the Empire

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# *Entering the Empire*

The contemporaneity and the situatedness of this volume are marked by transformations in the configuration of power relations globally. The changing ways in which many of us realize and experience these transformations in our different geographical, political, personal and professional locations have made it necessary to devise new conceptual tools that will hopefully help us understand better our present and our past conditions. The need for a new vocabulary was manifest in the most definite way through the immense popularity that the term “empire” has acquired in the last few years. This term is being used in diverse accounts and approaches to contemporary forms of global order, structures of rule, and foreign policy. Until a few years ago the term was mostly used to describe systems of political power that were considered to belong to bygone historical eras. The notion of “empire” referred either to pre-modern and pre-national power relations (the empires of Antiquity and the Middle Ages), or to forms of colonial

exploitation and control. Quickly after its reappearance, “empire” has now become a keyword between social scientists, activists, journalists and social commentators. We should not underestimate the crucial role that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s book *Empire* has played in the popularization of the term and the concept since its publication in 2001. According to Hardt and Negri the empire is the new political order that emerged after the overthrow of colonial regimes and the collapse of Soviet barriers to the capitalist world market. The globalization of economic and cultural exchange that marked that period was accompanied by the emergence of a new global order, a new logic and structure, a new form of political sovereignty – the empire. This new political regime is in the authors’ view post-colonial and post-modern.

## *Introduction*

Hardt and Negri's publication certainly does not constitute the definitive starting point in the exploration of these new globalizing forces that have emerged over the last several decades. Globalization theory, as it was developed especially during the 1990s, but also world system theories, world history and post-colonial studies have provided us with a huge corpus of innovative and insightful scholarship. Negri and Hardt drew on this literature and, in many instances, moved beyond it in the sense that they avoided several of the conceptual hang-ups that marked globalization theory. Current political developments have superseded many of the issues that concerned debates about the conflict between the welfare state and globalization forces, between "consumption and social production" and between the nation-state and international or global institutions. More importantly, the new concept of empire has definitely helped us to criticize simplistic views of globalization as a liberating force based on the false celebration of the declining, oppressing potential of state authority. Negri and Hardt argued forcefully that the decline in the sovereignty of nation-states does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined. Finally, their book provided us with a conceptual framework for the analysis of a world characterized by interconnectedness, biopolitics, transnational subjects, deterritoriality, and wars in the name of "justice".

Thus, the term "empire" has dynamically entered our academic and political vocabulary. It has done so not so much because it gives us a better insight in the doings and happenings of the emerging global order, but because of its power to point at a new political subject, the "multitude", that now has a name, even though it is doing so by bracketing diverse subjectivities. The power of the concept of "empire" and of the intellectual project that has introduced it also derives from its historical embeddedness. Whereas globalization theory has insisted almost exclusively on the novelty of globalizing forces and practices, the "empire" is presented as a new theory of history, concerned to disentangle the plane of immanence from the plane of transcendence. Hardt and Negri "resuscitated" history by placing a new post-modern and post-colonial political subject at the center of historical process. And they do so by means of the good old tool of grand historical narration. After warning us not to confuse the new empire with nineteenth-century imperialism or with other older forms of imperial organization, they attempt to reconstruct history in the *longue durée* through a genealogy of configurations of sovereignty.

The publication of *Empire* was timely. The political and military developments of the last few years have challenged our understandings of the world in more than one way. The United States and a few European countries are waging a war in Iraq and Afghanistan in complete discordance with international law and justice and violating the sovereignty of those two countries. The proliferation of military actions, the violation of human rights in Iraq and elsewhere, the disregard for the anti-war protests of millions of people around the world and the on-going plans for global restructuring and the "remaking" of the Middle East called for a new understanding of US foreign policy and multiplied the questions regarding the global structures of power. Is the war in Iraq a passage from hegemony to domination? Is US foreign policy a return of classic forms of imperialism? Is the new constellation of global power based rather on force than on consent? Has the constant "war on terror" since 9/11 created a permanent "state of emergency" and, if so, what has been the impact on citizenship and civil rights?

