

February 18 | **Marx, Foucault, America, Europe, Globalisation, Democracy and many different kinds of butter\***. **An interview with Michal Hardt:**

## In fact, I want us all to be rich

\* or very similar products

In an extensive interview with RÆSON Michael Hardt discusses his controversial book “Empire” with in the light of world developments since its publication in 2000. The book – which was published in Danish in October – was written by Hardt, an American literature professor, and the Italian philosopher Antonio Negri, who has been in prison since 1997 - convicted for inspiring terrorism. The book has generated enormous debate – it has been claimed as 'nothing less than a re-writing of the communist manifesto for our time' and Hardt himself named the “unwitting sage and critic” of the globalization protesters’.

By Clement Behrendt Kjersgaard, RÆSONs editor-in-chief

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1. The US under Bush: curbing global capitalism

*In your article, “Folly of our masters of the universe” [The Guardian, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2002] you seem to be suggesting that the Western elites - or the global elites? - are misreading or misunderstanding their own interests when catering to the U.S. Would that be a correct summary of your argument?*

MICHAEL HARDT [MH]: Well, I would say that there are two obvious problems with the U.S. policy, the attempt at what is now called *unilateralism*. One is what you are pointing towards: that it doesn't account for the interest of what of what we might call a *global aristocracy*. One might think of this recent unilateralist adventure of Bush' son as a kind of attempt to exert monarchical control over the world, and usurp power from the various global aristocracies. And by 'the global aristocracies' I mean both the dominant nation-states but also the major capitalist corporations and other dominant forces in the world. In a sense, what had been a rather distributive network of power is now being concentrated in the hands of the United States. So the first problem with the policy really is that the - let's say: exertion of monarchical control on the part of the United States does not account for the interests of these various aristocratic powers. One might think - as a kind of shorthand - of the great possibilities for profit in capitalist globalization of the 1990s that the activities of the United States have done a great deal to *curb* in the present era. That's one problem: that other global powers - nation-states and others - do not have their interest represented by the United States.

The second however is that the U.S. cannot in fact - despite the belief of some of its rulers - maintain global order in a unilateralist fashion. That it is in fact impossible today for a single power to exert control successfully over the global order: so in fact it is not only that the other global elites, as I am calling them, might be displeased with the U.S. - because it doesn't represent their interest in the current order - they in fact *are needed*. They are needed by the United States in order successfully to conduct the operations of what one can either call *global pacification* or *maintenance of the current global hierarchy*.

*That article - from about a year ago - suggests that we are now entering a period of strife - and out of that we will see if a global revolution (I don't know whether you would use that term?) but a global change; people trying to rise up. A key point in the book as well is that you don't see the U.S., at least in the longer term, as in any way the centre or the pinnacle of the current global empire because there can be none. Right?*

MH: Right. And that, to Toni and me, seems simply a statement of fact - not a question of desirability. It is of course something that today at least seems - although the events keep changing - to be *quite obvious* in Iraq and in Afghanistan: That the U.S. is proving incapable in many regards of imposing order unilaterally. Even in a strictly financial sense. And then again the old analogy with the monarch and the aristocracy becomes interesting again: The monarch cannot afford it! The U.S. cannot afford to conduct these adventures on its own - it needs the finances of the aristocracies. And then of course also in more practical terms it cannot succeed.

Also to say, as you suggested we are saying, that we've entered a period of strife - maybe that seems just terribly obvious to me: I guess *everyone* would recognize that we've entered a period of strife! The different possibilities of the outcome of this - THAT'S what's in play and what I of course would hesitate to predict. But certainly we can see the different options that are being proposed today.

*Implicit in the analysis lies the claim that the elites that are supporting the U.S. and its current administration to some extent are misreading their own interest. In Europe of course the debate initiated more than a year ago was about that question - on the basis of which we've discussed who is going to side with the U.S. and who will go against it. Would that be an implication of your thesis - that half of Europe has 'seen the light' and recognised that Washington is not acting in the interest of the world?*

MH: It would be hard for me to believe that any of the other powers could think that the U.S. was acting in their interest. What might be at play rather is *to understand how to go against it*. Because often the *avenues* for opposing U.S. unilateral control are very risky and unclear. I should point out, however, that in all of this analysis I would not say that Negri or I are posing our hopes on these global aristocracies: it's not that we would like to throw our hopes with *Chirac against Bush*. But one still needs to analyse what stakes that are at play here - and how the game is being played. This question about the interests of the elites: it must be in fact obvious to everyone - and I mean here also the elites in Brazil as well as in Denmark; and even large capitalist interests in the United States: *only very few of them are directly profiting from these wars*. The question then is - if one were strategizing from their perspective: how is it that one could contest the U.S.' control successfully? The reasoning from our perspective would have to be once removed from that - but that's a slightly different matter.

