

The Post-Marxist Theory of Empire and the Leninist Theory of Imperialism

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To begin with, are we still living in the age of Imperialism or has capitalism entered an altogether new stage? Are the Marxist categories of analysis adequate to comprehend the changes that have occurred in the *modus operandi* of Imperialism since the times of Lenin? How can the present era of capitalism be characterized as? Well, these questions and many alike have been at the center of debate for quite some time now. Numerous attempts have been made by scholars and academics to answer many of these questions. On the one hand, we have those who overemphasize the element of continuity and on the other hand, there are those who stress the elements of discontinuity and change. Thus, one end of spectrum constitutes of those who believe that nothing has changed since times of Lenin and everything has already been answered by Lenin himself; the other end of spectrum consists of those who contend that so much has changed since the first two decades of the twentieth century that Lenin's analysis of Imperialism is insufficient to grasp the complexities of present-day capitalism. Though it is true that the current phase of imperialism which has variously been called as Neoliberalism, Globalization, Neo-liberal Globalization has witnessed a lot of changes such as post-Fordism, over-financialization, rise of transnational corporations, informatization of capitalist economies, flexibilization of labour markets, decolonization, absence of a Socialist camp etc. over past few decades and especially since 1990s ; the Leninist theory of imperialism can still act as an axis and provide a compass to help us in comprehending the complexities of the imperialism in the phase of globalization. However, going by the current fad there seems to be a tendency towards fetishization of claiming novelty in the processes of contemporary capitalism as well as its theorizations. This explains the rise of the newfangled theories of new imperialism, global capitalism, global imperialism, empire etc. and numerous other such scholastic exercises. The present paper will focus on one aspect of this problematique and will specifically deal with the Post-Marxist theory of Empire whose chief proponents have been Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt as well as try to juxtapose their claims with the Leninist theory of Imperialism.

Imperialism is dead! Long Live the Empire!

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt begin the French edition of their book "Empire" (2000) with the claim that they are trying to write a "new Communist Manifesto of the Twenty-First Century" through this work. They also contend that as compared to other Post-Marxists who are putting to use only the old terminology, they have invented a new lexicon. Published at the advent of the new millennium, Negri-Hardt's *Empire* became an instant academic sensation, selling tens of thousands of copies in multiple translations. Not only was it hailed as a significant

contribution to Marxism (!) in academic circles, but surprisingly (perhaps, not that surprisingly, as we shall see) the mainstream media too, celebrated it as a ground-breaking analysis of the present-day world order. *Empire* attempted to bring together many diverse and often contradictory philosophical and ideological traditions and concepts—including French post structuralism and Italian autonomism, Spinoza and Marx, sovereignty and deterritorialization, Kant and Deleuze—in order to explain contemporary global politics.

Nevertheless, the most important aspect of the book is its engagement with the question of imperialism or the end of it. “Imperialism,” the authors declare, “is over.” We are living in the phase of Empire. Imperialism, Hardt and Negri argue, was “a system designed to serve the needs and further the interests of capital in its phase of global conquest” and as such was connected to modern forms of territorial sovereignty. This system, however, has been undermined and replaced by a “decentered and de-territorializing apparatus of rule that incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.” It is this impersonal network the authors call “Empire”—a new system of sovereignty that, while imperial, is not imperialist. What used to be competition between various imperialist nation-state powers has been replaced by “the idea of a single power that over determines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and post imperialist.” Whereas imperialism, tied to the “global conquest” phase of capitalism, rested on expansionism and the bounding of territorial space into an “inside” and an “outside”—a division best captured by the territorial nation state form—Empire’s relationship to space is much more expansive: in the deterritorialized, unbound world of Empire, there is no outside. Let’s hear the authors in their own voice:

“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.” (Hardt, M., and A. Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000, *Preface*)

“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.” (*ibid*)

“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. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow.” (*ibid*)

Further, Negri and Hardt contend that the age of Empire has witnessed a massive change in the role of the nation-states. The Empire is characterized by the decadence, and to an extent, collapse in the powers of the nation-states. According to our authors, the sovereignty that nation-states retained in the past has been transferred to a new global structure of domination in which decadent state formations play an increasingly marginal role. There are, we are told, no imperialist players or a territorial centre of power nor do there exist established barriers or limits or fixed identities or crystallized hierarchies. The authors argue:

“It is certainly true that, in step with the processes of globalization, the sovereignty of nation-states, while still effective, has progressively declined. The primary factors of production and exchange— money, technology, people, and goods—move with increasing ease across national boundaries; hence the nation-state has less and less power to regulate these flows and impose its authority over the economy. 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. The decline in sovereignty of nation-states, however, does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined.” (*ibid*, p.)

“The declining sovereignty of nation-states and their increasing inability to regulate economic and cultural exchanges is in fact one of the primary symptoms of the coming of Empire. The sovereignty of the nation-state was the cornerstone of the imperialisms that European powers constructed throughout the modern era. By “Empire,” however, we understand something altogether different from “imperialism.”” (*ibid*, p.)

