

# Back to the future?

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## **Empire**

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000

## **Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race**

Paul Gilroy

London: Penguin, 2000

There was a time when the energies of the Left were wholly invested in envisioning and bringing into being a new social order in which differences such as those of class, race and gender were either effaced or rendered irrelevant. For some time now, however, the more interesting intellectual debates have been concerned with 'difference'—with the ethical imperative to recognise and attend to it rather than subsume it, and with critiques of modernity, Enlightenment and so on, which can be seen as having ignored or sought to efface it. Both the books here are at odds with that concern. They are so not because they think a concern with difference is inherently misplaced, but rather because they argue that certain dramatic social changes mean that our relation to this concern should also be changing. For Hardt and Negri the logic of globalisation is not only inexorable, but desirable—the forward march of capitalism in the form of a deterritorialised global empire also leads to the possibilities of an intensified resistance by the proletariat, here redesignated as the 'multitude'. The endpoint is a cosmopolitan communism not unlike that envisioned by Marx. Theories such as postcolonialism and post-modernism, concerned with deconstructing the binary logic through which the modern is thought and lived, are tilting at windmills, for the new capitalism which has developed itself deconstructs binaries, just as it dissolves territories and all fixity. For Paul Gilroy, 'raciology'—by which he means not only racism but all forms of thinking and practice which accord race significance—is in crisis, and we now have the opportunity to leave it behind once and for all. Although using race, ethnicity and culture once gave the victims of racism some critical purchase, this now yields ever

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diminishing returns. Gilroy envisions a supersession of differences in a new universalism which he designates as 'planetary humanism'.

It may just be coincidence, or it may mark a shift in the intellectual mood of our times, that both the books featured here seek to go 'beyond' the contemporary concern with difference and that in both cases, the 'going beyond' involves a 'return' to earlier visions of universalism and cosmopolitanism. To be sure, the 'return' is no simple one, for these are theoretically and politically sophisticated works. Hardt and Negri are well aware that globalisation has usually meant Europeanisation, and Gilroy is keenly aware that humanism and colonialism went hand in hand, and draws our attention to that fact. These authors aim not to reinstate universalisms as if their critiques had never happened or were simply in error, but rather point to new forms of human solidarity that surpass difference, rather than suppressing it. Even so, it will be my contention that some of these arguments are unconvincing. Whether the (re)instatement of humanism and universalism is desirable and feasible still requires that we think through difference, and (to declare my own commitments) postcolonial theory is still a necessary element in this rethinking. The project of accounting for difference has not yet exhausted itself, and therefore it is too early as yet to 'return to the future'.

The central argument of *Empire* is signalled by its title: imperialism is over, and has been replaced by Empire. Globalisation has meant that states' control over their territory is becoming increasingly ineffective, but this has led not to sovereignty disappearing, but rather to its being coded and exercised in historically novel ways: 'Our basic hypothesis is that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire' (p xii). The novelty of this lies in the fact that sovereignty exists without territory—'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 system within its open, expanding frontiers' (p xii), and its defining feature is precisely that it has no location—'Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*' (p 190).

This political transformation is intimately linked with other transformations, including the increasing importance of the service sector (itself an aspect of what the authors label the 'informalization of production'), and hence of the 'immaterial labour' which produces such immaterial goods (p 290), which in turn is directly connected with the 'mass refusal of the disciplinary regime' which began in the 1960s. The social movements spawned then and since destroyed an existing regime of production (including the production of subjectivities) and invented another (p 275). Even this brief mention of a few aspects of the Hardt/Negri account of how capitalism has changed serves to convey something of the nature of the analysis, one in which everything is connected with everything else (although the nature of the connections is often rather imprecise), and where every page is crackling with intellectual energy. The more general point to emerge is that any distinctions between 'economic' and 'political' and 'cultural' (let alone base and superstructure) is increasingly inappropriate, because it is the nature of this new beast that all these are intertwined with each other, so that the production and reproduction of power also produces subjectivity and material and immaterial commodities: 'In Empire and

its regime of biopower, economic production and political constitution tend increasingly to coincide' (p 41).