The militarization of international politics created turbulence and internal divisions also in the context of European Union politics. To a certain extent these conflicts reflect the crisis that the vision of a united Europe has undergone in recent years and resonated with the heritage of Europe's own imperial past handed down to current politics. Europe was the birthplace of some of the mightiest and durable empires, empires that spread beyond the European continent to Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania. Until the First World War millions of people in central, eastern and southeastern Europe lived in the three empires of the time (Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian), whereas until the mid-twentieth century western European countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy) possessed colonies or at least a "glorious" colonial past. The end of the Second World War, the rise of US hegemony, the demise of European empires, decolonisation and the confrontation with the Soviet "empire" gave impetus to the process of European integration. The European Union as a supranational entity and a new mode of governance was founded on the post-imperial condition. But this, as we now know, was not enough for the unification of Europe. What is the place and the new role of sovereign states in the context of globalization and supranational modes of governance? The differences between the countries of "old" and "new" Europe reflect also power relations and tensions within Europe. The ambivalent attitude towards the European Constitution showed the divergence between the political priorities of EU citizens and their governments' policies regarding the principles of unification. Moreover, unification is contentious because it presupposes a constitutive "outside", which, according to circumstances, could vary from rogue states to illegal immigrants or from Muslims to the Chinese. The "politics of fear" lend legitimacy to European governments' drive to use political, economic, legal and military means to discipline or exclude the "barbarians" within and without Europe.

Making an issue of these diverse political developments, this volume is an invitation to think about the notion and the realities of empire both historically as well as contemporarily. Any attempt to discuss empire is inextricably related to the new uses of an old term, the recent and past debates about imperialism and colonialism, but mostly to the current challenge felt inside and beyond academia to contemplate on configurations of global structures of power in the past, present and future.

### ***Empire(s) Revisited***

Empire as a term and as an intellectual and political project has obtained a heavy conceptual luggage. The recirculation of the term that evokes a genealogy of forms of political sovereignty certainly provokes historians – alongside scholars in other fields of social sciences – to intervene and to question the new uses of an old term. And vice versa, in understanding our present condition in the context of post-national inscriptions of imperialism, we are challenged to reflect on a term that we have long been using, but which now has acquired new conceptual and political connotations. These different kinds of realization were the starting point of our engagement with empire. This fifth volume of *Historein* is the outcome of a rather long itinerary of discussions, workshops and meetings. It was sparked by a reading group on Hardt and Negri's *Empire* at the University of Thessaly. The discussion was further stimulated by the annual lectures organized by the Department

of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology at the University of Thessaly. These exchanges culminated in a conference co-organized by the Department and *Historein* in June 2003 in Volos. The articles of the present volume are based on some of the papers presented at the conference. The articles by Robert Young and Lluís Roura i Aulinas were submitted separately.

In his “Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental” Robert Young addresses a very important moment in the formation of the neo- or post-colonial condition which also constitutes the historical background of the contemporary appearances of empire. Young emphasizes how the Bandung Conference (1955) marks the moment when the former colonized nations expressed their will to establish an international political, economic and ideological identity independent from the communist East and the capitalist West. He follows the disjunction between different orbits of post-colonial politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America and points to the ways in which these led to the Tricontinental Conference in Havana (1966). The latter constituted the critical point of entry into our contemporary debates over empire because it represented a coming together of the anti-colonial movements and was marked by the public identification of the US as the leading force of global imperialism.

Following a reverse timeline Margarita Miliori explores the ideological formation of British notions of empire in “Imagining the ‘Global’? National Europe, Imperial Ideology and the Legacies of Rome in Nineteenth-Century Britain”. She explores the ideological foundations of British notions of the empire, emphasizes their correlation with the Roman idea of the imperium and points to the role that visions of empire played in intellectual articulations of nationhood as well as Europeanness in Britain.

In “Reflections on the Politics of Mourning: Feminist Ethics and Politics in the Age of Empire” Athena Athanasiou approaches the empire from the point of view of the analytical categories utilized in order to explore sovereignty in contemporary cultural and political analysis. Athanasiou studies the *Women in Black* group in order to foreground mourning as a form of political activism that raises critical theoretical questions concerning subjectivity, otherness and biopolitics. In view of the radical politics performed by *Women in Black* Athanasiou points to the role of mourning in contemporary claims – and challenges – to sovereignty expressed through the biopolitical nomos of metropolitan as well peripheral loci globally.

Rebecca Karl explores the various resurgences of the concept of the “Asiatic mode of production” in the context of Chinese historiography and politics. In her article “The Asiatic Mode of Production: National and Imperial Formations”, Karl argues that the concept’s comeback has not resulted as part of a general rethinking of Marxist modes of production, but rather as part of a reinterpretation of Chinese history and historiography in the post-Mao period. Karl traces the history of the concept from the late nineteen twenties/early nineteen thirties to the nineteen nineties and she relates its resurgence to the end of revolutionary historical paradigms and the rise of more nationalistic, modernizationist varieties.