Thus, according to the writers, the transition from the age of imperialism, based on a collection of warring states in permanent conflict among themselves, to the age of the empire, is signaled by the irreversible decline of the institutional and legal foundations of the old order, the nation-state. It is because of this that Hardt and Negri plainly reject the idea that the United States or for that matter any other nation, is “the ultimate authority that rules over the processes of globalization and the new world order”. Those who insist upon the role of nation-states assume that the old nation-state's sovereignty is still in force and do not realize that it is a relic of the past. Unaware of this transformation they also fail to understand that imperialism is over. The authors contend that “today... large transnational corporations have effectively surpassed the jurisdiction and authority of nation-states. It would seem, then, that this centuries-long dialectic has come to an end: the state has been defeated and corporations now rule the earth!” Thus Empire is characterized by both as “global network distribution of power” which operates through transnational bodies (corporations, nongovernmental organizations, international agencies like World Bank, IMF, WTO, the United Nations).

Empire, it is argued by the authors, emerged as a response to the working class as well as other civil liberties and democratic rights movements, of the late 1960s including the protests against the Vietnam War, labor strikes around the world, student movements, second-wave women’s movements, and even the general refusal to participate in factory work. These movements were

much stronger in the United States than elsewhere, and for this reason, the ruling classes in the United States faced the task of constructing a new apparatus of control earlier than their contemporaries elsewhere in the world. While a conjunction of political and economic factors enabled the United States to seize control of the “new world hierarchization of relations of dominance,” genealogically speaking, the United States was not coded to be imperialist. To buttress their claims, Negri and Hardt refer to the U.S. Constitution. In fact, the authors claim, the U.S. Constitution—both the process and the document—reveals that it was always meant to embody an *imperial*, not imperialist, order. However, that did not stop the United States from involving itself in actions that could be construed as imperialist. This situation changed after the Vietnam War. The imperialist path, Hardt and Negri argue, was forsaken after this misadventure, allowing the United States to return to its constitutional origins. This, in turn, perfectly positioned the United States to perform its imperial role during the first Gulf War. By deploying its military after the invasion of Kuwait, the United States, according to Hardt and Negri, emerged as the only power that was “able to manage international justice.” More importantly, it did so “*not as a function of its own national motives, but in the name of global right.*” The authors go to the extent of stating that “the U.S. world police acts not in imperialist interest but in imperial interest.”

Next, Negri and Hardt argue that within the Empire, a new counterpower is taking shape which they call “multitude”. The countercultural movements of 1960s, out of which the Empire was born, also constituted the first stirrings of the multitude—an amorphous mass, mobile, disconnected from a specific territory, disengaged from industrial production, and unaware of its existence as a collective subject. Just like Empire transcends imperialism, so does the multitude transcend the outdated category of the proletariat. It is the multitude that calls Empire into being through its struggles and resistance against the “capitalist disciplinary regime.” While developing their concept of multitude, the authors underline the changes that have occurred in the structure of labour, labour process and production process and thus put forth a new concept of “immaterial labour”.

Marx and Engels, they assert, were right in predicting the eventual expansion of capitalism to all corners of the globe, but they were wrong in assuming that its essential characteristics would not change. The present form of capitalism, postmodern capitalism, for Hardt and Negri is fundamentally different from the past in that there has been a dramatic shift from the production of material goods to that of services, cultural products, knowledge, communications and information. The production which the “immaterial labour” engages in is “biopolitical production” since it produces ideas, images, signals etc. This production is immeasurable as well as autonomous. This “biopolitical production” brings multitude towards ever increasing co-operation and partnership. This shift in production ushered in a new economy in which neither the idea of private ownership of property nor the labor theory of value is applicable. What we have, in other words, is a “virtual economy” that floats free of the material constraints of

production that characterized earlier forms of capitalism. For Hardt and Negri it is these conditions that, while enabling the functioning of Empire, also provide the possibility of a mobile multitude—as against the rooted industrial workers of the past—acting as the agents of resistance to power.

Besides these few other comments are made by the authors, however, these are peripheral to our discussion of Imperialism here. Therefore, it would be unnecessary to discuss them here. However, those aspects too require a separate inquiry. Before we embark on a thorough analysis of the claims made by Negri and Hardt *vis-à-vis* imperialism and its demise, it would be worthwhile to have a slight detour to the domain of the philosophical and political moorings of the Empire theorists.

Philosophical-Theoretical Origins of Theory of Empire

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt belong to the theoretical tradition which has come to be known as Post-Marxism. The Post-Marxist philosophy and theory, as a matter of fact, is an ‘upgraded version’ of various ‘post-’ thought streams that came into existence in the sixties and seventies. However, what is generally known as Post-Marxism is not a monolithic or homogeneous body of thought. There are many instances where theoreticians of this thought-current can be seen contradicting one another. However, various differences and dissimilarities notwithstanding, the refutation of basic revolutionary principles of Marxism and negative assessment of the socialist experiments of the twentieth century run like a common thread in all their theorizations. Most of the post-Marxists speak of a new kind of communism, which won’t be Marxist! Since the twentieth-century socialism ended in form of disaster/catastrophe, thus a new ‘idea’ of communism is needed now. The concepts of party, state, class have become irrelevant in the present era. Categories such as bourgeoisie, proletariat, capital have become antiquated, now ‘rulers’, ‘multitude’, ‘commons’ must be used in their place. They contend that the oppressed and subordinate classes do not need any leadership or vanguard and thus stress upon their “self-education” and “self-organization”. They also profess that something more radical than Marxism is needed. Marxism itself is totalitarian, oppressive and reductionist. In fact, all notions of universality and collectivity are oppressive! In a nutshell, what these theorists engage in can be aptly termed as “speculative philosophy”. Well, one can as well say that the age of speculative finance capital does get reproduced in the realm of philosophical superstructure as well and gets expressed in such phantasmagoric ruminations!

