

PERENNIAL EMPIRE

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Preface: Everlasting Leviathans

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The “E”-word for Empire augurs new forms of sovereignty that have toppled the “nation-state” and “imperialism,” which was engendered by the European powers during the process of colonization. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their seminal *Empire*, appropriately released at the turn of this millennium, “imperial” is not the adjective best qualified to tag the new Empire; “imperial” is passé, for “imperialism is over.”¹ “is a word so controversial, so charged with all kinds of questions, doubts, polemics and ideologic premises that it is better to resist its use altogether”² (Said 1993) Described as a “Leviathan,” with its clear Hobbesian connotations for an autocratic order of state, this monster of the deep has no adjectival form, no territorial center of power, no boundaries, no limits; its lies beyond nineteenth-century British reach or twentieth-century American overstretch; it inhabits the globe.

To account for this tentacular, insidious morph, Bernard Porter has coined the word “superempire.” Unlike Hardt and Negri, he locates it in “America,” an America which, though it shuns the traditional trappings of empire, aims “to remodel the world in her own image”; yet, like Hardt and Negri, Porter deems that this new Empire in the form of “internationalist imperialism” is unprecedented: “[it] exceeds any previous empires the world has ever seen.”³

As a new paradigm of power, Empire seems devoid of antecedents and is not beleaguered by anxieties of influence. Because they target the binary logic behind colonialist, sexist and racist constructions, postcolonial theories, as well as postmodernist theories—principally based on Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of modernist master narratives, Jean Baudrillard’s cultural simulacra, and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of Western metaphysics—are useless, for they evade the “real enemy,”⁴ an enemy that is, however, hard to fathom, for it takes such guises as globalization or capitalism, but a

capitalism-with-a-difference since it operates from the non-place of exploitation. So goes the argument in Empire.

For Hardt and Negri, a postcolonial theoretician and a cultural critic like Homi K. Bhabha is relevant only so far as his work is symptomatic of “the passage to Empire,”⁵ just as the new fundamentalisms are part of the same etiology. Significantly, the founding monument of postcolonial theory, The Empire Writes Back (1989) by the “down under” troika, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, is not mentioned. In other words, writing, whether “back,” “forward,” or “sideways,” or simply literature, that most subjective discourse, is not part of Hardt and Negri’s essai in political philosophy of the epochal shift towards Empire.

Interpreting exemplary texts, the essays in the volume provide a supplement of sorts by reviewing the transition from colonial to postcolonial as a historical but essentially imaginary and narrative construct. Examples of past and current empire building are analyzed from a transnational perspective by focusing on the exchange of ideologies and the practices of nation-building, state-power, democracy, and anti-democracy, up to the recent “war on terrorism” so as to expose the roots of empire formation and trace the continuum of empire building in the twentieth century. The latter spectrum and coverage illustrate the undeniable fact that there might be an Empire à la Hardt and Negri out there but, more plausibly, earthly empires, which seek to return, albeit in diverse forms and with punctual justifications, and are truly “perennial.” They are clones of former Leviathans.

This collection of fourteen articles falls into four Parts, outlining the twentieth-century process of empire building, even in subterranean forms, from the end of the First World War to the onset of the twentieth century.

Speaking on May 18, 1924, to a group called the Heretics, Virginia Woolf proposed “that in or about December, 1910, human character changed.” With that disarming mix of bravado and imperturbable tact, she strode to a conclusion: “All human relations have shifted ... those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.”⁶ The present volume bears evidence to the continuity of such changes.

Post-War Representations of Empire

Traditional empire and nation building provide the context for the scrutiny, in this first part, of national identities and imageries, deconstructing the modernist and post-War idea of the nation, often gendered as male and portrayed as ethnically homogeneous, as in the work of W. G. Sebald, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Barry Unsworth, and Peter Rushforth.

Metropolitan centers of erstwhile imperial powers bear indelible traces of the histories of imperialism. Britain's colonial legacy is thus everywhere evident in London, from the British Museum to the Indian restaurants, which have come to the rescue of the less palatable British cuisine. Urban landscapes are thus understandably the privileged sites for postcolonial literature and cultural studies, evidenced by the slew of criticism on multicultural London by, e. g. Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, and the creative success of Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, and Bernardine Evaristo. Englishness, that inspires nostalgia for a lost imperial age, will never be the same.

