

Global Babble

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Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (eds)
 IMPLICATING EMPIRE: GLOBALIZATION AND
 RESISTANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY WORLD ORDER
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EMPIRE IS EVERYWHERE. You can see it in the shanty towns of São Paulo and on the coffee tables of the well-heeled in Boston and Sydney. It made us, in its British form, in the antipodes via the expeditions of Cook and Banks, and all that followed. Now it dominates our newspapers and television screens in the form of war.

Empire is ubiquitous; we are all implicated in it. And so the books pour out, most spectacularly Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's bestselling *Empire* (2001), and collections such as this one, *Implicating Empire*. Its cast will be familiar to those who have been hanging around the left wing: Peter Marcuse, Jeremy Brecher, Alex Callinicos and, of course, Negri and Hardt. I do not know Heather Gautney, the co-editor, but Stanley Aronowitz is a stalwart leftist New Yorker, one of the few who knows about culture as well as political economy, still likes Marcuse and yet still believes that the working class actually exists, and suffers.

These days, every respectable academic needs to have a book about globalisation, on pain of death. In the 1990s the compulsory theme was citizenship; this decade, globalisation. Empire or imperialism remains the Marxist spin on globalisation. The big hit here is the Hardt and Negri book, which jaded left academics seem to like because it calls the world back to order. For Hardt and Negri, like an earlier generation of developmental Marxists, globalisation is actually good news, because it contains the seeds of global communism.

Some of the geopolitical analysis in *Empire* is astute, not least when it comes to detecting the limits of the earlier modern claims about the sacred sovereignty of nation states. Into the new century, claims to national sovereignty are tested not only by great power chauvinism, but also by the rise of progressive arguments about universal human rights, which even states should not infringe. National sovereignty no longer rules.

Beneath this geopolitics in *Empire* lurks the old Marxian metaphysics of *The Communist Manifesto*. Empire calls out the multitude, just as capital calls out the revolutionary proletariat. The obvious objection, that anti-capitalism doesn't mean socialism, is overridden by the kind of Marxist magic where capitalism, or imperialism, remains rotten-ripe for socialism, with or without revolutionary agents other than demonstrators. The ambivalence and ambiguity of the human condition, with or without globalisation, here simply dissolve into air.

Globalisation is a mixed phenomenon, best understood as a parcel of connected processes that develop at different rates. The most extraordinary of these is the revolution in information technology. Three other processes attend it: the globalisation of finance, production and culture. If we begin from this schematic sense of complexity, it is difficult to imagine anyone unconditionally supporting or opposing globalisation. And so it is here, in *Implicating Empire*, as it is on the streets during the demonstrations. The book contains some mouthing off about globe and empire, both positive and negative. Its most powerful insights, apart from the magisterial views of the editors in the introduction, are in the more substantively engaged pieces. Manning Marable, for example, connects the war against terror with domestic panic and racism. We all now live with a new state of emergency, which for some of us is much more urgent, as for example those caught in Los Angeles 'driving when black'. Permanent war abroad includes the prospect of permanent emergency at home. In the USA at least, this includes the risk that the state subcontracts repression to civil society. This is what the California sociologist Barry Glassner, co-opted by Michael Moore for *Bowling for Columbine*, calls a culture of fear, and it is escalating, not least after September 11.

Ellen Willis does a psychopathological number here on the phallic order of the Twin Towers — suggestive but, for me, unpersuasive. Alex Callinicos shows a refreshing openness to the anti-capitalist movements after Genoa and September 11. William Tabb questions the left-wing common sense that globalisation is always a 'race to the bottom'. For some oppressed workers, the prospect of the new industrial employment introduced by globalisation will mean a step up. Here, the problem is rather the insufficient development of globalisation. Most Foreign Direct Investment involves rich countries investing in other rich countries. Ergo the famous Mexican graffiti, 'Yankee Go Home', to which another hand has added, 'and take me with you'. Most poor countries

cannot attract even minimal foreign investment. The Western critique of the culture of development remains compromised by its own material comfort.

As Aronowitz argues, the problem is rather that, for the metropolitan poor, social democracy has been disarmed. Welfare is in tatters, especially in the USA, where in any case it has always been stigmatic. Development for India and China means deindustrialisation for the old working-class heartlands of the USA. Cindi Katz credits this shift to what she calls 'vagabond capitalism'. Clyde Barrow shows how the higher education sector has been transformed into the global enterprise system, which trains symbolic analysts and ignores local culture and commitment. Peter Marcuse discusses the reinvention of the urban fortress of citadel. Carmen Ferradas essays the fate of Argentina, and the end of its First World dream, a story that always has poignant implications for the antipodes. David Graeber, ever ready to bury the bourgeoisie and bureaucrats, offers closing advice for theorists and practitioners of revolution. The problem, however, is not only that the revolution devours its children, but also that the complexity of modernity won't allow it. What happens after you seize the Post Office and Flinders Street Station?

This is an uneven collection: no surprises there. Its subject matter can be as hilarious as it is earnest. In one place, for example, one writer seriously quotes herself at length as an authority, which is taking even North American academic self-referentiality a little too far. The subject matter otherwise remains as pressing as it is ubiquitous. Certainly, consciousness has become global. Local politics in a place such as Australia becomes a second-order trauma reflecting the chaos and brutality of the world we had for so long hoped would simply leave us alone. Lest we forget — in all the passion of the letters pages and talkback shows — the problems of reform begin at home, wherever we are. Even if we are not persuaded that 'Another World Is Possible', there must be better ways to live.