If one keenly observes, it becomes evident that despite their ostensible radical stance, jargoneering and claims of proposing a new kind of emancipatory politics, the target of their attack is precisely those concepts which constitute the revolutionary core of Marxism, viz., the concept of class, the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat, the concept of communist party as the vanguard of the class, the concept of capital, the concept of alienation and exploitation etc. Most of these post-Marxist “speculative philosophers” either reject these concepts or else distort

them, more often than not in fashionable post-modernist, French philosophical vocabulary. To understand this, one needs to trace the philosophical and political origins of post-Marxism, which like the most of the post-modernist thought-streams lies in the students'-workers' movement of May 1968. The political trauma emanating from the revisionism of European Left, especially that of the French Communist Party (PCF) as well as the misdeeds of Social Fascism and Social Imperialism of the Soviet Union resulted in a pathological reaction. The sins of the revisionist Soviet Party and Social Imperialist and Social Fascist state were imputed to the Marxist concepts of party, state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Post-Marxists like Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek were part of this pathological reaction. Besides, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was also underway in China at this time, which many took as "the revolution against the party". Consequently, these so-called 'new philosophers' ended up considering the theory of party and dictatorship of the proletariat as the root cause of all evils. Some of these like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida etc., calling Marxism totalitarian and oppressive, turned towards Post-Modernism, while others like Alain Badiou, Jacques Ranciere etc. spoke about a new kind of Marxism. And in this way, Post-Marxist theory came into being. Apart from this, yet another political source of the various 'radical' formulations of the post-Marxist theorists is the presence of the tendencies of Workerism and Spontaneism in certain sections of European working class movements, especially the workers' movements in Italy and Spain right since the latter half of the nineteenth century. These anti-Marxist petty-bourgeois tendencies not only fetishize and idealize the spontaneity of the working class but also repudiate the Leninist concept of vanguard party. In the present times too, the Autonomists, Workerists, Anarcho-Syndicalists of all shades are trying to gain foothold in the working class movement throughout the world as well as in India and are deriving their ideological fuel from the anti-Marxist approach and worldview of Post-Marxism. (For a more detailed critique of Post-Marxism, interested readers can go through the paper "Communisms' of Post-Marxisms" presented at the Fifth Arvind Memorial Seminar. The paper is available at- <http://arvindtrust.org/>)

Now let's briefly turn our attention towards the political influences which inform the thesis put forth by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in *Empire*, given the fact that that former is the foremost philosopher of Italian Autonomism.

The *Operaist* foundations of 'Imperial' Theorization

Since the Italian edition of Workerism (*Operaismo*) holds a very special place in the theorizations of writer-duo, rather it would be more appropriate to say that their entire Post-Marxist theoretical edifice stands on the political foundation of Workerism, therefore, it becomes imperative to cast a cursory glance at this specific Italian phenomenon of *Operiasmo*.

Antonio Negri's political life began with participating in the workers' movements of 1950s-60s in Italy. One of the major leaders and theoreticians of the Autonomist movements in 1970s, Negri was also associated with a Roman Catholic group (GIAC). He was also a member of

Italian Socialist Party between 1956 and 1963. He got associated with Mario Tronti, the father of Italian *Operaismo* after leaving the party. Mario Tronti was a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) at the beginning of 1950s. However, after distancing himself from the party (he never formally left the party), he (Tronti) co-founded *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebook) review with Italian socialist Raniero Panzieri. He authored *Operai Capitale* in 1966 and in 1967 came back to the fold of the party so that he could put to practice his theory of *Operaismo*.

A split occurred in 1968 within the *Operaists* (Workerists) on two issues, in the main. The first was the dominance of the policies of the Italian Communist Party and the second was the need underlined by CGIL (General Italian Confederation of Workers) for the method of increased intervention and mediation in the social struggles. Negri parted ways with Tronti in 1968 since he (Negri) believed that the politics of PCI could offer nothing new, whereas Tronti wanted to give it a shot. At this time, Negri founded a group named *Potere Operai* which was active from 1968 till 1973 and joined the *Autonomia* movement in 1975.

The stream of *Operaismo* consolidated its roots within the Italian working-class movement in 1960s. Since no revolutionary alternative was present (the revisionist and compromising character of PCI became increasingly clear with the advent of 1950s and 60s), therefore, alien tendencies such as *Operaismo* got an opportunity to thrive within the working-class movement. The key theoreticians of *Operaismo* were- Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno. The 1960s and 1970s were the decades of massive discontent among people and the resultant mass uprisings. The economic policies of the current political dispensation had created the conditions of migration from agrarian Southern Italy to industrial Northern Italy. The industry was getting cheap labour, however, the government was not in a position to provide facilities to this huge populace of the urban centres. This created ground for various workers' struggles. These struggles soon turned into peoples' movements. Workers of FIAT went on a major strike in Turin in 1962. Massive strikes and violent clashes took place in 1968. This was also the time when world capitalism had already entered into a period of crisis and the phase of peoples' movements across the world (France, Germany, Greece etc.) had commenced. In 1975, *Autonomia* movement began in Italy which witnessed a huge participation from workers, women, students, youth, unemployed. This movement was spontaneous and anti-representation. The *Operaismo* theorists tried to prove the veracity of their principles through these movements. Every kind of alien/non-proletarian tendency present in the working class movement found a place in these movements such as Libertarianism, Anarchism, Neo-Anarchism, and those professing "ideology-free" political programme.