In the collection's opening essay, Lucienne Loh ventures through the seemingly innocuous rural British landscape and excavates sediments of imperialistic history under the surface of, i.e. Suffolk in East Anglia. In approaching German writer W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1998), she introduces a working concept of her own alloy—"ironic nostalgia"—a variant of Paul Gilroy's notion of "postimperial melancholy" to account for the fact that in this nostalgia, there is no harking after an illusory, idyllic past. Sebald provides the traditional material, including the manor-home as a metonymy for Englishness, while stressing the fallen state of imperial splendor and further forcing the reader to acknowledge the sources for nostalgia. These sites of historical amnesia and the concomitant histories of the rural spaces beyond Britain's shores— what Loh calls the "rural networks of empire"— make up both the violent histories of the British empire and post-colonial immigrant subjectivities. Loh's reading of rural Britain as mirroring the cultural production of empire recalls the materialist approach and space theory, as articulated by James Clifford, Clifford Geertz, Arjun Appadurai, Edward Soja, and David Harvey.

In her reading of British Barry Unsworth's quasi-autobiographical novel *Sugar and Rum* (1999), Jennifer Nesbitt considers writer's block as a symptom of a postcolonial logic of exploitation in/as culture, for, while Unsworth's author is denied the possibility of framing his own narratives, it is intimated that framing narratives about "others" is an innately exploitative act. In this end-of-millennium story, Unsworth compresses the conventions that separate narratives of the slave trade from narratives of World War II and those of historical English entitlement. The climax of the novel joins all three narrative threads at a reenactment of the Battle of Brunanburh, an Anglo-Saxon battle allegedly representing the first truly "English" victory, during which "heritage" appears as syncopated word and moral responsibility for "others" is deliberately shunned.

Among the many "others" that have been singled out as members of "the oppressed," what Hardt and Negri call "the multitude," the common name for the poor, children have often been denied membership. While recalling the "discovery" of childhood in the long nineteenth century and the ensuing conflicts between children's rights and owners' rights over children, Anca Vlasopolos focuses on the continuing strands of this conflict from entrenched nineteenth-century plots to late twentieth- and early-twenty-first century literary rewritings. While Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's Joss and Gold (2001) and Peter Rushforth's Pinkerton's Sister (2005) rework Puccini's Madama Butterfly; Rushforth's Kindergarten (1980) revisits the Grimm brothers' fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel," which portrays children as chattel or disposable goods, against the backdrop of two twentieth-century traumas, the Holocaust and terrorism.

Building on the fracturing of I-identity caused by such traumas, Andrea Yates compares Derrida's Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin (1996) and in Woolf's Three Guineas (1939), for both works stage the "self," as inexorably defined by the imperialist "other," and engage with an envisioned interlocutor while representing empire through the relationship between "proper name" and the "narrator," between the witness and the signature. In an imaginary dialogue that bears the traits of performativity, both Derrida and Woolf take up issues of national identity and citizenship.

Experimental Nations Globalized

In the second part, contributors move from the initial inquiry of the admittedly binary colonizer/colonized relationship to a more nuanced view, which includes hybridity, the main characteristic of Homi K. Bhabha's "politics of difference," which is instrumental in challenging the essentialism of modern sovereignty, to which Hardt and Negri oppose their globalization theory.

Taking her cue from Algerian scholar Reda Bensmaïa's apt phrase in Experimental Nations: Or the Invention of the Maghreb (2003), Valerie Orlando characterizes wandering Maghrebian writers as nomads inhabiting "experimental nations," that are free spaces unhindered by borders or state bureaucracies. Orlando argues that contemporary Algerian authors, such as Salim Bachi and Malika Mokeddem, consider the post-independent Algerian state as more repressive than the former colonial French empire. The (f)ailing and corrupt "nation-state" is gradually replaced by a borderless, nation-less space, where nomadic authors, like Edward Said's intellectuals during their voyage in,⁷ are able to reconfigure their idioms, history, territory, and community from outside their homelands.

