

EMPIRE AS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF 'INTERNATIONAL' IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION

Muhammed Kürşad ÖZEKİN¹

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this article is to present an up-to-date and analytically valid conception of contemporary international politics by mainly drawing on the seminal work of Hardt and Negri (2000) called Empire. In line with this objective, this study argues that Empire, as a theoretical framework, provides a more comprehensive analysis of today's globalising world. However, rather than explaining the constitution of Empire in mainly juridical and political terms, as Hardt and Negri did, this study aims to present a slightly different reading of the conception of Empire by associating the matter with the transnationalisation of capital, state and social relations of production widely labeled as globalization. To that end, the article puts the conception of Empire into a more concrete economic context by placing particular emphasis on factors such as capital accumulation process, class formation and state-capital relations as understood in the theory of Global Capitalism.

Keywords: Globalisation, The Theory of Global Capitalism, Empire, Transnationalisation of Production.

Küreselleşme Çağında 'Uluslararası'nın Bir Kavramsallaştırması Olarak İmparatorluk Özet

Bu makalenin asli amacı genel olarak Hardt ve Negri'nin (2000) İmparatorluk isimli ufuk açıcı eserine dayanarak günümüzdeki uluslararası politikanın güncel ve analitik olarak geçerli bir anlayışını sunmaktır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda çalışma kuramsal bir çerçeve olarak İmparatorluk'un günümüz küreselleşen dünyasının daha etraflı bir çözümlemesini sunduğunu öne sürecektir. Fakat imparatorluk'un oluşumunu Hardt ve Negri'nin yaptığı gibi genellikle hukuki ve siyasal kavramlarla açıklamak yerine, çalışma meseleyi yaygın biçimde küreselleşme olarak adlandırılan sermayenin, devletin ve toplumsal üretim ilişkilerinin ulusötesileşmesi süreciyle ilişkilendirerek İmparatorluk kavramının nispeten farklı bir okumasını sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla makale küresel kapitalizm kuramında anlaşıldığı şekliyle sermaye birikim süreci, sınıf oluşumu ve devlet-sermaye ilişkisi gibi etkenler üzerinde özellikle durarak imparatorluk kavramını daha somut bir iktisadi bağlama yerleştirecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küreselleşme, Küresel Kapitalizm Kuramı, İmparatorluk, Üretimin Ulusötesileşmesi.

INTRODUCTION

As is well known and widely argued, along with other factors, the two prominent characteristics of capitalism, namely the endless accumulation of capital and its relentless expansion through seeking to overcome the limits of time and space, have historically played a crucial role in shaping the world economic order and the juridico-political framing of the modern

¹ Dr. Öğr. Görevlisi. Uşak Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, Uşak, muhammed.ozekin@usak.edu.tr

state system as well. Since their emergence in sixteenth century Europe, capitalist classes, in tandem with European states, have tended to create what Marx called ‘the world market’, and find new ways to expand internationally by spilling over well beyond the borders of Europe via the use of brute force, colonial expansion, trade relations, and capital investments. As emphasised by Marx and Engels (2007: 12-13), long before the introduction of the word ‘globalisation’ into the lexicon of the social sciences, capitalism, by its very nature, is disposed to transform and unite the world into a single world market through which the capitalist classes “has given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... *and* in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations”. These historical characteristics of capitalism, and its endless search for what Harvey (2001: 241) calls the ‘new plane’ in distant geographies, have brought about the manipulation of the allegedly global character of capitalism since its inception to the present day, as outspokenly put forward in the works of many accounts in various ways (Arrighi, 1994; Wallerstein, 2000; Boron, 2005; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001).

However, despite its relentlessly expansionist and so-called globally-oriented character, it was only in the late twentieth century that the capitalist world economy, as Castell (2003) and many others (Gill, 1990; Robinson, 2002, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2000) discuss, was capable of appearing as a truly global arena regarding the internationalisation of productive and financial capital, the high level of interconnectedness and interdependency and its institutional, organisational and technological capacity, all of which distinguish the current economic system from any other world economic order in the history of capitalism. Along with these recent economic transformations and the emergence of a truly global economy in real terms, a distinctly global socio-political sphere and a newly emerging form of governance have also come into existence over the last several decades. Both of these two transformations – the emergence of the “global” as a new socio-political sphere and the transition to a new form of global governance were primarily signalled by the decline of the institutional and legal foundations of the modern state system and the transformation of the sovereignty of the nation-state, as a cornerstone of imperialism, into a new global form of sovereignty; what Hardt and Negri (2000) call ‘Empire’.

