



# Global Subalternity, Exteriority, and *Independence Day*: Rethinking Radical Democracy and Biopolitics. Notes on Laclau-Mouffe and Hardt-Negri

**Joseba Gabilondo**

Michigan State University

E-mail: [joseba@msu.edu](mailto:joseba@msu.edu)

Papeles del CEIC  
ISSN: 1695-6494



# 21  
mayo 2006

Resumen	Abstract
Subalternidad global, Exterioridad, e <i>Independence Day</i>	Global Subalternity, Exteriority, and <i>Independence Day</i>
El artículo analiza el trabajo de Laclau-Mouffe y Hardt-Negri, probablemente los teóricos más influyentes del postmarxismo. El objetivo es mostrar que su trabajo no explica la exterioridad de la subalternidad en la globalización y que, consecuentemente, no es capaz de teorizar la dimensión geopolítica de la globalización. El artículo muestra que el trabajo de estos autores está todavía determinado por el marco epistemológico lingüístico del postestructuralismo (Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault) y, como resultado, sigue estando definido por la geopolítica del estado (post)imperialista europeo. El artículo discute la película <i>Independence Day</i> para probar que las propuestas teóricas de estos autores han sido previamente cooptadas y movilizadas por el neoliberalismo global.	The article analyzes the work of Laclau-Mouffe and Hardt-Negri, perhaps the most influential theorists of Postmarxism. The goal is to show that their work does not account for the exteriority of subalternity in globalization and, thus, they are not able to theorize globalization in its geopolitical dimension. The article shows that the work of these authors is still confined to and by the linguistic, epistemological framework of poststructuralism (Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault), and, as a result, remains defined and limited by the geopolitics of the (post)imperialist European nation-state. The article discusses the film <i>Independence Day</i> to prove that the theoretical proposals of these authors have been already co-opted and deployed by global neoliberalism.
<b>Palabras clave</b> globalización, teoría política, cine, post-marxismo, lo subalterno	<b>Key words</b> globalization, political theory, film, post-Marxism, subalternity

## Índice

1) Genealogy of Postmarxism .....	2
2) Laclau and Mouffe .....	5
2.1 On the Persistence of the Nation-State in "Radical Democracy" .....	5
2.2 Discourse and National Language .....	10
2.3 Independence Day as Radical, Democratic Hegemony .....	14
3) Hardt and Negri .....	28
3.1 Biopolitics and the Globalized/Multitudinal Working Class in Empire .....	28
3.2 The National Lineage of Empire's Geopolitics .....	32
3.3 Independence Day as the Geopolitical Exclusion of Non-Biopolitical Subalternity .....	35
4) To Conclude .....	47



5) Cited Works ..... 48

## 1) GENEALOGY OF POSTMARXISM

Over the last twenty years, two works, more than any other, have shaken and defied previous leftist thinking on politics: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000)—perhaps with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1987) as the holy ghost of this Marxist trinity. To the reader of theory, both books appear inscribed in a poststructuralist genealogy that stems from Althusser and Deleuze but also from other authors who do not have a direct Marxist affiliation, such as Lacan or Foucault. Thus, both works represent a continuation and reengagement in the Marxist attempt to rethink poststructuralism in conjunction with the other two major discourses that have challenged humanism: Nietzsche's philosophy and Freud's psychoanalysis. Furthermore, both books benefit from the thirty- or forty-year perspective gained by theory, after the events of 1968 and the ensuing global expansion of capitalism after 1989.

My contention is that both works foreground capitalism as the ultimate instance or reality and, as a result, they remain confined within the limits of traditional Marxism. More specifically, these works represent a continuation of the Marxist tradition of thinking capitalism from within the (post/imperialist, European) state:<sup>1</sup> a class struggle taking place within each state with a goal towards its international expansion. As a result, they do not transcend the framework of the state and, instead, end up redefining global politics—and politics in globalization—from the geopolitical standpoint of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.

---

<sup>1</sup> This coinage refers to England and France, and more marginally to Germany. No other European state is included in this formulation.