## 2. State of exception

*Al Gore has conjured up the image of "1984" - that some of the developments in the U.S. bear a resemblance to that dystopian vision of a police-state. He is implying that fighting the War On Terror the U.S. is giving up some*

*of its fundamental freedoms: values that both to the Americans and the rest of us constitute the core principles of America. Would you agree with him on that?*

MH: Absolutely. In the sense that we have in a way a *double phenomenon* with respect to law and life. On one hand the U.S. is in this war but also has been, during this entire administration, intent on violating the principle of international law in a variety of ways. Refusing to sign international treaties such as Kyoto; un-signing treaties such as the International Court - and then also violating international law in a variety of ways: the principle of pre-emptive strikes is maybe one emblem and the detentions at Guantanamo another. But corresponding to this violation of international law is of course the violation - or the undermining, let's say - of domestic rights. So what Al Gore is referring to seems to me to be one face of this two-sided phenomenon. I would put it in general terms like this: the US is acting under the legal framework of *the state of exception*. It poses a state of exception that will then allow the suspension of law and of democratic rights, both on the global scene and on the domestic one. This goes along completely with this notion I was speaking of earlier - of a kind of monarchical use of the constitution. A unilateral taking control of the rights from the other dominant powers - leave alone the question of the populations as a whole.

*Speaking both historically and philosophically, one might say that this is the original justification for the Sovereign: that he can protect you against threats from the outside; against external enemies - and this is exactly the point the current American administration is making.*

MH: I think you're right - the formulators of the US policy are not always as eloquent as you just were in formulating it. But I think if one were to do so, their argument would be something like this: 'We now have a globalized world. The globalized world needs a sovereign power. The U.S. is the only candidate for that sovereign power - and it will now exert its sovereignty and exempt itself from the law. Because, in our old European-model tradition of political theory, the sovereign DOES stand above the law: the Sovereign IS the exception to the law'. Now, what I would say - this is the argument really of our book about the concept of *Empire* - is that with such an argument, the U.S. would be mistaking a modern form of sovereignty, that functions within the national context, for the needs of a new conception of sovereignty in the *global* context. And that this theoretical and political misunderstanding is leading in fact to all kinds of tragedies. Both for the United States and moreover, for the rest of us, in the meantime. In other words, I am saying that it can't just be President Bush, who is sovereign over this entire globe - there has to be a *new form of sovereignty*, that would be capable of managing a global order. This would be our argument - of course not saying that we're for such a thing and that we want to support it, but just: what is the necessity of the times.

*In Europe, we have discussed the 'spectre of anti-Americanism'. Many critics of the Iraq-war make a major point of out of suggesting that they are not 'against the U.S.' - they are not critical "of America, but critical of the current administration". A central question thus is whether current U.S. policy is in line with the wishes of the American people. In light of that - and of the presidential election of 2000 - would you say that America today is a democracy?*

MH: Well, I actually think that the U.S. is as democratic as any nation, today. At least in general terms - I think there are many ways in which many European states are more democratic than the U.S., but seen on a large scale, the U.S. is not in fact much less democratic than either it has been in the past or than any other state.

*But many critics of America on the left-wing would disagree with you there - they would suggest that since only about half the population vote in the Presidential election, you simply don't have a democracy: 'money decides it all, as implied by the debate about campaign funds', and so forth?*

MH: I guess I would agree with that, but I would also criticize the other examples they're pointing to. I am not here trying to celebrate the United States in the least - and coming back to your starting-point: It is much more accurate, *throughout* the world - not only in Europe, and ALSO in the United States - to interpret what even some of the demonstrators express as anti-Americanism - as rather: a protest against *tyranny*, again to put it in the old terms. You might make the distinction, like you did, between 'this Administration and U.S. history' or 'this Administration and the U.S. people' - but in more straight-forward terms, it is a protest against *the role* the U.S. is playing now. It is playing a tyrannical role; a role in which it has usurped the position of sovereignty and is, in a way, *pretending* to represent the interest of everyone else in the world. And so these protests or expressions of anti-Americanism - also by leaders not only by populations - are a protest against the *pretense* of representation without in fact: representation. This pretense that the United States government can represent and guide the interests of others in the world - without, in fact, being able to.

This is where I would locate the issue - it becomes very close then to the way any criticism of the Israeli government is immediately translated into an expression of anti-Semitism.