Hardt and Negri are indebted to Marx as well as others (perhaps most notably Deleuze<sup>1</sup>), but their departures from Marxism are also extensive, and these aspects of their analysis will not find favour among more orthodox Marxists. Nonetheless, the general (dialectical) tenor of their argument remains deeply indebted to the Marxist tradition. Just as Lenin's amendments to Marx's theory were justified by arguing that such revisions were occasioned by a change in the nature of capitalism, so Hardt and Negri anchor their theoretical innovations mainly on the fact that the object of analysis has changed. For Lenin the transmutation of capitalism into monopoly capitalism led to the phenomenon of imperialism (and the need for a concept to capture and render this new reality); for Hardt and Negri imperialism in turn has been rendered redundant—it eventually became a fetter to the deterritorializing flows and smooth space of capitalist development, and ultimately it had to be cast aside' (p 333) and replaced by Empire. Both the analysis and the language deliberately signal the influence of Marx.

The rhythms and dynamic of their analysis also mirror the form, though not always the content, of Marx's argument. Marx, as all know, welcomed capitalism as a historically progressive form; Hardt and Negri similarly proclaim that Empire, for all its inequities, is to be welcomed: 'We claim that Empire is better in the same way that Marx insists that capitalism is better than the forms of society and modes of production that came before it. Marx's view is grounded on a healthy and lucid disgust for the parochial and rigid hierarchies that preceded capitalist society as well as on a recognition that the potential for liberation is increased in the new situation' (p 43).

The development of Empire means that the struggle against it is raised to a new and global terrain, free of the petty nationalisms and localisms which characterised (and all too often derailed) anti-capitalist struggle before. The 'multitude', that expanded notion of the proletariat ('a broad category that includes all those whose labor is directly or indirectly exploited by and subjected to capitalist norms of production and reproduction' (p 52)), is driven to a struggle against Empire on a global terrain for an end to all forms of exploitation. A new form of solidarity and militancy is visible, according to Hardt and Negri, in struggles as diverse as those of Chinese students in Tiananmen square, as the Intifada, the struggles in the Chiapas, 'race riots' in Los Angeles, and so on. They register the fact that these struggles do not in fact communicate with each other, that they don't seem to direct themselves against a common enemy and that the language in which they struggle is usually not that of socialism. Despite this, such struggles, write Hardt and Negri, 'directly attack the global order of Empire and seek a real alternative' (pp 56–57), and for this reason *Empire* ends by expressing optimism that the multitude will succeed in becoming a revolutionary political subject.

Two questions arise from this, one principally a question of logic and fact, concerning the plausibility of this sketch of the liberatory potential of Empire, the other an ethical question concerning the desirability of 'liberation' from one's particularity. I will consider each in turn. There are ample precedents within the Marxist tradition for the Hardt and Negri version of revolutionary optimism, and many of them are directly connected precisely with the 'globalisation' of Marxism

itself, that is, with the extension of Marxism beyond Western Europe and North America. It was Lenin who made Marxism relevant to the non-Western world,<sup>2</sup> for his analysis of imperialism made it possible to argue that nationalist movements were progressive because they were anti-imperialist, and that therefore communists in colonial countries had a political role to play. Their role was to actively support and seek to radicalise national liberation movements, rather than sit around waiting for capitalism to mature and a proletariat to develop. Lenin assumed that these nationalist struggles would be progressive in their internal content as well—that national movements would be bourgeois–democratic ones, committed to the establishment of a national market, the abolition of feudal ‘fetters’, and so on. It soon became apparent, however, that this assumed homology could not in fact be assumed, and that anti-colonial struggles could be led and joined by all manner of classes and political forces.<sup>3</sup> The gap this opened up in the argument was usually plugged by creative redefinitions of ‘progressive’, and by a growing tendency to suggest that, whereas in ‘advanced’ countries the development of capitalism facilitated the development of class consciousness, in the non-Western world there was a necessary gap between structure and consciousness. Peasants would fight for land and bread, went the argument, but because their feudal oppressors were tied up with comprador and foreign capitalists, and all of these were part of the imperialist system, they would in effect be fighting against imperialism. A hunger for land and bread would thus give birth to soviets, five-year plans and even futurist art, although the agents of this did not and could not desire it. In short, these were struggles which ‘objectively’ meant more than the agents of these struggles were capable of recognising or willing.<sup>4</sup> Such arguments were not always and entirely absurd, but the idea of ‘objectively radical’ invited abuse, and many on the Left succumbed. Hardt and Negri’s argument has something of this quality: all indications are that the struggles they name are unconnected, and sometimes not very radical; but this turns out to be a virtue, for their very localness and inability to link up horizontally means that they ‘leap immediately to the global level and attack the imperial constitution in its generality’ (p 56). There *are* some signs of the coalescence of diverse struggles on a world scale, such as during the Seattle protests, and Hardt and Negri may yet be proven right. But here their argument is not carried by the weight of evidence but rather by the momentum of their dialectic.