What really makes Empire a distinct type of juridico-political regime of contemporary world politics and distinguishes it from the modern system of sovereign states and so the Marxian analyses of imperialism, is the decentralising and de-territorialising features of the new global form of sovereignty, which “progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 117). In this sense, Empire seems to present a more adequate analysis of current world politics in which the comprehension of space and time originates from every aspect of globalisation – the social, the economic, the political, and the cultural as well – blurs the modernist dichotomies of domestic and international, inside and outside, core and periphery, North and South, and brings with it the emergence of a place-boundless political subjectivity, breakup, opacity and uncertainty in regard to late modernity. Nevertheless, the breakdown of modernity does not mean a sheer disengagement from the past, but as Jabri (2007: 37) states it implies “both continuity and change, suggesting the co-presence of past and present...portraying an image of an age having gone through and continuing to undergo monumental transformation from the assumed certainties of the past”.

Drawing on these accounts, this article argues that Empire, as a theoretical framework, provides a more adequate analysis of contemporary international politics, which has been associated with the recent process of globalisation, and is distinguished from the territorially-bounded modern state system of the era of imperialism, articulated by both classical Marxist (Lenin, 1970) and some Neo-Marxist (Arrighi, 1994; Boron, 2005; Callinicos, 2009) accounts. However, rather than viewing the constitution of Empire in mainly juridical and political terms, as Hardt and Negri (2000: 3-41) did in the first part of Empire, this article aims to present a slightly different reading of it by putting the issue into a more economic context in the light of the Global

Capitalism thesis and Marxist terms such as capital accumulation, class formation, state-capital relations, and inter-imperialist rivalry. In parallel with this modest ambition, the article is organised as follows. In the first section, the recent transformation in world capitalist economy is analysed by taking account how the deterritorialising operation of capital on a genuinely global scale contradicts with the sovereignty of the modern territorial state in its traditional and imperialistic sense, and in connection to this, how the internationalisation/transnationalisation of productive and financial capital in the last several decades has paved the way for the formation of a transnational capitalist class that is progressively less tied to a particular national state and territoriality. Following this, the second section examines two related questions: (1) how a new form of sovereignty and transnational governance has emerged in parallel with the recent restructuring of the world capitalist system, and due to this shift (2) in what respects the conditions and nature of contemporary warfare have differed from imperialist, inter-imperialist and anti-imperialist wars of modernity.

I. RETHINKING CAPITAL, CLASS AND STATE IN THE ERA OF CONTEMPORARY GLOBALISATION

In retrospect, capital, for much of its history, has tended to be relatively more tied to a particular national state due to its reliance on disciplinary measures and the fixation of labour-power within national boundaries on its own account (Green, 2002: 40). Beside its reliance on the state for its interest in domestic markets, capital also has organic ties with the state for the sake of its international interests beyond national borders. As Kiely (2005: 52) argues the rise of capitalism has materialised together with the consolidation of the modern state system in nineteenth-century Europe, during which nationally-based capitalist classes were often promoted and protected by the state against foreign competition, which also brought geopolitical competition based on capitalist sovereignty and the imperialist rivalries of European powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, as stated earlier, capital, by its very nature, has an expansionary tendency beyond the national borders through penetrating markets in distant localities and building new accumulation circuits and Networks of production on a global level. Therefore, despite its reliance on the state, capital, in Hardt and Negri's (2001: 326) own words, also tends to operate on "the plane of immanence, through relays and networks of relationships of domination, without reliance on a transcendent center of power". Due to these reasons, it also contradicts with the restrictions of traditional social and national boundaries and the transcendence of sovereignty in its modern sense (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Green, 2002).