### 3. Could Europe offer an alternative?

*Much talk is made outside the U.S. of the need to 'supplement', 'balance', even 'show resistance' or create an alternative to the U.S. on the world stage. In Europe, some pose this as the main argument for equipping the European Union with a military arm. But any such strategy seems very different from what you're in favour of: would you think such a development ran the risk of replicating what some would call the power-mechanisms, the authoritarian and aristocratic features of the American system?*

MH: I find this a very interesting topic of conversation. In fact, what I've found for me personally the most rewarding discussions in response to our book are precisely on this question. Because both - let's say; leftist political thinkers in Europe, and also - what I find interesting about it - people in China and East Asia object in exactly the same terms to our book because we claim that there *is no more 'outside': that there's no possibility of creating an alternative to the current Empire*. And that claim, they say, undermines the possibility of creating for instance a democratic political Europe, to pose an alternative to the United States. Or, a democratic political East Asia, that many Chinese scholars imagine that could similarly pose an alternative to the United States.

I find these possibilities very interesting - I guess I have to argue against them just in terms of both the feasibility of such projects---

*But not the desirability?*

MH: There IS a good question about desirability, too. I remember speaking about this with several people in Brazil, and they said, "The thing we *least* need is another Euro-Centrism."

The broader frame of this issue would be to think about how regional autonomy can function in the global system - and I think that there are two opposing views on this. One is, what is certainly the U.S. administration's view of regionalism in the global system, where each region is essentially 'all the powers in that region PLUS the United States'. NATO functions this way; in the Pacific Rim it would be the various Asian countries sympathetic to the United States PLUS the United States; in the Middle East it would be the same way. They imagine a kind of regional autonomy with the regions being like the spokes of a wheel, where the US is the hub which reaches to each region. And so regional autonomy functions as part of a coherent global order.

The other - in a way just the flip side of the same coin - is imagining Europe as a regional, autonomous force. (It is very hard to imagine the same for the Middle East, but that would be an interesting project. Certainly Latin America - or the Southern Cone is being imagined in this way now; East Asia etc.) And as one providing an alternative to the United States. It might be that the two don't look that different. One would have to then debate what the possibility for regional autonomy *is*. So I guess I'm rather confusedly coming back to both the things you said: one is the feasibility of this regional-autonomy-as-alternative and the second one is about the *desirability* of it. Because certainly, it brings with it any number of dangers - or it has to be constructed in a very different way than it has been to provide a truly democratic alternative.

*From your perspective, it must come down the question of how power is distributed WITHIN those regional super-states, or whatever they would be?*

MH: And also the *closed* nature of those states. I think it is extremely important and interesting with the debates going on about the European constitution now. And the construction of - let's call it: a political Europe. That is one point, as you mentioned: In what way can we make Europe democratic - and *more* democratic than the nation-states have been? That's one - the other is: In what way will Europe represent another closed entity? With these policies of immigration etc.? Would it be a benefit to the European population at the expense of Africa, the Middle East, Asia etc.? Or would it somehow be an *open* possibility, that provides a stepping-stone towards democratic movement?

*To some, the EU is the expression of a 'limited internationalism', where the call for solidarity extends to Eastern Europe and no further, and where the debate of its extension and horizon inevitably gets stranded on the issue of Turkey or Russia. Others say, "The EU is a painful attempt to overcome the nation-state, and our mode of being a world-power is not by replicating the US but by exporting a model for co-operation which, on the inside, has more solidarity, democracy and equality than the US and on the outside is less aggressive". So Europe's role on the world stage is exporting that vision of regional integration to other parts of the world.*

MH: Right. That seems to be a very honest and honourable position. I still would argue that - seeing solidarity in a fellow-traveller-mode - that we need to at least work in conjunction with much more global actors and participants within this context. That is in no way a negation of such a project, that you describe.

#### 4. The nomades' lesson

*As I've understood "Empire", the real challenge both for America and Europe is immigration - and migration.*

MH: Right.

*Would it be true that to the extent that one can identify a social 'engine' or a significant historical force, that is: migration and what you call 'nomadism'?*

MH: That's certainly one reality, that undermines and threatens any notion of fixed geographical political actors. I wouldn't want to be understood as thinking that the migrants are going to become the new 'shining vanguard' and somehow they are going to transform the world for us - migration of course being just the evidence of a refusal of poverty; a refusal of the state of war; a refusal of all kinds of horrible conditions. I think that is one

factor that should indicate to us that the *possibility* of creating separate entities for political rule and action, is at least, difficult if not impossible.

*But is it the same thing when somebody escapes straight from hunger, making it across the border by foot, as when somebody who - being very well educated and highly skilled - travels from one end of the world to another? In the analysis they in a sense come down to the same thing, but they are not, are they?*

MH: No, there are obviously many things different in the two characters. You're right that both of them a desire for a better world - for *bettering their own world*, that's true. I wouldn't want to put them in the same category; but I think rather that both of them are refusals of the kinds of hierarchies - or indications, least say, but also refusals - of the kind of global hierarchies we have today. So that really all they amount to, for the discussion we're having, is a warning against, and an indication and reminder of, not only the global hierarchies in the world today - global divisions of labour; global divisions of power - but also a warning against re-creating such. We don't want a political solution that merely reproduces in different territories the same kind of hierarchies we experience today. I think that's a large part of my hesitation with the outline of I think a very engaging and noble vision you mentioned before, about Europe, which is that even if or when such a project is very beneficial for the population of Europe, we of course don't want to create one, which just reproduces the exclusion from this community of others in the world.