The figure of the nomad is also a key-figure in Hardt and Negri's genealogy of Empire. Nomadism is, along with exodus or desertion-as-resistance, part of what they call the "being-against," a stance embraced by the early "against-men," that is, the first anti-fascist deserters of treacherous European governments, which have become tomorrow's "multitude." This "new nomad horde" or "new race of barbarians" offer an alternative, which is that of the "counter-empire."⁸

The specter of migration looms large in this section, as this new nomadism also applies to the five million Portuguese immigrants in the world (as opposed to ten million in Portugal), who have emigrated, especially during the Salazar dictatorship. While the Portuguese represent one of the main immigrant communities in France, they remain "invisible," absent from public discourse, because, as Martine Fernandes argues, they are seen as "good" immigrants, easily assimilated into French culture as opposed to non-Westerners or non-Europeans, such as Algerians who all too easily are identified as the "bad" immigrants. Such a manipulative opposition is an expression of contemporary French empire building.

In her dialogic examination of Carlos Batista's novel Poulailler (2005), after the hen-house where the Franco-Portuguese narrator as a little boy used to seek refuge from his father's violence and French racism and turned himself into a hen, Martine Fernandes designates the hen house as a metaphor for the loss of sovereignty and domestication suffered by Portuguese immigrants and their descendants in France, as a result of Salazar's dictatorship and French neocolonial politics. This political satire's critique of French society is reminiscent of Voltaire's "Dialogue du chapon et de la poularde," in which castrated animals, like the emasculated Franco-Portuguese male in France, fall prey to exploitative humans. This Kafkaesque metamorphosis also limns a most discreet genealogy in Mozambican author Mia Couto's denunciation of various imperialisms (e.g. Portuguese, Russian, American) in Terre Somnambule (1992) and in Beur writer Farida Belghoul's *Georgette!* (1986). The fable, a traditional French genre for political satire, becomes a powerful hermeneutic tool to denounce contemporary French imperialism.

The Portuguese immigrés join Hardt and Negri's "new nomad horde," that resurfaces at the end of Empire under the subchapter "Nomadism and Miscegenation," which appear as "figures of virtue, as the first ethical practice on the terrain of Empire."⁹ Zahi Zalloua deems their discussion of the nomad exceedingly romantic, leaving undisturbed the alterity and exemplarity of the nomad. If the authors of Empire, he continues, rightly underscore the limits of a "politics of difference" à la Bhabha, calling attention to the ways "difference" can always be co-opted by the dominant doxa, Hardt and Negri ignore what Zalloua calls "an ethics of difference in the age of globalization." Zalloua thus brings added nuance to "difference" by juxtaposing Hardt and Negri's understanding of "difference" with Edouard Glissant's ethico-political injunction for the right to "opacity" and with Derrida's Levinasian notion of a rapport sans rapport, which conjures up Levinas's definition of "response-ability."¹⁰

Even though Bensmaïa only had the Maghreb in mind when he came up with the concept of "experimental nation," nomadism is given an antipodean twist in Australian novelist, Christopher Koch's novels that invariably feature an adventurous and nomadic protagonist yearning for another land. Despite his Asia novels, Koch may be thought of as a Caucasian writer clinging to the idea of a White Australia pining for Europe, as attested with his last two books, Out of Ireland (1999) and The Many-Coloured Land

(2002). Jean-François Vernay scrutinizes Koch's Eurocentric fantasies as evidence of a lingering Empire and of an interest in the "dying colonial world." This form of nostalgia returns us to the concerns of the opening essay.

Half of Empire: the 'Other' America

Inclusions in and exclusions from the realm of power are discursive and deliberate, as is the case with the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and Central America, which make up the "Other" America and share unique racial and cultural patterns of hybridity, that influence their political positioning between the Americas. The resulting economic, political and cultural interrelations between agents involved in the process of empire building are also addressed.

Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau's Goncourt Prize-winning novel Texaco (1992) provides the x-rays of the transformation of long-established colonialism in the Caribbean and its connection to the emerging global scape of Empire at the turn of this century. A close scrutiny of essays by Antonio Benítez Rojo (Cuba), Caryl Phillips (St Kitts) and Edouard Glissant (Martinique) reveals what Kristian van Haesendonck wittily terms light colonialism in the broader Caribbean. To Hardt and Negri's "empire," which occludes the Caribbean region, Van Haesendonck opposes the concept of "light colonialism," which, as a complex form of domination in times of globalization, likewise challenges the old dualism of colonizer vs. colonized. With a note of lucid reproach, Van Haesendonck remarks that even Bhabha, who worries about global dynamics, refers neither to Martinique nor to the broader Caribbean in his introduction to the new edition of Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1954), nor, for that matter in Nation and Narration (1990), or The Location of Culture (1994). Instead, he focuses like Hardt and Negri, on the global reach of contemporary imperialist ethics. What Bhabha fails to see the history of the Caribbean as the history of the construction of Empire.

Along the same lines, Asima Saad Maura concurs that, since the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Puerto Rico inhabits a liminal space between Spain, a ghostly empire with a burdensome Hispanic-Catholic past, and the more tangible Anglo-Protestant presence of the United States. Saad Maura focuses on two twentieth-century

century authors, René Marqués and Luis López Nieves, who each give a different portrayal of the “true” meaning of invasion and empire formation, yet implicitly emphasize the similarities between the Spanish and North American invasions and conquering methods, of the Taino and the Puerto Rican “other,” respectively.

Likewise, Central America has been the site of ongoing phases of empire building since the arrival of Europeans in the Western hemisphere. While agents of the Spanish crown colonized the region, Great Britain and the United States vied for possession of the isthmus well into the twentieth century. Ana Patricia Rodríguez reads Central America by its literature—European travelogues, anti-imperialist literary manifestoes, agro-production and canal zone novels, testimonios of resistance, and more recent texts responding to the crisis of globalization—so as to unearth the weighty narrative of Empire. She also pleads for Central America to be filed in the record of global empire, if only for the region’s history of foreign military, economic and political interventions and its key position in the global market economy at the outset of the new millennium.

Rodríguez is thus concerned with the next phase of Empire in the isthmus—the nebulous Empire of globalization as first put forth by Hardt and Negri in Empire and refined in Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (2004) and challenged by their detractors and interlocutors, such as Paul Passavant and Jodi Dean’s Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri (2004); Gopal Balakrishnan and Stanley Aronowitz’s Debating Empire (2003); and William I. Robinson’s Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization (2003). A growing body of isthmian literature—by Uriel Quesada (Costa Rica), Claudia Hernandez (El Salvador), and Franz Galich (Nicaragua)—documents the crises faced by Hardt and Negri’s “multitude,” here reread as the Vogelfrei masses of dispossessed Central Americans hindered in their flight by the agendas first of the Monroe doctrine and then of neo-liberalism—cornerstones of empire building in the region.

Queering Empire

The last part explores the trope of intimacy, specifically queer sexuality, in order to re-imagine the colonized subject and further criss-cross postcolonial studies and queer

theory as sites of unequal power relationships. New readings of canonical modernist texts such as Joseph Conrad's Nostromo (1900) or the critical browning of queer studies through a re-examination of texts from India and Sri Lanka demonstrate that sexual dissidence has a voice in the building of nations in a postcolonial age that cannot afford to ignore the secret interstices between nations as well as between genders.

In reading homoeroticism in Joseph Conrad's Nostromo, Patrick Mullen suggests that a violent homophobic epistemology legitimizes and enables a sanitized imperialist historical narration in the text. Accessorily, he examines Conrad's historical relationship with queer Irish radical Roger Casement to whom Conrad promised a copy of Nostromo and thus marks the particular intersections between the macropolitical lines of imperial force and the micropolitics of affect and desire in historical subject formations. In so doing, he points towards a much needed reassessment of the interpenetration of colonialism and sexuality, timidly adumbrated by Robert Aldrich in Colonialism and Homosexuality (2003).¹¹

Turning to Shyam Selvadurai in Funny Boy (1995) and Timothy Mo in The Redundancy of Courage (1991) which portray gay protagonists telling their own story, John Hawley, who had already paid special critical attention to the queer postcolonial,¹² shows that, whereas Selvadurai allegorizes the Sinhalese / Tamil divide as a gendered question of boys' territory against the girls', Mo echoes the Indonesian / East Timor conflict by utilizing a protagonist and narrator who is similarly torn.