The Italian edition of *Workerism*, *Operaismo* talks about underlining the "changes" that have come about in the "structure of the working class". Meaning thereby, that it defines the proletariat in a new manner. According to this theory, wage earning workers, white collar workers, industrial workers engaged in manual labour, i.e. blue-collar workers, those working in service sectors as well as students, unemployed youth, domestic workers etc. are part of this "new proletariat". It includes all those who are not organized in any kind of union. This theory

puts forth the concept of transformation of “mass worker” into “social worker”. This “social worker” was highly educated and was born out of “standardization” and “proletarianization” of mental and intellectual labour. This class was different from that of “mass worker” engaged in unskilled and physical labour. The source of Negri-Hardt’s concept of “immaterial labour” is this new definition of the proletariat. *Operaiismo* advocates the freedom of the working class from the state, trade union, party or any kind of disciplined political organization and gives predominance to “self-organization” of working class resistance. It insists on “insurrection” rather than revolution.

While developing his theory, Negri contends that the process of the unification of the proletariat that Lenin propounded has been turned upside down in the modern world. Now instead of a “top-down process” under the leadership of party, there is a need for “bottom up process” inspired by “mass avant garde”. This amounts to rejecting the concept of the Leninist party and the vanguard. The *Operaiismo* has proposed yet another strange theorization. It has been called the “theory of refusal”. According to it, the working class will refuse to sell its labour power to the capitalist system and will refrain from participating in the capitalist development and this will eventually lead to the breakdown of the capitalist system.

Having delved broadly into the philosophical and political foundations of the theorizations which Negri and Hardt put to use, now we can direct our energies to scrutinize the claims of “newness” made by both in *Empire*.

A Rose by any other name would smell as sweet

Imperialism by any other name would stink as foul!

Shakespeare back in the sixteenth century had insinuated to the fact that the names of the things do not affect what they really are. This is particularly true of the post-Marxian realm. With an unbeatable obsession about claiming novelties and ‘breaking new ground’ every now and then, the words of the bard are a humble reminder of the fact that more often than not the new is just not so new! Serving antediluvian bourgeois and social-democratic concepts of Imperialism in the jargon-laden parlance of fashionable post-modernist French philosophy as well as the petty-bourgeois ‘Left-wing’ childishness (to borrow from Lenin) of the Italian brand of Anarcho-syndicalism and autonomism does not change the fact and reality of Imperialism today. What Negri-Hardt refer to as Empire is nothing else but what has now come to be known as Globalization. What strikes as an oddity is the fact that a book announcing the ‘demise of Imperialism’ does little to engage with the classical Marxist theories of Imperialism, and most importantly the Leninist theory of Imperialism. So much for claiming to write a “new Communist Manifesto of the Twenty-First Century”! However, to the authors’ credit, one does find strong resonances of non-Marxist underconsumptionist theory of Rosa Luxemburg and Social-democratic and revisionist Kauskyian thesis of “Ultra-Imperialism” in their characterization of the Empire. Yet another glaring omission in their analysis of the contemporary global order is that their theorizations are not rooted in any serious understanding

of Political Economy. No empirical evidence is provided by the authors to buttress their sweeping hyperbolic claims. Thus, one finds everything except Marxism (though occasional references to Marx can be found, but he too has been turned into a non-Marxist!) in the entire theorization that goes behind their Empire thesis. One can come across pantheistic mechanical materialism of Spinoza, Post-Modernism of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and even the principles of the American Federalist James Madison; besides the non-Marxist economist thought of the Italian Workerism (*Operaismo*). However, as far as Classical Marxism is concerned, the writer-duo have a natural antipathy towards it.

In the brief discussion at the outset of the paper, I had tried to present the key tenets of the Empire thesis. According to this thesis, Empire is as an all-encompassing realm not bound by any limits and possessing no centre. The authors, in fact, only reproduce the image of a globalized capitalism, basic aspects of which are the emergence of a global market, the retreat of national states (as modern forms of sovereignty and also as territories that place limits on the expansion of capital) and the proliferation throughout the world of new decentralized forms of governance. We will, however, first focus on the economic analysis of the Empire presented by them.