##### 5. The luxury of philosophy

*Some who look at "Empire" are likely to say: "Basically, what is happening here is a fusion of Marxism and post-Modernism." Would that be the 101 of what's going on?*

MH: Well, there are several things we're trying to do in the book. One of them is enter into the kinds of contemporary political discussions, like the ones we've been talking about up till now. Another is to give the reason behind various movements, in a way interpret and repeat what many people are saying about the movements that have to do with globalization, that insist on democratising the global system etc. That's two. But the third is, I think what you're point towards now: we think of the book as a entry into theories of primarily university-based debates, and we've tried in a way to bring various theoretical perspectives together. And sometimes demonstrate that they are in fact *working on the same project* - and they haven't recognized this before. A variety of, say, so-called post-colonial studies that are based in South Asia, for instance; and a certain kind of so-called post-structuralism, one might think of it based in France, and the traditional Marxist studies, which in way travels throughout the world. We see these as not opposed - in fact we see them all as working in a similar tradition: we try to have them speak to each other. This is a part of the book, though, that people outside the university may want to just ignore - and I hope we've written it in such a way that people who weren't already in such debates can simply read it for what they want rather than engaging in those debates.

*One of the fundamental features that Marxism and Post-Modernism share is that they are tools for challenging what is established and existing ---*

MH: Yes.

*But the big difference philosophically is the way Post-Modernism inverts Marxism, with the claim that 'the idea' is stronger than the material reality. How can you reconcile that debate?*

MH: What is also very difficult in all these discussions is that post-modernism, or post-structuralism, and Marxism itself have very many different currents working in different ways. In a way we want to read postmodernism as a *symptom* - this is what we try to do - I think it is in chapter 2.4! Excuse me for remembering these things too well -

*You're forgiven.*

MH: We want to read these discussions of postmodernism as a symptom that the world was *changing* at that point. And take them not so much at the letter but recognize that they have, in a way, inadequately, realised that the power structures in the world have changed. Read them symptomatically - as symptoms of that change. Again: not endorsing their conclusions, but seeing that they have, in a way: obscurely, recognised a historical shift. We make the exact same argument - and this is one that after September 11 got all kinds of reactions from the right-wing press in the U.S. - we make a very brief argument, in two pages, that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in recent years, or: the new form of fundamentalist Islam, is a way just the same as these postmodernist scholars in the first world. Because they have recognized that there has been a shift in the power structure in the world, and they have protested against it. They, just like the postmodernists, are mistaken about what the change really is - they're also mistaken about the way to address it. But they are important symptoms of how this change has happened.

So in both senses there is no way in which we endorse either what we're calling these post-modernist theorists, or the Islamic fundamentalists. We're trying to read both of them as a change of the times. In some ways, it is ironic to put them together, obviously, because postmodernists notoriously celebrate the hazardous, the changeable nature of the text, and Islamic fundamentalists of course insist on the fixity of the text and the truth of the world. But in a way they might be thought of as the winners and the losers of this current formation of a new global order: they look at the same thing from different sides. One can think of these postmodernists as the academic version of the global privileged, that move around the world and experience hybridity in a new way. Whereas Islamic fundamentalism generally has its roots in those who have been most disadvantaged - at least: in that part of the world - in the global changes.

*Marxism is a programme for action which can easily be explained to somebody – postmodernism is much less intuitive. With postmodernism, between what might be thought of as postmodern elements of popculture and the academic discussion, the gap is huge.*

MH: Yeah, you're absolutely right: they're very different kinds of theorizing.

*So what is your primary criticism of postmodernism?*

MH: Our critique of it in the book is that, in so far as postmodernism is pretending or believing that, simply by violating binary divisions we're creating an act of liberation --- so that postmodernism that attacks racism thinks that simply by the fact of hybridity, by mixing of black and white, by undercutting binary divisions, we're creating a liberatory act. That seems to us a misreading of how power functions today. In fact, global capital - even global order - functions today *by managing hybridite identities*: it is not simply black vs. white. So this seems to us a mistake. On the other hand, we do believe - like I said before - that these authors have recognized that something has changed. The way it fits with Marxism really is that --- let's put it this way: *every* historical materialism and Marx in particular holds – one of his central arguments is: that theory must match historical reality. It must trace it - and so, as historical reality changes, theory must change too - this, maybe, seems like an obvious statement. So that any historical materialist argument - certainly after 100 years - has to be *seriously*

revised. In a way we think that Marxist theorizing - or social theorizing in general - or, even: our conceptions of democracy *have to be modified* given the changes in reality that postmodernism might be one symptom of.