Moreover, I defend that their reliance on language-derived, poststructuralist theories reinforces their state-bound theoretical limitation, for poststructuralism's linguistic and discursive approach ultimately relies on a state-derived, monological understanding of linguistic reality: language is always the one and only national language of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.

The most important effect and consequence of this geopolitical, theoretical limitation is the incapacity of these works to think *subalternity* and *exteriority* to/in global capitalism, which ultimately amounts to not being able to think the politics of globalization—and politics in globalization. Consequently, their work does not defy capitalism but rather confirms the political scenario that the inherent logic of capitalism—increased exploitation of human labor through geo-biopolitical expansion and commodification of difference—deploys internally to further its hegemony. In short, I would like to underscore the fact that these their work's political and theoretical horizon remains Europe and the (post)modern, (post)imperialist nation-state. As a result, their theories end up legitimizing, rather than challenging, capitalism's global hegemony and, more specifically, its neoliberal ideology, which continues to rely on the state.

Ultimately, my analysis contributes to the ongoing postcolonial (Said, Spivak, Mignolo, Beverley, Guha, Chakrabarty) and feminist (Haraway, Spivak, Butler) criticism of poststructuralism and its lack of geo-bio-political situatedness—which ultimately explains the latter's lack of awareness towards subalternity and exteriority (to capitalism). My emphasis on these two political realities, subalternity and exteriority, aims at resituating geopolitically the works of Laclau-Mouffe and Hardt-Negri and, by doing so, also de-legitimizing capitalism's globalist ideology—which their



works contribute to legitimize. The final aim of my critique is to develop a political utopian theory that will allow us to start thinking the aftermath of capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

Since my area of expertise is representation theory, rather than political or philosophical theory *sensu stricto*, I will rely on a historical analysis of the cultural representation of otherness in modern imperialism and globalization and, more specifically, on a detailed analysis of the film *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996) to ground my analysis. The goal is to show that both political projects—Laclau-Mouffe's and Hardt-Negri's—have been already preempted and assimilated by the neoliberal ideology of global capitalism and some of its “ideological global apparatuses,” such as Hollywood—if you allow me the refashioned reference to Althusser's theory of interpellation.<sup>3</sup> In the following, I will first discuss the work of these authors separately and highlight their geopolitical, yet, unconscious limitations. Then, I will explain the way these limitations derive from these author's political reliance on the nationalist linguistics and epistemology supported by the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. After the discussion of each work, I will present *Independence Day* in a larger historical context in order to demonstrate that global hegemonic representations already deploy the political strategies and articulations expounded by these authors.

In the case of Laclau and Mouffe, I will show that *Independence Day* is already a representation of a radical democratic articulation. Nevertheless, the film also

---

<sup>2</sup> As well as the aftermath of “Terror.” Here Terror is understood as imperialist war and complements terrorism in their asymmetrical mirroring structure.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to begin by emphasizing the specificity of both books. They represent clear and distinct, almost opposite, genealogies of poststructuralist Marxist thinking—which some have termed “post-Marxism.” Laclau and Mouffe forgo any economic dynamic that might set the terms for revolution and instead emphasize the political necessity for the articulation of a radical democratic hegemony, which can encompass most forms of political dissidence to which capitalism gives rise (feminism, ecology, race struggles, etc.). Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, return to the core internal contradiction of capitalism, as analyzed by Marx, and point out the political and utopian potential of this contradiction in its new globalized expansion by deploying three new complementary concepts: biopolitics, Empire, and multitude. In this sense, the two books appear to be almost antithetical: the former is historical whereas the second is teleological. Yet, in a further analysis, they share the same discursive genealogy and political unconscious.



represents othered forms of subalternity, which are excluded from its radical, democratic articulation of hegemony—something that the work of Laclau and Mouffe cannot think. By historicizing the representational strategy of *Independence Day*, I will emphasize that the exclusion of othered subalternity is a strategy that is present in literature since the rise of British capitalism and the gothic novel in the eighteenth century and, ultimately, constitutes the imperialist state as nation.