The second and for my purposes more interesting question is not one of fact. In the passage quoted above Hardt and Negri declare, citing Marx as their precedent, that globalisation is to be welcomed, both because it is better than narrow parochialisms, and because it provides the foundations for the leap into a qualitatively better society. They elaborate that the European ‘discovery’ and colonisation of the world, bloody and barbaric as it was, also contained a utopian element and possibility. Again, Marx is one of the examples of this utopian aspect (Bartolomé de Las Casas and Toussaint L’Ouverture are the other two<sup>5</sup>). When in 1853 Marx wrote a series of articles on India for the *New York Daily Tribune*, he denounced the hypocrisy and greed of the British, which had undermined the traditional Indian village community and caused great suffering.<sup>6</sup> However, it was important not to forget, wrote Marx, that these village communities ‘had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind, within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules depriving

it of all grandeur and historical energies' (quoted on p 119). In destroying this and 'laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia' British colonialism, despite its crimes, 'was the unconscious tool of history'. Hardt and Negri rebuke Marx for assuming that Westernisation is the only possible alternative to traditional social forms, but otherwise they cite him approvingly for seeing the utopian possibilities in the globalisation of his day. A similar recognition, they declare, 'is what prevents us from simply falling back into participation and isolationism ... pushing us instead to forge a project of counterglobalisation' (p 115).

The immediate targets this is directed against are Hardt and Negri's 'friends and comrades on the Left' who, since the 1960s, have championed the local and the national, and seen in the advance of globalisation the defeat of progressive possibilities. *Empire's* dismissal of such positions is somewhat peremptory—there are surely circumstances where invoking state protectionism against neoliberal globalisation is politically necessary—but I am sympathetic to their argument that the sovereign nation-state is not something the Left should usually be in the business of championing. And when Hardt and Negri write that 'from India to Algeria to Cuba to Vietnam, *the state is the poisoned gift of national liberation*' (p 134), I cannot but agree, for postcolonialism is perhaps first and foremost a critique of the nation-state and of national liberation.<sup>7</sup>

Postcolonial criticism, however, seeks to problematise the nation-state *not* because it is particular and parochial rather than universal and global, but because it is European and modern, corresponding to a historically specific form of community and subjectivity, and it has not proved capable of coding and representing forms of community that are different. This is a different sort of position from that of Hardt and Negri, for it is immediately suspicious of globalisation as well, and for the same reason: that it represents the universalisation of Europe. This is an ethical questioning, which asks how we know that the fruits of globalisation, even if they could be harvested, are superior to that which they replace.

Let me pose this question at its most provocative, by asking by what standard we judge (using the example of Marx's denunciation of his imagined Indian village community) that a restrained and circumscribed human consciousness is better than an unrestrained one which is conscious of its own 'grandeur', and that the dissolution of 'superstition' better than its existence? The history in which the humanist and Promethean exaltation of Man emerges, and in which Reason appears as a place-less universal which challenges merely parochial traditions of reasoning, is Europe's history. Colonialism and globalisation represent the universalisation of that history, and it is true that as a result it in part ceases to be European. But nonetheless, as long as other ways of knowing and being remain, not fully colonised by the logic of the European-global, how do we assess that this logic, and the fruits it purportedly heralds (freedom, equality) are better? Was this apparent to the Indian peasants whose villages were economically undermined and transformed by colonialism? If not—if, even as many of them no doubt suffered under and protested against caste and semi-feudal economic exploitation, they also suffered under and protested against colonialism, not because it brought only incomplete liberation, but because it 'liberated' them from forms of life and being that were familiar and offered some pleasures—then by what standard do we judge this as an advance? Note that to ask this question does not commit one to 'nativism' or to any other such bogey, for

instance, arguing that the Indian village community was a superior or desirable form of community. It simply asks if there are any standards by which to decide this which are not already the standards of the European modern. But this is also more than just the sceptics' question, because it is not just an epistemological question: *this* question only arises under circumstances of unequal power. The question does not take the form, 'how do we compare the form of life sustained in and by an Indian village with those of a European metropolis', but rather 'by what standard do we welcome the latter effacing the former?'