As previously mentioned, the writers, while analyzing the passage from Imperialism to Empire, reproduce the ideas present in the theories of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky on Imperialism. Negri-Hardt perceive underconsumption as structural ‘dysfunction’ within the body of capitalism. It is a contradiction which manifests itself as the problem of realization. Insofar as there is not sufficient purchasing power to absorb the commodities produced within the bounds of national economy, surplus value cannot be realized. This causes the need of non-capitalistic periphery to exist, for the resolution of this crisis. As the familiar Luxemburgite refrain goes, capital has no other prospect than that of export: “*capital is an organism that cannot sustain itself without constantly looking beyond its boundaries, feeding off its external environment. Its outside is essential*” (*ibid*, p.224, emphasis added). However, export of capital does not prove a definite solution to the problem of realization. Rather it causes simultaneous triggering of a capitalization process. The capital exported to non-capitalist zones “transforms them into capitalist societies themselves”: a “process of capitalization” comes into operation that *interiorizes the exterior* (*ibid*, p.226–7). Non definitive resolution of the contradiction of underconsumption leads to the “fundamental contradiction of capitalist expansion”: “once a segment of the environment has been “civilized,” once it has been organically incorporated into the newly expanded boundaries of the domain of capitalist production, it can no longer be the outside necessary to realize capital’s surplus value” (*ibid.*). There are two possible ways by means of which the new contradiction might be resolved: revolution or empire (*ibid*, p.240).

Now this theorization has some inherent problems. First of all, it is not the problem of realization of surplus value which is the motive force behind the export of capital in the imperialist phase of capitalism, but the crisis of profitability, as the Leninist theory of Imperialism underlines. The

drying up of opportunities of profitable investment within the boundaries of national economy drives capital to look for these opportunities outside. And it is not only to the non-capitalist peripheries to which capital is exported, but to other capitalist economies too. Secondly, it is the contradictions in the sphere of production itself, namely concentration and centralization of production as well as capital that leads to the advent of the stage of Imperialism. By assuming that realization problem is the principal impetus behind the capital export is to shift the analysis from the sphere of production to that of circulation, exchange and distribution. Thirdly, there seems to be an assumption that the “capitalization process”, i.e., transformation of non-capitalist systems into capitalism, is a smooth, homogeneous, uniform process as far as these non-capitalist economies are concerned. This is highly misplaced. Uneven development is one of the key characteristic features of capitalism and no such homogeneous development has ever taken place in the entire history of capitalism, both within the national economies and on the world scale. Fourthly, the understanding that only outside intervention causes capitalist transformation of non-capitalist periphery too goes against the foundational principles of Marxism which gives primacy to the internal contradictions and self-generating motion within individuals, entities and processes. The potentialities for capitalist development are themselves present within the non-capitalist modes of production. It’s not that the non-capitalist peripheries are waiting to be transformed by the “benevolent” metropolitan capital!

Negri and Hardt claim that the Empire marks the transition from the process of formal subsumption of labour by capital to the real subsumption of labour by capital. To a significant extent the internationalization of capital has succeeded in organizing the world on a capitalist basis, bringing to accomplishment the process of *formal subsumption* of labour to capital. By formal subsumption of labour the writers mean the gradual exhaustion of non-capitalist reserves, that is to say “extension of the domain of capitalist production and capitalist markets” (*ibid*, p.255). In a sense the world is homogenized and thus draws ever closer to a *limit*: “for more than one hundred years the practices of imperialism had worked to subsume all forms of production throughout the world under the command of capital [...] At a certain point, as capitalist expansion reaches its limit, the processes of formal subsumption can no longer play the central role” (*ibid*, p. 262, 255). As it approaches this limit, capital enters the phase of *real subsumption* of labour to capital, something which does not involve “the same processes of expansion” because “the integration of labour into capital becomes more intensive than extensive and society is ever more completely fashioned by capital” (*ibid*, p.155).

Now there is nothing novel in the processes described above. Marx was the first to describe capitalism as the first truly global as well as universal mode of production. The law of accumulation of capital, the principal law governing capitalist mode of production itself states that the natural motion of capital is towards expansion; without this condition it would perish. As far as the “formal” and “real” subsumption of the labour by capital is concerned, Marx himself distinguished between the two. In the chapter on “Primitive Accumulation” in *Capital*, Marx

describes this process. At first, capital draws into itself an existing labour process -- techniques, markets, means of production and workers. This Marx calls *formal* subsumption, under which the whole labour process continues much as before. However, by monopolizing the means of production and submitting the worker to the wage-labour (through primitive accumulation), capital gradually transforms the social relations and modes of labour until they become thoroughly imbued with the nature and requirements of capital. With this the labour process is *really* subsumed under capital. With the development of capitalist relations of production and technological advancements, real subsumption of labour would happen; not in a linear fashion necessarily but nonetheless would happen. It does not warrant a Eureka moment as Post-Marxists like Negri and Hardt would have us believe!

Yet another thing that strikes about Negri and Hardt's description of Empire is the fact that it bears an uncanny resemblance to Kautsky's "Ultra-Imperialism". It must be remembered that Lenin subjected Kautsky's theory of "Ultra-Imperialism" to ruthless criticism and famously called it "ultra-nonsense". Kautsky had talked about the possibility of the cartelization in foreign policy, thus leading to emergence of a world monopoly, a single international trust. This is what Kautsky called the phase of Ultra or Super Imperialism which would be characterized by union of many imperialisms into one imperialism jointly exploiting the entire world by internationally united finance capital. Lenin argued that such an assumption is a meaningless "pure abstraction". Now just have a look at quotes below; the former is by the theorists of Empire and the latter by the theorist of Ultra-Imperialism.