In the case of Hardt and Negri, I will show that *Independence Day* is the first global blockbuster and, as such global film, creates and sanctions forms of global spectatorship that are biopolitical. I will then historicize this form of biopolitical spectatorship in the context of global war and spectacle, which consolidates with the first North American war against Iraq and its global coverage by CNN (1991). This historical analysis will demonstrate that the formation of a global, biopolitical spectatorship and, more generally, of global biopolitics, is precisely enabled by the exclusion of subjects that are subaltern. In short, I will defend that global capitalism legitimizes itself by creating a global subalternity that is defined by its exclusion from biopolitics—something that the work of Hardt and Negri cannot think. By historicizing the representational strategy of *Independence Day*, I will emphasize that the exclusion of othered subalternity is a strategy that is present in historiography since the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and, ultimately, constitutes the exteriority that defines the imperialist state as nation.

## 2) LACLAU AND MOUFFE

### **2.1 *On the Persistence of the Nation-State in “Radical Democracy”***

In their groundbreaking work, Laclau and Mouffe revise the tradition that spans from Marx and Rosa Luxemburg to Althusser. This revision allows them to re-



define the three concepts on which they build their proposal for a radical democracy: the discursive openness of politics, hegemony, and antagonism.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is important to examine these three concepts in detail, before analyzing the way their proposal leads them back, through the back door, to the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.

Because of their reliance on poststructuralist theories of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe underscore the fact that no political system is closed and, rather, its openness constitutes the exteriority to which the political field cannot give closure. As they explain: “no hegemonic logic can account for the totality of the social and constitute its center, for in that case a new suture would have been produced and the very concept of hegemony would have eliminated itself. The openness of the social is, thus, the precondition of every hegemonic practice” (142).

This poststructuralist approach to reality solves the problem of the constitutive relationship between identity and politics. For Laclau and Mouffe, the interior and exterior of the social field as well as the political identities that constitute the latter become defined in differential terms: the openness of the social becomes its exteriority and negative moment, from which the former is internally constituted and closed through difference:

As a systematic structural ensemble, the relations are unable to absorb the identities; but as the identities are purely relational, this is but another way of saying that there is no identity which can be fully constituted... It is in this terrain, where neither a total interiority nor a total exteriority is possible, that the social is constituted. For the same reason that the social cannot be reduced to the interiority of a fixed system of differences, pure exteriority is also impossible. (111)

Yet it is important to emphasize that this negative exteriority is also relational: it is constructed as the limit of the political field's interiority, which cannot be

---

<sup>4</sup> The concept of “articulation” would be the forth key component of their theory. However, it is not necessary to revise this concept for my argumentation.



fixed or closed, because, for Laclau and Mouffe, the nature of identity is relational and differential.

From this approach to the political as open field, and following Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the other two key concepts that structure their political discourse: antagonism and hegemony. Both terms explain the way the interiority of a political order is structured differentially. Antagonism is the difference that a given political order negates. As the authors state: “Antagonism as the negation of a given order is, quite simply, the limit of that order, and not the moment of a broader totality in relation to which the two poles of the antagonism would constitute differential—i.e. objective—partial instances” (126). In turn, they define hegemony as the discursive and ideological structure that upholds a given order, against which antagonism is differentially structured as negation. As the authors state: “[H]egemony is... a political *type of relation, a form*, if one so wishes, of politics; but not a determinable location within a topography of the social” (139). The authors explain their theoretical debt to Gramsci’s concept of “historical bloc,” which they redefine discursively as hegemony:

A social and political space relatively unified through the instituting of nodal points and the constitution of *tendentially* relational identities, is what Gramsci called a *historical bloc*. The type of link joining the different elements of the historical bloc—not unity in any form of historical a priori, but regularity in dispersion—coincides with our concept of discursive formation. Insofar as we consider the historical bloc from the point of view of the antagonistic terrain in which it is constituted, we will call it *hegemonic formation*. (136)