The two most sophisticated and influential answers to this question can be grouped (to be schematic) under the signs of Kant and Hegel. Kant and Hegel were not of course concerned with justifying colonialism (although Gilroy reminds us that race consciousness was by no means alien to Kant's thought<sup>8</sup>), but they did provide two very powerful elaborations of Enlightenment thought, and of the 'project of modernity' which it has underwritten. Kant's defence of modern subjectivity and morality is principally epistemological; he derives the superiority of these not from their rootedness in any tradition or empirical circumstance or way of being, for such specificity would compromise their universality,<sup>9</sup> but rather tries to derive this from the very structure of Reason itself. Hegel's defence of modern society and the modern state is historical and dialectical; the telos of history is self-conscious freedom, which is instantiated in successive historical forms, and the Indian is one of the earliest and least developed of these forms.

It was on grounds such as these that the liberals and socialists who were the inheritors of the Enlightenment could champion the globalisation of liberty and autonomy and Reason, confident that these were superior to constraint and superstition. To the degree that the globalisation of Europe could be seen as the bearer of these values, it too could be welcomed; or if it at least laid their foundations, it could be welcomed in a qualified fashion, as the 'unconscious tool of history'; or else it could be denounced for *failing* to deliver ('colonialism retards development, hence must be overthrown'), and the better order embodied in Western modernity pursued under the sign of nationalism or socialism.

It has been one of the fruits of postmodernism and postcolonialism, it seems to me, that both these arguments are harder to make today than they were even a few decades ago.<sup>10</sup> Hardt and Negri draw upon Hegel and Marx—theirs is a fully-fledged dialectic (although they are deeply uncomfortable with this, and deny it), the telos of which is universal freedom in the form of socialism. They are by no means indifferent to the claims of difference, but they doubt that theories which accord centrality to difference are useful, because, they suggest, difference in any case no longer means what it did. Contemporary capitalism produces in equal measure the global and the local, and thus 'It is false ... to claim that we can (re)establish local identities that are in some sense *outside* and protected against the global flows of capital and Empire' (p 45). There is no 'non-West', no Third World, for these are themselves the effect of the global machine, and thus offer no licence for an ethical or political project which might counterpose them to the universal and the global. And theories which have emphasised the binary nature of modern and colonial thought and sought to deconstruct and dismantle it, such as postmodernism and postcolonialism, are fighting a disappearing target: 'the postmodernist and postcolonial theorists who advocate a politics of difference ... have been outflanked by the [new,

global] strategies of power. Power has evacuated the bastion they are attacking and has circled around to the rear to join them in the assault in the name of difference' (p 138).

This is an interesting argument (as is the claim that postcolonialism is in any case an effect of globalisation, a point I will return to at the end of this essay) but it conceals a conceptual slide. This lies in the word 'modern', or rather the relation posited between this and Europe. Hardt and Negri write that they begin their story in Europe and North America, not because they wish to privilege it, but because this is where Empire and the concepts and practices which characterise it first developed. But, they add, 'Whereas the genealogy of Empire is in this sense Eurocentric ... its present powers are not limited to any region' (p xvi). Compare this with the following statement by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, explaining that they treat the originally European system of state relations as a global system not because of any Western arrogance on their part, but because what was once Eurocentric is now global: 'It is not our perspective but the historical record itself that can be called Eurocentric'.<sup>11</sup> I counterpose this to Hardt and Negri not to suggest some fundamental convergence between their arguments and those of two relatively conservative international relations theorists, but rather to show that there is a widely used intellectual 'move' which allows one to argue that, in becoming global, what was once the *European*-modern ceased being specifically (and in that sense parochially) European. Now, if it were true that not a trace of other worlds was left—if there were not a trace of a subject who was not a bourgeois self, possessed of interiority and the desire for autonomy, no form of community that was not representable as a nation and governable by a state—then there might be no vantage point from which we could speak of (radical) difference. 'Europe' would be coextensive with the world, and we would all be variations on the 'modern'.