Historically, this contradiction was softened for the most part or the mediated through the imperialist policies of European states. Capital classes, which were originated from national accumulation circuits and were organically tied to core European powers, were capable of expanding, whilst enjoying the protection of the state at home and assuring the mobilisation of military forces in order to reap profits beyond national boundaries. As correctly observed by Hardt and Negri (2000: 332) and many others (Gill, 1990: 46; Robinson, 2006: 7), this type of state-capital relations characterises the nineteenth and early twentieth century world of inter-imperialist rivalries among states and national capitals which generated and solidified rigid social and economic boundaries and rigorous notions of inside and outside, which impeded the free flow of capital, goods and labour, thus obviating the materialisation of the world market in a truly global sense. The conceptualisation of world politics in this manner was firmly grounded in the classical theories of imperialism in the early twentieth century (Lenin, 1975; Hilferding, 1981) and later, to a greater extent, carried on by some Neo-Marxist political economists via theories of the dependency school, world system approach and, to a relatively lesser extent, by studies of new imperialism and US intervention, particularly after the September 11th, 2001.

However, capitalism has fundamentally altered since the early twentieth century. Particularly since the 1970s world capitalism has undergone a qualitatively new stage of

restructuring, which is mainly characterised by essential shifts, such as the rise of genuinely transnational capital, the emergence of global markets, the formation of a new transnational capitalist class as a globally-oriented class group aroused from new accumulation circuits and global markets rather than national markets, and the appearance of a new transnational governance based on the reconfiguration of power relations in global society. As Robinson and Harris (2000: 13) put forward, in line with the free flow of productive and financial capital, the global integration of national markets, and the fragmentation of national accumulation circuits in the last several decades, class formation has progressively become less tied to territoriality and less driven by national competition, so the traditional Marxist assumption that the capitalist class, in its theoretical sense, is formed within national boundaries and driven by the dynamics of inter-imperialist rivalry has lost its explanatory power.

Particularly coupled with new globalising or ‘third wave’ technologies of information revolution, the decisive breakdown of Fordist/Keynesian model of development as a hegemonic societal paradigm has paved the way for new forms of social relations of production, and has starkly moved the balance of class power in favour of transnational capital and globally-oriented economic and social forces (Robinson, 2002). Through this structural transition and concomitant neo-liberal structural adjustment programs under the auspices of international financial institutions, capital has become liberated from the material and political constraints of nation-state system and national accumulation circuits and achieved transnational character through global production networks and accumulation circuits (Robinson, 2004). At the structural level, transnationalization of capital and production has formed the material basis for the formation of a transnational capitalist class which is less tied to territoriality and less driven by national competition, and whose interest is grounded in global accumulation circuits and the cross-border strategic alliances.

In a similar vein, Sklair (2001) argues that with the integration of national productive apparatuses into new globalised circuits of accumulation and the loss of the nation-state’s traditional role as an organising agent of capitalism and an institutional “container” of social life and class formation, the new capitalist class formation has taken place on a global level by bringing together transnational capital, the executives of transnational corporations, globally-oriented politicians, bureaucrats professionals, and elites and classes in different countries. In that sense, the formation of a transnational capitalist class does not only represent one of the key aspects of current economic restructuring in the era of contemporary globalisation but also an “epochal shift” of the historical trajectory of the world capitalist system, signalling a transition to a global phase of capitalism in which the dynamics of capitalism are no longer understood through the conceptualisations of the state, capital and class, as in theories of imperialism.

II. THE RISE OF ‘GLOBAL’ AS A NEW SOCIAL SPACE, THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND THE QUESTION OF MODERN SOVEREIGNTY AND WAR