In an essay in Queer Frontiers (2000), Peter Coviello surmised, after Susan Sontag's intuition that "Apocalypse is now a long-running serial; not 'Apocalypse Now' but 'Apocalypse from Now On,'" ¹³ that, about November 1989, the concept of apocalypse changed and, by virtue of that change, all human relations have shifted," which comes full circle with Virginia Woolf's similar 1910 remark. Coviello further reasons: "[in 1989] the Berlin Wall fell; the Cold War ... ended, and nuclear weapons... all but vanished."¹⁴ At that precise time, Coviello enthusiastically continues, the menace of AIDS unseated nuclear warfare as the defining apocalyptic threat to American health and security, which shows how intimately bonded the nuclear and the sexual actually were, before the advent of AIDS gave to such bonding a ghastly quality of doom.

Given the sexualization of nuclear warfare, as is evident in the naming of an atoll Bikini, soon to be visited by an explosive Little Boy, it is no wonder that Paul Allatson received by e-mail in December 2003, “barely a few days after the capture of Saddam Hussein by U.S. forces, a jpeg that featured the former Iraqi dictator sitting in a chair, a silver apron covering his body, while around him stood the various members of the popular U.S. reality TV show ‘Queer Eye for the Straight Guy’.” Some months later, he “acquired what U.S. collectors like to call a bobblehead or nodder, a small doll made of a synthetic polymer resin with moveable head, in this instance a uniformed Saddam Hussein with his trousers down around his ankles, and a large missile painted in the colours of the U.S. flag embedded in his exposed buttocks.”

The volume suitably climaxes with Allatson’s essay, which he describes as a make-over show-and-tell of sorts and which meditates on the resonances accruing to the conjunction of these two queerly touched products of global pop-culture, both of which also function as imperial history memorabilia. That conjunction suggests, he argues, that the recent coming out of the queer “I” in Queer Eye could never simply be a televisual fairies’ tale but rather metonymizes the consolidation of the Bush Jr.-led United States of Empire (henceforth, the U.S.E.), itself undergoing “a formidable combat-fatigue chic make-over since 9/11, 2001.” This intimate relationship between The War on Terror and The (Queer Eye) War on Terrible Taste is revealed in “the very coincidence of disparate pop-cultural texts and objects, which implicate a dominant and dominating queer purview in the operations of the state from which that purview emanates.”

Tentatively calling this purview imperial queer, Allatson draws attention to the capacity of U.S.E. queer to do two things: “First, to enact colonizing and commodifying identity pressures; and second, to do so by replicating the identity-making protocols, national dreamscapes, and disciplinarian ambitions of the geopolitical state that dominates the global order in our early twenty-first-century epoch.” The U.S.E. is indeed a caustic way of sexing up Hardt and Negri’s “Empire” and relocating it on the human map of desire. Empire is here deflected from its common etymon to accommodate a plural grammar, complete with its erotic declensions.

Thus the essays here collected cover the advent of what the Bush dynasty termed as “the new world order” based on passed formulas of empire building and future plans

for expanding spheres of influence. The novelty is that the monster's tentacles are no longer visible; Leviathan outlived the Hobbesian notion that tied its existence to the now obsolete nation-state.

¹ Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, Empire (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), p. xiv.

² Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 3.

³ Bernard Porter, Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 162.

⁴ Hardt and Negri, Empire, 211.

⁵ Hardt and Negri, Empire, 145.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 1:320-321; emphasis added.

⁷ See Edward Said's discussion of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park in the chapter "Consolidated Vision," in Culture and Imperialism, 73-229.

⁸ Hardt and Negri, Empire, 210-214.

⁹ Hardt and Negri, Empire, 362.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, Proper Names, transl. Michael Smith (Stamford: Stamford UP, 1996), passim.

¹¹ Robert Aldrich, Colonialism and Homosexuality (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹² John C. Hawley, ed., Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

¹³ Susan Sontag, AIDS and Its Metaphors (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 88.

¹⁴ Peter Coviello, "Apocalypse from Now On," In Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders and Generations, eds. Joseph A. Boone, Martin Dupuis, Martin Meeker, Karin Quimby, Cindy Sarver, Debra Silverman, Rosemary Weatherston (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 39-63, p. 42.