But in any case, you're certainly right about the, in a way, different *audiences* that in general Marxist theories and postmodernism have been aimed at - and the different, say, political locations of them. I wouldn't want to mix them into the same thing. Although we should remember of course, that there was a lot of criticism at it's publication of Marx's *Capital* - that it was very hard to read; that workers couldn't read it; the original French edition Marx wanted to publish it in instalments so that workers' groups could read it, but they nevertheless complained they couldn't understand it. None of this theorizing is immediately understandable by everyone.

*But in terms of a philosophy turning into a mass movement, or at least: being utilised by a mass movement, Marxism is a unique historical occurrence. You don't see a People's Party based on Foucault or Derrida anywhere!*

MH: No-no-no, we wouldn't claim that either and the authors themselves certainly had no intention of that kind.

*Although the attack on the binary distinctions IS in a sense a continuation of the Marxist attempt at localising the dialectics of society. Would you go as far as to suggest that postmodernism in a sense has been a luxury of the academics?*

MH: No - especially if we were going to pull into it the authors you just mentioned, I wouldn't say that. It seems to me that contemporary philosophical trends are not necessarily and shouldn't be immediately applied politically. I think that the philosophical work of Derrida or Foucault or any of the other *les grand maîtres* in France since the 60s are enormously important bodies of philosophical work and it would be a mistake to imagine that they were immediately provided for politics. Philosophical work IS only the luxury of the elite in a university - I wouldn't criticize them directly for that.

## 6. Capitalism and the creation of difference

*You made the point that today capitalism manages hybridity - but in fact your thesis is even stronger, isn't it? That capitalism LIVES by hybridity.*

MH: Yeah. This is the historical mode by which capital operates: the creation of differences and the *management* of differences. Capital doesn't create a uniform, homogenous society - and it also doesn't create uniform, homogenous identities. This is how capital in a way doesn't correspond to old notions of sovereignty, that create or: at least imagine a uniform population, let's say - 'the English people'. Capitalism in fact *creates* social differences - and *needs them*, both from the point of view of production and, in a somewhat minor but easily seen way: in terms of marketing. Capitalist marketing is always proliferating differences. This is one way in which it *looks* poststructuralist.

But the more general point- which I didn't get to 15 minutes ago when we were starting on this issue - is that there are a lot of trends in Marxist thought today, where people say: "Look, we have all the right concepts. We all knew the way things were 150 years ago. We just need to apply the same theories today." This is something that Toni and I feel one needs to argue against: just simply in the sense that we live in a different world today, and that Marxist theorizing - or theorizing of capital or of liberation - has to be *constantly renovated*. Sometimes



these philosophers can help us - not always - but that is only one way of trying to renovate our thinking about this.

*When you paint the picture that capitalism creates a very differentiated society - and needs it, both in a grander, historical perspective and also in a very immediate "I Can't Believe It's Not Butter"-type of way---*

MH: [laughs] You've spent too long in the U.S., I can tell!

*No, I've spent too long watching U.S. sitcoms, so it's even worse! A lot of old socialists in Europe probably do not see today's society as being very differentiated: they thought that things were much more fun 30-40 years ago and feel that differences have vanished - that those differences which are needed for consumer-culture are essentially artificial. They see the trend of globalisation and Americanisation as making us all the same. Do you disagree with that?*

MH: Well, I certainly disagree about interpreting globalisation in that way - but here again, globalisation means many different things. It's difficult to conduct that discussion. But if one puts them together, at least in a general mode, the processes of globalisation do in some way homogenize: think about how film industries are destroyed by Hollywood. Or, like you're saying, the television industries too. But there are many ways in which the processes of globalisation also - if I can use the word: *heterogenizes*: it creates new differences, or: resurrects old differences. So it's not that we have a more homogenous world, but that we have a *differently differentiated world*. This is the general, overarching let's say--- it's not really an idea, almost: an axiom --- of our work or project. That: these processes of globalisation - which we have experienced the last 20-30 years - in many ways, on the one hand, create more severe forms of exclusion or really: exploitation, and many new forms of suffering. But they also, at the same time, provide at least the potential for new forms of liberation. This is our argument: that we need to have in a way a two-sided response to the processes of globalization and even the new forms of global order. On the one hand, we have to resist and counter the way that these become new elements of control or exploitation or suffering or poverty; we also have to grasp - rather than turning backward and just acting against globalization as such - we need to grasp the possibilities in globalization and create out of them mechanisms for liberation.