"The Empire can only be seen as a universal republic, a network of power structures and counterbalances structured into an inclusive and unlimited architecture. The expansion of the Empire has nothing in common with imperialist expansion and is not based on nation-states bent on conquering, pillaging, massacring, colonizing peoples into slavery. Unlike this imperialism, the Empire expands and consolidates its power structures [...] Finally, remember that at the basis of the development and expansion of the Empire is the quest for peace." (*ibid*, p.)

"From a purely economic point of view, therefore, it is not impossible that capitalism is now to enter upon a new phase, a phase marked by the transfer of trust methods to international politics, a sort of super-imperialism. Instead of fighting each other, the imperialisms of the whole world would unite and we would enter a war-less era under a capitalist regime, in which the imperialist countries could dedicate themselves to the collective exploitation of the world on behalf of a coalition of international financial capital." (Karl Kautsky, *Ultra Imperialism*, 2014)

As can be seen, both refer to a global power structure in which conflicts between the various imperialist countries would cease to exist. Negri-Hardt, however, who are fully aware of this dispute between Lenin and Kautsky, goes one step further by saying that in reality:

"Lenin agreed with Kautsky's basic argument according to which capitalist development contains within it a trend towards increasing international co-operation between the various national finance capitals which would have probably created a single global organization. Lenin however disagreed strongly with Kautsky's efforts to use this perspective to justify his forecast of a future of peace and to negate the dynamics of the contemporary situation". (*ibid*, p.)

Well, this is nothing short of distortion of Lenin's theory. In reality Lenin had something very different to say about the creation of a world trust, which we have already discussed. In *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, Lenin clearly states that although the various imperialist powers are able to make agreements between each other on a world scale, these agreements are only temporary and are only a reflection of the existing balance of forces between the opposing imperialist countries at a particular moment in time. It is obvious then that if this balance of forces changes, the agreements will also change. Therefore, such a situation cannot be described as peaceful and stable co-operation, but merely a series of temporary agreements designed to obtain the maximum amount of profit from a specific sector of the market.

Now let's come to the question of the role of nation-states. Negri and Hardt, like most of the globalization theorists argue that the present era can be characterized by the retreat of national states both as modern forms of sovereignty as well as territories that place limits on the expansion of capital. For Negri and Hardt, the Empire is a transnational global structure of power which does not represent the interests of any particular national (in the sense of belonging to one particular nation-state) bourgeoisie, but interests of international capital in general. To a certain extent, the rise of transnational corporations and international finance capital has created an optical illusion of capital no longer rooted in a particular nation-state. Sometimes these corporations have more investments in countries other than that of their origin which makes it difficult to trace their roots. However, in times of crisis it is mostly their national governments or the nation-states that belong to the bloc of *their* nation-state and *their* central national banks that, more often than not, come for their rescue. Moreover, in times of military conflicts it is the national armies that defend the interests of their national capital. We have yet to see an instance where transnational corporations would themselves engage in military warfare to defend the interests of international finance capital! Negri and Hardt perhaps understand the absurdity of their claim pertaining to the declining role of nation-states and hence come up with an even more absurd claim of the U.S. acting as a world policeman defending the interests of the Empire! Well, one believes that the writer-duo have been living under a rock for past twenty-odd years. Right from Afghanistan to Iraq and currently in Syria whose interests is the U.S., by the way defending? Well, some questions are better left unanswered.

However, the problem with these theorizations regarding the role of nation-states is that they fail to grasp the dialectics of the relation between the state and capital. These theories treat both

capital and nation-state as autonomous entities and stress the non-correspondence between the two. The state might sometimes appear antithetical to the interests of capital, and it would also be erroneous to draw one-to-one correspondence between national capitals with national states in each instance but what must be remembered is that, in the last analysis, the primary function of bourgeois state is to guarantee the reproduction of capitalist social relations. And thus, the view pertaining to the non-correspondence between the capital and nation-state or the autonomy of both is intrinsically flawed.

Negri-Hardt's concept of "immaterial labour" and "immaterial production" too seems to be problematic. At a superficial level, they are correct in identifying the shift that took place in the 1970s in the *modus operandi* of capitalism. However, the correctness is limited to only that, i.e., the surface. Their analysis of it nothing short of being infantile. As we have already seen Political Economy is too slippery a ground for them to tread! First of all, their concepts of "immateriality" clearly demonstrates the political influences of Operaismo and autonomism still present in writers' theorizations. Secondly, there is a kind of fetish towards the radical potential of post-industrial "immaterial" production, i.e., the production of information and communication, or in the words of Negri and Hardt "biopolitical" economy. It's true that the role of information technology as well as services has increased manifold during previous decades, however, this is not something unforeseen or novel. Even in these branches of production, howsoever, "immaterial" or "immeasurable", as the authors try to suggest, labour power is expended which might be highly skilled but nonetheless labour power and that too, very much quantifiable. Besides, "material" production is a *sine qua non* for "immaterial" production to even happen. However, it's totally absurd and non-dialectical to even create a dichotomy or a Chinese wall between "material" and "immaterial" labour as the authors seem to be doing. It does not mean that there have not been changes in the structure of the working class in the period of Imperialism in the phase of globalization. The informalization of labour is one of the hallmarks by which the current phase of Imperialism is identifiable. However, our authors refuse to even touch upon this key aspect. One can thus see that the concept of "multitude" that Negri and Hardt introduce in *Empire* and which they later develop in their *Multitude*, is an Autonomia-inspired endeavor. It has been designed to launch attack on the Marxist idea of proletariat and consequently, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The primacy given to "immateriality" of labour engaged in "immaterial" production is to create the notion of an amorphous, shapeless multitude whose resistance against a "deterritorialized", free-floating, impersonal Empire is as abstract and consequently as impotent as anything can be imagined, as opposed to the revolutionary idea of a collective resistance and class struggle.