In his article “From Machiavelli to the Sultans: Power Networks in the Ottoman Imperial Context” Demetrios Stamatopoulos traces the disciplinary origin of the concept of “power networks” from nineteenth-century structural-functional social analyses and sociometrics to communication

studies and political science. Through a network analysis of the Ottoman Empire Stamatopoulos leads us to a more contemporary envisioning of the empire, such as the one presented by Hardt and Negri, in order to argue that the action of power networks has the potential to subvert the centrality of imperial space because of their substantial connection to the cultural factor and the continuous contradictions to which the activities of the network's agents can give rise.

Ada Dialla in her article "Empire and Nation: Tensions and Convergences in Russia, 1861–1905" discusses the relation between nation and state in the context of the historiography of Tsarist Russia. She focuses on the "new Russian imperial history" that argued that while the Tsars in the second half of the nineteenth century had a set of policies of Russification, these did not represent a consistent, uniform strategy of establishing a predominance of Russian culture but aimed more at the unity of a non-national imperial state. Dialla traces this tension between state and nation in the debates among three intellectuals of the late nineteenth century (Ivan A. Aksakov, Aleksandr A. Kireev and Vladimir S. Solov'ev) that defined in very different terms the relation between patriotism and nationalism, assigned a different role to the Orthodox faith in making up the character of the state, and envisioned a different future for the ethnicities that made up imperial Russia.

Lluís Roura i Aulinas' addresses the historiography of another Empire, that of Spain, in "L'Empire hispanique et l'idée d'empire dans l'historiographie espagnole moderne". He argues that from the seventeenth century the unity of Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella was associated with the expansion and the formation of empire. In the nineteenth century the imperial past was idealized and identified with a particular national Castillian history, which was based on Catholicism and covered the whole Iberian peninsula. Nationalist historiography, closely connected with political history, was reinvigorated in the nineteen nineties with the view to establishing Spanish exceptionalism and uniqueness in world history, and from this viewpoint the imperial dimension became of paramount importance for the nationalist vision of Spanish history.

A certain nostalgia for the imperial past influences the historiography of the Habsburg Empire, as Konstantinos Raptis demonstrates in his article "Discord or Achievement? Reflections on the Habsburg Empire, 1848–1918". The Habsburg Empire, or after 1867 the Dual Monarchy, was seen by many contemporaries as a model of peaceful coexistence of different nationalities. Its sudden collapse in 1918, however, has puzzled historians ever since. Raptis examines the structural problems of the Empire and offers an overview of the ongoing debate on the causes of the dissolution in order to argue that the images of the past in the historiography have been shaped by changing interests and priorities.

In his article "The Visibility of History – Bridging the Gap between Historiography and the Fine Arts" in the *Interventions* Jörn Rüsen addresses a question that is pertinent to history as a discipline as it concerns the foundations of historical knowledge. What is the relation between art and history? Can history be visualized, and furthermore, can historical sense or meaning be transformed into sensual awareness? Rüsen argues that the power of aesthetics to generate historical meaning is rather weak. However, because aesthetic and historical sense transform contingent moments into meaningful time, historians should take art into consideration when trying to make sense of the past and articulate historical meaning.

The discussion about post-national formations of imperialism and the recirculation of the concept of empire in order to name a new global order marks the intersection between academic preoccupations and the living history of contemporary political, economic and cultural changes. The concept of empire reorients our historical understanding towards the transnational perspective as it necessitates the use of analytical categories that supersede the conceptual repertoire of the nation-state and its prerogatives. This reorientation has a twofold effect on historical and social studies. On the one hand, the elaboration of transnational perspectives is seemingly leading to a renewed interest in world history and analysis. Committed to the balance between global analysis and in-depth local studies and to the study of the geographical and historical multiplicity of political formations, this new global history defies the Eurocentricism that has often marked world history. On the other hand, the renewed interest in the study of empire is marked by an enlarged understanding of the concept of sovereignty. The latter is now evident not only in the realm of state politics and formal ideologies, but also in the broad range of practices, activities and positionings that are related to the formation of subjects and subjectivity at various social levels.

*Past and Present Empires* aims at promoting such discussions and seeks to contribute to the deepening of the intersection of academic discourse and contemporary history. This objective derives from Historein's commitment to the idea that history provides us with the opportunity not only to consume or to produce theory, but, more importantly, to trouble theory.

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