## 7. New forms of exploitation

*At this precise moment - as you mentioned at the top - it is easy to say there is strife, war and atrocities in the world. But when you use the term 'exploitation', many people - also on the left - would say, 'Well, certainly some people are richer than others, but exploitation in the old sense is really being dissolved.' That when one looks at countries as complex as the U.S., it is very difficult to find a few people who monopolise all the power - things simply are too complicated to make such a claim.*

MH: I agree that one has to - and this is the global challenge I was speaking about before that Toni and I think we're faced with: we have to renovate all of the concepts, because as reality as changed, we need to think of differently. So in this regard we do have to understand exploitation differently - and see that it is not simply a matter of, say, the difference of time (as Marx likes to explain it at least, if not to understand it): the difference of the amount of time required in the factory to produce the amount of value that one must produce, where the extra time one spends in the factory was therefore the time of surplus value; the time of profit; the time of exploitation]. We have to think of this differently, in society today - both in the dominant countries *and* in the subordinated countries. That exploitation has taken new forms and new mechanisms.

That said, though, I *wouldn't* say that today we can't recognize the enormous inequality in the control of wealth or if you want to call it: means of production, or something like that. The figures are always staggering - the figures that are given even by the World Bank about what percentage of the population controls what percentage of the global wealth. Even in the United States, which is not the most unequal of countries in the world, it IS a very small portion of the population that controls the vast majority of the productive wealth. So if we're looking in those sorts of terms, I don't think that there has been an enormous change from the days of Rockefeller and Mellon, we've just moved to Gates and others. That said, though, I think that what is most important in such a discussion is to say *how* is the exploitation act operating today? How does it operate - both in the *immaterial production* (for those who are not producing cars anymore but immaterial goods in the dominant countries) and how does it work in terms of the seemingly excluded population in other parts of the world? The populations that we would argue are not excluded but necessary though sadly subordinated – at the bottom of global hierarchies.

*The challenge to that image would be the same as has always been levelled against Marxism and perhaps even postmodernism: All right, so you can identify some very rich people and some that are very poor - in Hobsbawm's terms: don't have a great deal of influence on their 'life's chances'. But that the big difference between today and 150 years ago, and those societies with greater and less stability is the fact of the middle class: people who have an interest in keeping things as they are.*

MH: It matters how one *defines* 'middle class'! Often I've seen 'middle class' defined in the U.S. as those who earn between \$20,000 and \$100,000 a year - thus expanded to include a large portion of the population. If one wanted to make the argument about class division globally, thinking of class strictly in terms of ownership of the means of production, it WOULD be a very starkly divided picture. And also, if you were just posing it in terms of stability of society, that wouldn't be the way I pose it: I would rather pose it in terms of the possibilities of freedom and of democracy. Democracy is becoming harder and harder to imagine, both in the national context and in the global frame. Certainly the possibilities of democracy are greatly undermined by the enormous hierarchies and subordinations within the world. That's one of the ways - one of the frameworks in which - we should think about such inequalities and the damages such inequalities do to us as a global society.

And the prospects of freedom too - which the phrase from Hobsbawm seems to point to: the World Bank's favourite statistic about poverty is, how many people in the world live on under \$2 a day - which is a very large number. Of course one should counter that - and I think one should - with the fact that \$2 means something very different in Mozambique than in Copenhagen - because \$2 doesn't buy you anything in Copenhagen. On the other hand, even if one can live in Mozambique on that \$2, you certainly can't go anywhere else: you certainly couldn't take a holiday in Copenhagen on those \$2 a day! So there are many ways in which the differences of wealth - not so much *income* but - differences in the wealth and the power translate to enormous restrictions on freedom for a large portion of the world's population. Maybe I am very old-fashioned in this regard, but it seems to me that freedom, equality, democracy are perspectives from which one should read these situations and also from which one should act.

## 8. Freedom and stability

*But I guess if one is a really fundamental Marxist, you would take issue with that - and might find some common ground with an extreme capitalist, in saying: "What we really need to focus on IS income levels. These are not related to issues such as democracy and freedom, but to issues of stability - that everyone wants wealth more*

*than democracy, and thus we should construct societies that might be autocratic but guarantee a high level of income and a rising level of income."*

MH: I actually think that the effort to ensure stability is the sure way to lose it: if by guaranteeing stability, one is going to ignore questions of inequality and freedom. But you are right in the sense that these are in a way political choices that inflect or determine one's theoretical perspective. The fact that I think democracy is an important or even fundamental political objective will leave me to say different things and make different political choices and would have me refuse immediately any notion of, say, the dictatorship that would be, in some sense, for the benefit of everyone.