Resisting the "charms" of Post-Modernism is too much to ask from post-Marxists like Negri and Hardt.

The temptations of French philosophizing are totally irresistible! In *Empire* too, the influences of French Post-Modernism are palpable. Thus, while the concept of "deterritorialization" has been

borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of “biopolitics” and “biopower” have been taken from Foucault. The concept of “deterritorialization” was created by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). The term “deterritorialization” first occurs in French psychoanalytic theory to refer, broadly, to fluid, dissipated and schizophrenic nature of human subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures. However, the term was later employed in relation to the processes of cultural globalization. On the other hand, “biopolitics” as a concept has been used and developed in social theory since Michel Foucault, to examine the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority. The rise of biopolitical technologies of governance have extended political control and power over all major processes of life itself through the transfer of sovereign power into “biopower”. This “biopower” by extending its authority subjugates the “bodies”. Now let’s cut through this intellectual maze. The high-sounding concepts such as “deterritorialization”, “biopolitics”, “biopower” have nothing new in them except their names. The manner in which Negri-Hardt have used the “deterritorialization” only indicates the most characteristic feature of capital which is towards expansion. Since capital cannot exist without expanding, its natural motion is towards removing all obstacles that come along its path and in this manner creating “a world after its own image”. As far as the question of Foucault’s concept of “biopower” and “biopolitics” are concerned, they only reiterate the Foucauldian notion of invincibility of power. It’s just an extension of the old post-modernist theorization regarding the fact that power is everywhere and any collective resistance against it is useless. According to this idea any collective resistance of power always gives rise to new structures of power and therefore this resistance must be effected at individual atomized level by breaking all notions of “universal” and “norm”.

After this brief discussion on the key aspects in Negri and Hardt’s Post-Marxist theory of Empire, we will now turn our attention toward the Leninist theory of Imperialism and its relevance and applicability in analyzing the world today.

Leninist Theory of Imperialism and Imperialism Today

Lenin’s theory of Imperialism which was put forth in his book ‘Imperialism: The Highest Stage of capitalism’ was written amidst the horrors of First World War in which the major imperialist powers of the world fought it out amongst themselves to divide the spoils of the war. Lenin’s theory unraveled the causes underlying this imperialist loot and plunder in the early decades of the twentieth century. It goes without saying that his revolutionary theory continues to inspire the Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries throughout the world even after 100 years of its publication. The brilliance of Leninist theory of Imperialism lies in the fact that it’s not just a scholastic analysis of the contradictions of capitalism in the stage of imperialism but provides a tool in the hands of the proletariat by characterizing this monopoly stage of capitalism, i.e., imperialism as the “eve of the proletarian revolution”. There have been many conscious and unconscious attacks on the revolutionary content of this theory both within and without the Marxist paradigm. This is

quite understandable too, given the radical implications the Leninist theory draws. The post-Marxist theory of Empire is a case in point.

Lenin, while analyzing the changes in the *modus operandi* of capitalism of his time, provided all the available empirical data at his disposal in his book to ground his theory of Imperialism. In the first six chapters, he gave a detailed empirical account of economic developments that he then summarized in the well-known definition that was given in Chapter VII: “Imperialism as a Special Stage of Capitalism”. Not only Lenin, but Hilferding and Bukharin too made use of extensive data. However, as I have mentioned earlier too, all the tall, bombastic claims by Negri and Hardt regarding the passage from Imperialism to Empire are made literally out of nowhere. It was based on this empirical research that Lenin called Imperialism the highest stage of capitalism. In other words, Imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism, the monopoly stage that grew out of the general characteristics of capitalism, i.e. free competition. The free competition itself grew to an extent that it was transformed into its opposite, i.e. monopoly. It must be borne in mind that monopoly is opposite of free competition, not competition per se. However, how “free” was competition in the period of free competition too needs to be examined. Lenin reminds us time and again that monopoly is not the negation of competition, conflict and antagonism, rather it is the intensification of competition and thus leads to the most violent and fierce conflicts and antagonisms. This monopolization emerged as a result of concentration and centralization of production and capital, creation of industrial monopolies, creation of banking monopolies and the merger of the two leading to creation of finance capital in the hands of the financial oligarchy. The concentration of production and capital and its merger with the bank capital leading to the rise of finance capital ultimately leads to the division of the world between capitalist monopolies and territorial division of the entire globe among the imperialist powers. Lenin then goes on to give five central features of this new stage.