Along with the rise of genuinely transnational capital, the emergence of global markets and the formation of a transnational capitalist class, a new structure, and logic of governance – in short a new form of sovereignty – has come into being as a political subject of the contemporary international system. In fact, the birth of the new form of sovereignty primarily lies at the core of the transformation of nation-state sovereignty and the international system in the last several decades which marks another essential contrast with the era of imperialism. Most particularly, the increasing disintegration of spatial barriers under the pressure of globalisation compels a rethink of politics and geography of the sovereign-state system, which hypothetically operates through the modernist logic of inside/outside. As Hardt and Negri (2000: XI) state “even the most dominant nation-states should no longer be thought of as supreme and sovereign authorities, either outside or even within their own borders”. Hence, unlike what imperialism theories advocate, the

borders of sovereign states are no longer impervious containers of social relations, and the configuration of the international as a social space can no longer be understood through the limitedness of nation-state terms such as territory, autonomy, self-containment, and political and social control, but rather through “thick set of social relations, consisting of social and cultural flows as well as political-military and economic interactions, which often take place in a context of imperial hierarchy” (Barkawi and Laffey, 2002: 112).

In a similar vein, what appears to be prominent about this shift, as Robinson (2001: 158) discusses, is the emergence of ‘global’ as a new social and political space, as a result of which the nation-state is neither maintaining its primacy nor vanishing but increasingly becoming transformed and absorbed into a larger collective rule that he calls ‘transnational state’ (TNS). In plain words, the transnational state apparatus has emerged as a multilayered and multi-centered network embracing and linking globally-integrated national states, supra-national economic and political forums and international organisations (both formal and informal), which operates in a regulatory manner, but without a centralised institutional form. The function of the TNS, in Robinson’s own words (2001: 166), is:

“...attempting to fulfill the functions for world capitalism that in earlier periods were fulfilled by what world-system and international relations scholars refer to as a "hegemon," or a dominant capitalist power that has the resources and the structural position that allows it to world capitalism as a whole and impose the rules, regulatory environment.”

Thus, the emerging transnational state apparatus has in this sense provided the required institutional mechanism through which transnational capitalist classes managed to subordinate economic and social forces within nation states to the imperatives of the global capitalist economy. In fact, this new form of transnational governance has also manifested itself by increasing subordination of nation state structures to the regulatory environment of neo-liberal globalization. Overall, it has brought along a globalized form of economic governance that legally encodes the fiscal, monetary, trade and investment policies of disciplinary neo-liberalism and curtails the state’s capacity and control over the economic and social policy-making.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the state is simply a passive bearer of policies formulated by transnational forces in favour of global capital and that it fulfills its function within a distinct social sphere free from the emerging global social space. In fact, it is not external to the transnational state and the global social space, but increasingly incorporated into it as a constituting part of it both in governmental and spatial terms. In other words, the spatial configuration of modern sovereignty as formulated by imperialism theories in line with the inside-outside dichotomy is progressively blurring and losing its classical meaning. Hence, as Hardt and Negri (2000) put forward, with the fading away of state sovereignty as a cornerstone of the era of imperialism, power has gained a non-spatial meaning by dissolving into the smooth space of Empire. In their words, in this smooth space, “there is no place of power —it is both everywhere and nowhere” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 190). Therefore, sovereignty has gained a new form by embracing a range of national and supranational forces and in aiming to rule the whole social order on a global scale.

To put it another way, the transnationalisation of economic and social relations over the last couple of decades has simultaneously accompanied with the emergence of new form of supranational sovereignty whose apparatus of rule is de-territorialised and decentered. This new rule of supranational sovereignty, as Hardt and Negri (2000) claim, represents a paradigmatic form of biopower, and thus regulates human interactions in its entry and focuses on the production and reproduction of social life. The constitution of such a form of sovereignty signals the rise of post-imperialist era in which no single nation-state, including the US, is able to act as the center of new global order. Rather, imperial sovereignty functions through a network all-

englobing power, which binds states, international organisations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, IMF, WTO and G-8, transnational corporations, and non-governmental organisations under a global paradigm of rule.

If the modern understanding of sovereignty and the dialectic of state and capital have considerably transformed, so that even the most prominent nation-states are no longer capable of exercising sovereignty either beyond or within their borders, then how should the US's role in contemporary international system and its military interventions in different parts of the world be viewed? In line with the realist conceptualisation of power relations, 'new imperialism' theories mainly view US's military interventions as attempts to restore the relative strength of its capitalist classes and its hegemonic position in the international system by subordinating the rest of the capitalist world to its global interests (Arrighi, 2005; Callinicos, 2009; Harvey, 2005). Unlike this simplistic way to conceptualise warfare, wars in the contemporary international system and the US's military interventions cannot be understood with reference to US imperialism or inter-imperialist rivalries, but rather in terms of a global conception of war and global relations of power.