*As in the MATERIAL benefit of everyone?*

MH: Right. And also, it reminds me --- but this is a detour: you can cut all these things off of the tape! --- I had a little radiodebate with some guy named Niall Ferguson. They set up the radio thing because his book is also called *Empire*, and he argues all kinds of ridiculous things and I don't think he actually believes them: that the British empire was actually good for all of its imperial subjects; that we need to repeat that today; that Europe has to become an empire like Britain was etc. But he makes this argument from the perspective that democracy is really not important. He says, democracy is a nice idea that might come *later* - when everyone is ready for it, for the moment, what we need is *liberty*, which means: private property. Now, first of all; I wouldn't restrict the notion of liberty just to private property - it would be a very small portion and maybe not even an adequate portion of what freedom or liberty means. But it's true that if one says that democracy is perhaps desirable yet something we don't need to think about now, one can arrive at all sorts of different theoretical ends.

*You don't accept the trade-off between material well-being and liberty? At least that it could be a lasting trade-off?*

MH: Right. Certainly 'the well-fed slave' is not my ideal of society. Moreover, even from the simple, tactical point of view of maintaining stability, it seems to me an enormous mistake. Because I think that in fact such a restriction of freedom and a restriction of democratic possibilities is a sure recipe for instability. This is such an obvious point that it is hard to believe that I would have to say such a thing, but when the U.S. administration argues that 'in the name of security and of global stability, we need to *restrict* freedom - both in the U.S. and abroad' - that is a horribly mistaken notion, not only a bad notion but a mistaken one, because the restriction of freedoms is, it seems to me, certainly not a recipe for stability: in some ways even a *provocation*.

*But there is always a trade-off isn't there? In a sense the current Bush administration is postmodern in the sense that they say, 'we've got bad guys in the U.S., that's why we have the police and the death penalty. We've got bad guys outside - we need to use the same measures'. In no society is freedom unlimited by the state - basically, they're acting out that role on the global stage.*

MH: There are three things I want to answer. First of all, I have nothing to defend in postmodernism: I am happy to throw it out or not or whatever you want! But I think that they *ARE* imaging - and this is what your example seems to suggest to me - that we can simply extend the kind of national regime and project it unto the global stage. And that seems to me to be failure to recognize historical changes. First of all, things change with the difference in *scale* - but also, we have to rethink our contemporary world in much more drastic ways. The third thing is, that - at least in the domestic U.S. debate about these things, it seems to me there is a lot of confusion about *what constitutes an undermining of liberty*. For instance, longer lines when checking-in at airports seems to me a very minor issue - and I don't really care: I am happy for them to check everyone's suitcases etc. That doesn't seem to me an appreciable decline in liberty. On the other hand, undermining the rights of people who

are accused of crimes; what previously had been illegal searches of people's houses; of their Internet sources; their library accounts etc. - these DO seem to me to be significantly undermining liberty and freedom and I guess: dangerous in many ways. Dangerous even from the strict sense of the maintenance of order: like I said before, such decreases in freedom are things that in a way inspire revolt. So it is many very different things, that are often talked about and grouped under that category of 'freedoms'.

## 9. The false alternative

*The starting point of the book seems to be the certain passing from the nation-state to some other kind of international order. In the 90s, a lot of people felt that the UN had a re-awakening - or: an awakening! - and that a sense of global solidarity was growing with the nation-state and nationalism retreating. Some people would think that in the last five years - both in the Middle East, the U.S. and Europe - we have seen a renaissance of the nation-state: that all of the things which are supposed to undermine it really just serve to strengthen it: As people become more uncertain, they also grow more appreciative of the culture and heritage they have. So that in fact we are not passing from a world of nation-states to a world with one frame of reference, but rather into an era where nations are more relevant and vibrant than they have been for a long time.*

MH: This points to what seems to me a false alternative in all the discussions about globalization, which is: one person says, 'there is globalization - therefore the nation-state is no longer important'. And the other person says: 'Well - nation-states are still important, therefore there is no globalization'. What we have to recognize is the way in which relationships --- and relationships of power, too --- are globalising and how the nation-states function within that process. Processes of globalization, or even in the proposition of a global sovereignty, like Toni and I suggest - don't mean that the nation-states are no longer important. Nation-states remain important - of course some more than others - and that's always important to recognize. Many nation-states in fact have never really been sovereign - but that's another matter.

I would disagree both the claim that nation-states are fading away and will soon be irrelevant - but also I would argue against the notion that nation-states have re-asserted themselves, so it is in fact the same or they are *more* sovereign than they were at a previous time. Neither of those views is right - what seems right to me, and this is the attempt of this notion of Empire, is to recognize a global framework in which nation-states, in an unequal way and various other forces, some of them at a global level; some of them at local level; some of them at national level - function in a network of relationships, that constructs global order. That is our attempt - we could certainly be wrong; I don't say that we're necessarily right, but I think that *some attempt like that* - one that recognises how nation-states function within a larger structure - seems to me the only way of coming to terms with what our global situation is today.