But the triumph of the social transformations we label modern, which began in Europe some centuries ago and have since undoubtedly transformed the rest of the world, has not been that complete. To say this is not to be guilty of a nostalgic and ill-conceived hankering for a non-existent point 'outside' Empire and the modern. It is rather to suggest that, even where everything *has* become part of a capitalist system, this does not establish equivalence between the different moments and elements of what can still be seen as a single system. It was one of Lenin's insights (drawing on Marx), not yet rendered irrelevant, that the expansion of capital can occur without necessarily refashioning in its own image the new areas/processes which it subordinates; that there can be uneven development in which a 'formal' subsumption to capital is not accompanied by a 'real' subsumption.

To make the point in this way is still to engage in an argument about the character and extent of capitalist globalisation, an argument which (in principle, at least) is resolvable in empirical terms. But the argument I wish to make is not only an empirical one about 'how far' capitalism has remade the world, and so I will return to this at the end of the essay.

If *Empire* posits a revitalised Marxist universalism, Paul Gilroy's *Between Camps* calls for the invention of a new, planetary humanism which will leave 'raciology' behind forever. Certain developments have bought raciology into crisis—by which Gilroy means not a decline in racism (on the contrary), but rather the fact that the ways in which 'race' has been discursively constituted are being refigured, offering

us the opportunity 'to free ourselves from the bonds of all raciology in a novel and ambitious abolitionist project' (p 15). But to do this requires convincing the oppressed, for often the victims of racism have invested their racialised identities with positive significations and, as a result, 'For many racialized populations, "race" and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up' (p 12). A great deal of Gilroy's intellectual energies—and many of the best parts of the book—are implicitly addressed to those who have invested 'black' with positive attributes and, in aligning it with culture and sometimes nation, have made it constitutive of identity.

Why is raciology in crisis? Gilroy advances a number of reasons, of which three seem especially important. First, certain technological innovations, such as the discovery and mapping of DNA and the rise of genomics, a 'transracial' trade in bodily organs for transplant, and medical imaging, are leading to a transformation in the ways that people conceptualise the nature of the relationship between nature and culture, and thus in how race is imagined. Second, Gilroy invokes the diaspora, as have many others, as a phenomenon that problematises all essentialised notions of identity and belonging, and 'stands opposed to the distinctively modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexity of nation-states' (p 124). Diasporas are moreover no longer exceptional—in Europe and North America the barbarians have long been within the gates,<sup>12</sup> and 'the narratives and poetics of cultural intermixture' (p 253) that have resulted confound and make a nonsense of racialising discourse. Finally, and most interestingly, Gilroy argues that black cultures 'themselves are not as strong, complex or effective as they once were' (p 14). The oppositional status of black cultures has diminished as the market colonises racial difference, with some versions of the black body becoming sexy and fashionable, and black dissent itself presented in a domesticated version which renders it hip. Gilroy is always fascinating on the subject of music, and he is both authoritative and eloquent when he declares that the music he has listened to for over 30 years is no longer the bearer or contestatory values: 'I have watched their oppositional imaginings first colonized and then vanquished by the leveling values of the market ... In a sense, the black vernacular cultures of the late twentieth century were the death rattle of a dissident counterpower rooted, not so long ago, in the marginal modernity of racial slavery' (p 272).

As race becomes reconfigured in these ways, it is no longer a viable strategy to base resistance on racial identities. Indeed, as the boundaries of race as they had earlier been constructed become blurred, the incipient authoritarianism always present in any attempt to establish and enforce identity becomes accentuated; the more unstable the category, the more coercive the attempts to maintain it. Gilroy has harsh words for the defenders of black 'authenticity', and counterposes to this his alternative of seizing upon the crisis of raciology to create or reinvigorate humanism, and leave behind once and for all the category of race.