For Lenin, these five characteristics of imperialism were:

- 1) The concentration of production and capital developed to such a high stage that it creates monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life;
 - 2) The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of “finance capital”, of a financial oligarchy;
 - 3) The export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance;
 - 4) The formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves;
 - 5) The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed.
- (Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p.84)

In a nutshell, Lenin defined imperialism as capitalism in that stage of development in which the domination of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the

international trusts has begun: in which the division of all the territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.

As some economists have attempted to show the indicators used by Lenin still hold true today. The concentration and centralization of production and capital, defined by Lenin as one of the characteristic features of capitalism in the stage of Imperialism, has assumed gigantic proportions today. Take for instance the fact that large companies in 27 countries of European Union account for only 0.2% of total number of enterprises, but for 32.9% of all employees, 42.5% of total turnover, and 42.4% of total value added (calculation based on Eurostat data). Similarly, the total value of annual worldwide mergers and acquisitions has sharply increased from 74.5 billion US dollars in 1987 to 880.5 billion US dollars in 2006 (data source: UNCTAD). The finance sector accounted for the largest share of these M&A (Mergers and Acquisitions) in 2006: 24.6% (1717) of all M&A, whereas the transport, storage and communication sector accounted for 5.4% (379) of all M&A and the printing and publishing industries accounted for 2.0% (142) (all mentioned data from UNCTAD). All of these sectors have experienced dramatic rises in the number of M&A, but the largest and most rapid increase is in finance, which is an indication that finance is the most heavily concentrated sector. The data presented suggest that the concentration and centralization of production and capital is valid even today.

Finance capital, as Lenin had pointed out “is the bank capital of the few big monopolist banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist combines of manufacturers”. Under imperialism, finance capital commands “almost the whole of the money capital of all the capitalists and small businessmen and also a large part of the means of production and of the sources of raw materials of the given country and of a number of countries”. The banks’ control of the flow of investment money that is used for operating corporations gives them huge economic power for controlling the capitalist economy. Lenin mentioned that banks are influential in accelerating technical progress. Capital concentration and the formation of finance capital are connected developments. Finance capital aims at generating extraordinarily high rates of profit.

Statistical data confirm that today the second criterion of Lenin’s definition of imperialism is valid. Finance capital has grown tremendously in the past thirty years and commands “almost the whole of the money capital”. Its assets are so large that it has the power to influence all other economic sectors. Since the beginning of the 1980s, finance capital has increased its influence, importance, and concentration. The emergence of liberalized global financial markets has enabled these developments. There are some new features of finance capital today that were not present at the time of Lenin. Today, the financial market is more than stocks and bonds: there is the powerful influence of insurance companies, pension funds, investment funds, and new financial instruments, insurance markets, foreign exchange markets have also come into existence. Though these new financial instruments have increased the short-term profits but they

have led to the volatility of the system and lie at the heart of most of the present capitalist crises. Thus, we can see that Finance capital is the dominant fraction of capital, which shows that an important

Characteristic feature of imperialistic capitalism is present today.

Lenin had clearly stated that “under modern capitalism, when monopolies prevail, the export of capital has become the typical feature”. The goal would be to achieve high profits by exporting capital to countries, in which “capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap”. Most of the empirical data show that the Foreign Direct Investments and world trade have significantly increased in the past thirty years, production and trade have both become more global. The world economy is still significantly rooted in national economies, but transnational corporations engage in global outsourcing of labour in order to save labour costs and other costs and to increase profits. Capital export, the third characteristic of imperialism mentioned by Lenin, has in comparison to the period 1945-1975 become far more important. The transnational corporations are a new characteristic of the world economy.

The current developments throughout the world have amply suggested that the economic division of the world among big corporations, which Lenin called the “real” division and the political division of the world among imperialist powers, which Lenin referred to as “figurative” division still exists. Perhaps, the variables might change from time to time, with certain additions or omissions, but the real as well as figurative division of the world is a reality today. The inter-imperialist rivalries might have assumed new forms but economic considerations still drive the imperialist powers to increase their areas of influence and engage in direct or indirect politico-economic conflicts with one another. Wars, though not always full-fledged, for securing geopolitical and economic influence and hegemony, is an inherent feature of the Imperialism today. In the end, what just needs to be added as a caveat is that it must not be forgotten that colonialism is not the only mode of existence for Imperialism. Imperialism can exist without colonialism as the current phase of Imperialism demonstrates.

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, we have seen that the markers which Lenin used to describe Imperialism as a specific as well as the highest stage of capitalism exist even today. The Empire theorists miserably fail to show as to what qualitative changes have occurred in the transition from the stage of Imperialism to Empire to warrant a change in the nomenclature, apart from their post-Marxist fetishization of novelty. Jargon-laden claims aside, how does one know that imperialism has actually been superseded since the writers do not deem it appropriate to substantiate their claims with any empirical evidence? Put differently, what is so new about Empire? Seriously speaking, nothing! Hardt and Negri’s avowal of the novelty of the contemporary order, as the preceding discussion should have made clear, leads them to some

very absurd assertions about the current world order. In the end, my contention is that this Post-Marxist endeavor had been precisely undertaken by the authors to attack the revolutionary implications implicit in the Leninist theory of Imperialism and substitute it with their “amorphous”, “immaterial”, “abstract” and blatantly apologetic and reactionary theory of Empire.