*For people to say that your prediction of a kind of watershed is correct, there needs to be empirically a sense of increasing international solidarity, right? But about a lot of those things you describe - people migrating, refusing to remain in poverty - a capitalist or a liberalise would say: "That's individualism! There is no sense of solidarity; no sense of commonality; no sense of community, and certainly none of these immigrants are thinking about each other - they are thinking about themselves!" When people migrate - to find another job, 'better their life-chances' - they are really thinking about themselves: to suggest, 'once you have made it - you need to think about those you've left behind; or those who are in the society where you are currently residing or in that where you're going to reside tomorrow', you need to appeal to a global or at least: a cross-national solidarity which is just not there.*

MH: I feel we're at a very deep philosophical point right here.

*I take that as a compliment!*

MH: [laughs] Okay! I don't view it as there being a need for self-abnegation and altruism; where I see the need is for a recognition of 'collective desire', let's say. So that when I say, from the perspective of someone in the U.S., that I am against people working in sweat-shops in Asia, it's because doing away with that practice will make my world better too. It's not just from any austere altruism; so I would turn to, rather than the migrants, in this case - but I bet one could give a good description of that, too - to these various movements that have grown around issues of globalization and now war, too. When they're protesting in front of the IMF or the World Bank or the G8, these are not simply *abstract expressions of solidarity* in the sense of self-abnegation. They're in fact fundamentally arguing for a *more democratic world*. And a more democratic world not in order to deprive themselves but in effect: to enrich themselves. That's the way I would argue. For instance, I wouldn't want to construct a movement on the left based on poverty - I don't want all of us to be poor. No, I in fact want all of us to be *rich* - I think it is in my interest, it is in my desire, and I think it is in our desire in a much more general way that we have a more democratic and more equal world.

#### 10. The bubbling cauldron

*So what makes people demonstrate in Seattle and Gothenburg, it is not because they feel sympathy with the Third World, but they feel that they themselves have been left out of the political process?*

MH: It is not just a matter of sympathy with the Third World, but a recognition of *commonality*. The desire of democracy is really fundamentally a desire also for *equality*. I am not trying to argue that 'they are myopic and that although they appear to be in support of those in the Third World, they really only want more money themselves', or something like that. I think that they recognize that their own lives and the lives of those elsewhere *are related*. This is why these movements seem to me the most advanced expression of *globalization* - rather than of anti-globalization struggles! What they really are is recognizing the immense desire and potential released by these processes of globalization; and recognizing our commonality with others in the world - which seems to me the only basis for a new form of democracy, that is adequate to the global scene. That is why I was trying to insist that fundamentally - despite various and even conflicting demands one hears at these protests - underlying them all is a demand for democracy.

*Do they have an image of what they're striving for?*

MH: I would say not - but that's in fact the way movements and especially protest movements have been, historically. There's two things that are expressed, really: one is a refusal of the present conditions of rule and the other: a *desire* for something better. Protest movements of course are enormously important for any democratic society, and they don't generally offer a blueprint for the future. What they offer is a kind of mechanism towards it - an expression of desire towards a different future. And I too don't have blueprint or '10 points we can do today' to make the world democratic: it seems to me a much longer-term, collective project. Posing it in much grander terms: it seems to be the fundamental question that our societies are faced with, today: How is it that we can invent a new democracy that would be adequate to *the global world*? What would be its institutions; what would be its concepts; what would be its mechanisms?' I think that's something we're very far from, but that the need of it is ever more present.

*And this is the process we have seen accelerate in the past 3-5 years?*

MH: How would I put it? It seems almost like a *bubbling cauldron*: we've seen advance and regression, too. The war against Iraq certainly wasn't an advance. But nonetheless I think in all of the various tumultuous events of recent years, even stretching back to 1989: that might be the best - or 1968; I am not sure what is the right year one should give for its initiation; we've seen the ever-present need and perhaps experimentation - not very successful[!] - of trying to work out this project.

One is tempted in such a situation to look back historically to other times when new political frameworks were invented: they of course don't happen all at once. They take great extended periods of moving forwards and back: an example that I like in this context is when, in early modern Europe or North America; say, the 18th century in general; there WERE revolutionary demands for democracy, and there was a recognition that the old notion of democracy - essentially: the Athenian notion - was not adequate. We couldn't just take this democracy, created for the city-state 2000 years ago, and apply it to the national scene. So there was enormous and revolutionary experimentation in creating - or demanding - a new form of democracy. It seems to me that similarly, we're facing a new crossroads today: the models - however badly they worked - of national democracy that we've lived with throughout modernity, are NOT adequate on the global scene today. Like those revolutionaries in the 18th century, we too have to invent a new *kind* of democracy, that would be able to grasp this change in scale and the new world we're confronted with. And it's not going to happen overnight.

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