But if Gilroy's analyses of the crises of raciology are always stimulating, his call for the (re?)birth of humanism is unconvincing. What exactly this is a call for, and what it might look like, remains extremely vague. Gilroy repeatedly insists that he is clear on what it is not—it is not an old-fashioned anti-racism which declares we are all equal under the skin, for this liberal humanism was deeply imbued with ideas of race, which 'compromised ... [its] boldest and best ambitions' (p 30). The ambiguity



which Gilroy never resolves is whether the universalism of Western humanism was simply 'compromised', as he seems to suggest here (in which case what is needed is 'simply' to free it of its connections with racism, and 'realise' the universalist potential which was always there), or whether, as he seems strongly to suggest elsewhere, racism was a constructive element in and of it—an altogether more radical proposition. The latter possibility—the suggestion that the horrors of modern times have not been departures from humanism and universalism, but products of it, is at least as old as Fanon (and in a different register, Gandhi),<sup>13</sup> and has fuelled another suspicion, namely that all 'universalisms' are in fact European particularism in disguise. Gilroy is well aware of all this, but his attempt to reinstate humanism requires a much clearer specification of what it is that can be retrieved from this tradition, and how. His uncertainties and evasions on this central point means that he is persuasive in his account of how 'race' is being dramatically reconfigured, but not in his call for a new, planetary humanism.

It may be, as I observed at the beginning of this essay, that these books foreshadow an intellectual trend, a 'return' to the Enlightenment universalism to which Marxism and liberalism (two chief progeny of the Enlightenment) are heirs. If so, I think this trend would be premature, for the reasons outlined above, and for a further reason with which I will conclude this essay.

Even if the process of capitalist expansion is so complete that there is no 'outside' of globalisation, I have argued that it does not follow that any project which would challenge its universalising imperative is quixotic or, worse, nostalgically reactionary. I made this argument in terms of the continued existence of forms of life and knowledge which, even if they have been incorporated into global capitalism, have not been remade in its image. I want to stick to this argument, but also acknowledge that it lends itself all too readily to the historicist language of 'survivals', and thus immediately raises the questions of how long these survivals will continue to survive. It could also be read as suggesting that postcolonial theory, in the name of which I have made a case for (continuing to be) attentive to difference, somehow 'represents' these survivals, even speaks for a subaltern figure such as the peasant. But that is not at all what I wish to suggest.

When Hardt and Negri suggest that postcolonialism is in an important sense an effect of globalisation (pp 138–139), I think they are profoundly right, although not perhaps quite in the sense that they intend. It is only when capitalism has extended its sway to the point where little or nothing lies outside it that we can see a difference which exists in the interstices of capital, a moment which is in the life of capital but not entirely of it. It is to these differences—not necessarily or only 'pre-capitalist'—that postcolonialism attends, and in this sense it too is only possible after capitalism has colonised the world, when there is no 'outside' from which and in the name of which to criticise.

Let me clarify this point by drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Reading Marx somewhat against the grain, Chakrabarty suggests that, for Marx, once capital has fully developed, there are certain historical transformations (eg the separation of labour from the land) which appear, retrospectively, as the logical presuppositions of capital. That is, once one has grasped the structure of capital (which can only be done retrospectively, when capital is triumphant and its structure clear), one can see that

certain historical events are a necessary part of its emergence, are posited by capital as the conditions for its own emergence (the positing is done not by history, which would be a very teleological account indeed, but as a perspective from which the *logically* necessary conditions for the emergence of capitalism can be seen to have also *historically* occurred). But there are other elements of the past, which capitalism also encounters as antecedents to it, but—Chakrabarty quotes Marx—‘not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life-process’.<sup>14</sup> These are pasts which are not ‘outside’ capital, but nor are they logical preconditions of it, *necessary* elements in the history of capital. In other words, Marx accepts, according to Chakrabarty, ‘that the total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital’.<sup>15</sup> These other pasts may be part of the ‘precapitalist’ past of a society, but they also may not, consisting instead of structures of affect which might (or might not) coexist with capital, but are not part of the world it posits.