In fact, US military interventions, following Robinson (2007: 21-23), are less a case of the nation-state employing coercive means to gather economic benefits for its own corporations than the globalised use of military means for providing favourable conditions for the production and reproduction of global capitalism and the regulation of capitalist social relations at both the local and global levels. In this sense, contemporary wars are not spatially limited military conflicts between sovereign political entities, only aimed at control over territory and resources, but a globally spread state of violence, intended to control social life by creating and maintaining social order, as in the case of the "global war on terror". This leads to Jabri's (2007: 59) argument that "war in the late modern context constitutes a technology of control, a tool drawn upon in the control and regulation of populations and their relations globally". To put simply, due to the emergence of the global as a new social space and the transformation of sovereignty in late modernity, the conditions and nature of contemporary war, as Hardt and Negri (2004: 12-25) discuss, are no longer conceptualised as imperialist, interimperialist, and anti-imperialist as is mainly depicted in the theories of imperialism, but as a global and interminable state of war, including both coercive and noncoercive means – from military intervention, to surveillance, to humanitarian intervention, to state building, to discourses of war and security as well – and primarily aimed at organizing society and the social sphere on both the local and global scales.

In this sense, war, as Hardt and Negri (2004: 13) put forth, has become a "general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination" or a constant regime of biopower, aiming at controlling the population and all facets of social life through the threat and violence of warfare. This is particularly striking because war is no longer a "state of exception" during which civil rights are temporarily suspended and government authorities are bestowed with extraordinary power. Rather, temporary powers and exceptional state of emergency have extended under a global condition in which high intensity policing and its motives for providing security have fused with low-intensity warfare and globally dispersed counterinsurgency operations. More precisely, global war on terror, drugs, weapons, poverty and many other matters globally expanded the social relations of domination and force under the pretext of providing security. Thus, becoming virtually indistinguishable from police activity, the contemporary warfare is increasingly marked by the durative and uninterrupted exercise of power and violence on a global scale.

Concurrently for Hardt and Negri (2004), this constant state of war compels us to rethink the concept of democracy during these times of imperial sovereignty and all-encompassing warfare. After all, this brings us to the notion of "multitude", an antidote to empire and its worldwide social relations of dominance and violence. As a global, plural collectivity, the multitude forms itself both within and against processes of capitalist globalization and emerges as a potential

alternative for the realisation of true democracy. Unlike the notions of “the people” or the “working class”, the multitude is not associated with the industrial capitalism and logic of modern nation state. Rather, the multitude represents a new revolutionary subject that incorporates the contradictions of the current phase of capitalism, particularly its globalised character. As the empire “spreads globally its network of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict”, its antidote, the multitude, takes advantage of “new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: xiii). In short, as a political subject best suited to challenge the empire, the multitude emerges as a biopolitical power of networked citizens endeavouring to produce common resources required for obtaining true democracy in these times of global warfare.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To sum up, in comparison to theories of imperialism, Empire, as a theoretical framework, provides a more adequate analysis of contemporary international politics which are increasingly associated with a set of transformations in world economy and politics such as the transnationalisation of capital, class and production, the rise of the global as a new sociopolitical space, the emergence of transnational governance and a new form of sovereignty, as well as the changes in the conditions and nature of warfare. In respect of each of the cases examined in this article, theories of imperialism, both classical and new ones, seem to no longer be accepted as a viable explanatory paradigm of the ‘international’, which is increasingly characterised as a thick set of social relations taking place in a truly global context. To put it very briefly, due to their commitment to state-centric and territorially defined conceptualizations of capital, class, sovereignty, and even war, theories of imperialism fail, to a large extent, to examine the actualities of international politics which blur the modernist dichotomies of domestic and international, inside and outside, core and periphery, North and South, and bring with it the emergence of a place-boundless political subjectivity, breakup, opacity and uncertainty in regard to late modernity.

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