If this is true, then globalisation can never be the same as the universalisation of capital.<sup>16</sup> Globalisation will never remake the world, for capital, for structures of effect and multiple ways of being human which are not part of the necessary history and structure of capital continue to inhere in capital even where it has done its work of transformation most thoroughly. Difference continues to exist, although ‘Difference, in this account, is not something external to capital. Nor is it something subsumed into capital. It lives in intimate and plural relations to capital, ranging from opposition to neutrality’.<sup>17</sup> It is in this spirit that I dissent from the suggestion that difference itself is now created by Empire and the market, and therefore that the time when it was ethically important to attend to difference is passing. For similar reasons, I am sceptical of the new universalisms and humanisms which are appearing on the horizon and which promise to overcome the shortcomings of the old. We still need, it seems to me, to be attentive to difference, and to work our way ‘through’ difference, rather than to surpass it. Postcolonialism is still a useful tool in that enterprise, not as the voice of the premodern subaltern, but rather as that which keeps us sensitive to what is in but not of capital. Like the difference to which it attends postcolonialism does not lie outside the belly of the beast, but it has not been digested by it, and it has functions still to fulfil, for it is too soon to ‘go back to the future’.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hardt is the author of *Gilles Deleuze: an Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, London: UCL Press, 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> Marx had assumed that the non-Western world would simply traverse a similar historical path to Europe’s, at which point his theory would come to have some bearing on the non-West; however, he also once expressed the worry that while ‘on the Continent revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant?’. Letter to Engels, 8 October 1858, in S Avineri (ed), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, New York: Doubleday, 1968, p 439.
- <sup>3</sup> As Radek noted as early as the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, often those heading ‘oriental national movements [are] neither Communists nor even bourgeois revolutionaries, but for the most part representatives of ... decayed feudal cliques’. *Fourth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report*, London: Communist Party of Great Britain, nd [1922], p 221.
- <sup>4</sup> See Sanjay Seth, ‘Interpreting revolutionary excess: the Naxalite movement in India, 1967–71’, *Positions*, 3(2), 1995, pp 481–485.
- <sup>5</sup> Toussant L’Ouverture was the leader of a slave revolt in Haiti, the subject of C L R James’ classic *The Black Jacobins*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963. Las Casas was the 16th century Spanish priest

- who argued that the Amerindians were, after all, men, and that the Spanish treatment of them was unconscionable. See Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, Chicago, IL: Regnery, 1959.
- <sup>6</sup> Marx's understanding of the village community as an autarchic little republic was based upon a series of colonial reports, which in turn bore only passing resemblance to rural life in colonial India. See L Dumont, 'The "village community" from Munro to Maine', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, IX, 1966.
- <sup>7</sup> The by now classic critique is Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986. See also Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, London: James Currey, 1992; and Sanjay Seth, 'A postcolonial world?', in Greg Fry & Jacinta O'Hagan (eds), *Contending Images of World Politics*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, pp 214–226. The best general survey of postcolonial theory is Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Allen and Unwin, 1998.
- <sup>8</sup> Gilroy, pp 58–61. See also Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, San Diego, CA: Austin Hill Press, 1980.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Empirical principles are always unfitted to serve as a ground for moral laws. The universality with which these laws should hold for all rational beings ... falls away if their basis is taken from the special constitution of human nature or from the accidental circumstances in which it is placed'. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans H J Paton, New York, 1956, p 109.
- <sup>10</sup> And when they are made, as of course they continue to be, they occur in full awareness of the fact that it cannot simply be assumed that autonomy and the like are supra-cultural moral truths. For example, while John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas seek to retrieve the Kantian answer (but without the metaphysics), they also acknowledge that Reason never is 'pure', but that it is deeply rooted in a particular moral and philosophical tradition. In Rawls' later works he abandons altogether the claim that autonomy and equality are values for which a culture-free sanction can be found. See, for instance, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- <sup>11</sup> Hedley Bull & Adam Watson, 'Introduction', in Bull & Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Some of Gilroy's earlier works, such as *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, London: Hutchinson, 1987 and *The Black Atlantic*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, have done much to emphasise the necessity of treating slavery and the presence of black populations not simply as 'events' in the history of the USA and Britain, but as constitutive of their history as a transatlantic zone.
- <sup>13</sup> More recent versions of this argument include Zygmunt Bauman's widely discussed *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, p 63.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p 64.
- <sup>16</sup> In a recent review of Chakrabarty's book, Hardt describes the difference between his and Chakrabarty's view on this point thus: 'My formulation would lead to the conception of ... a strong contemporaneity [between a "third world" society and a first world one] that contains within it differences and multiplicities. Chakrabarty's formulation instead leads to a conception of multiple, incommensurable times that exist simultaneously'. Hardt adds that 'these two formulations may not be as different as they initially appear', but I suggest that Hardt's own way of framing the difference reveals how significant it is. See Hardt, 'The Eurocentrism of history', *Postcolonial Studies*, 4(2), 2001, pp 243–249.
- <sup>17</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p 66.