Once Laclau and Mouffe expound their theory of politics as a hegemony defined through antagonism in an open social field, they approach the new political reality of “advanced industrial societies” in the fourth and last chapter of their book. More specifically, they center on the emergence of the new social movements and conclude that:

The unsatisfactory term ‘new social movements’ groups together a series of highly diverse struggles: urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of sexual minorities... What interests us about these new





social movements, then, is not the idea of arbitrarily grouping them into a category opposed to that of class, but the *novel* role they play in articulating that rapid diffusion of social conflictuality to more and more numerous relations which is characteristic today of advanced industrial societies. (159-60)

Since they end their book with a reconsideration of the “new social movements,” it is important to underscore that this is the one and only reality they address through their new redefinition of political openness, antagonism, and hegemony. Following mainstream Marxism, they first emphasize the totalizing effect of capitalism: [T]here is practically no domain of individual or collective life which escapes capitalist relations” (161). Then, they equate politics with the new social movements in advanced industrial societies and, as a result, they turn the identity of these groups into the ground in which their analysis of politics is proven and legitimized. Yet, the authors do not explain that the “historical and political” reason for the formation of these new groups is precisely the development of late capitalism in postmodern societies—as well as the ensuing spread of the neoliberal ideal of democracy. In other words, late capitalism in advanced, industrial societies becomes the center and justification of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory, since the former encompasses and validates the political field of the new social movements. Although the social movements might organize themselves antagonistically against or around capitalism, and, thus, might exceed the latter, Laclau and Mouffe present this excess as deriving from and relying on capitalism. In short capitalism continues to be the only and primary political horizon of antagonism for Laclau and Mouffe. There is no antagonism, in their discourse, which is political and is not determined by capitalism; there is no exteriority to capitalism in their work.

Consequently, capitalism becomes the political reality that denies and invalidates the initial openness of the social, which the authors posit as point of departure for their theory. Allow me to quote at length in order to illustrate capitalism’s transcendental effect of closure in Laclau and Mouffe’s work:





The fact that these 'new antagonisms' are *the expression of forms of resistance to the commodification, bureaucratization and increasing homogenization of social life* itself explains why they should frequently manifest themselves through a proliferation of particularisms, and crystallize into a demand for autonomy itself. It is also for this reason that there is an identifiable tendency towards the valorization of 'differences' and the creation of new identities which tend to privilege 'cultural' criteria (clothes, music, language, regional traditions, and so on)... For this reason many of these forms of resistance are made manifest not in the forms of collective struggles, but through *an increasingly affirmed individualism*... But in any case, and whatever the political orientation through which the antagonism crystallizes... *the form of the antagonism as such is identical in all cases*... Once again, we find ourselves confronting the *division* of social space. (164-65, my emphasis)

Once it is accepted that capitalism determines all social aspects, the former also becomes the origin and ultimate horizon of social antagonism. Thus, it is not a coincidence that antagonism is mostly articulated in cultural forms that affirm individualism and its identities, i.e. subjectivity in late-capitalist, first-world countries. As Laclau and Mouffe conclude in the above quote, "the form of the antagonism as such is identical in all cases." But then capitalism is recentered as the open but ultimately all-encompassing formation that justifies all antagonisms, through commodification. As a result, capitalism becomes the closure of the political field and its transcendental subject. In turn, this political field, because of its capitalist closure, always requires a modern and individualistic understanding of the subject, which only applies to first-world societies.

After underlining the ultimate centrality of capitalism and the politics that its subjectivity —first-world individualism— requires, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize the importance of democracy in a way that cannot be separated from its neoliberal version: "[T]hus far we have presented the emergence of new antagonisms and political subjects as linked to the expansion and generalization of the democratic revolution" (166). Consequently, they conclude their book by asserting that the political goal of the Left "should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against op-



pression. *The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy*" (176). As long as political struggle and democratic expansion are situated within capitalism and the latter becomes their closed and transcendental horizon, radical and neoliberal democracies cannot be differentiated. Ultimately, radical democracy becomes just another justification for the internal logic of late capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 *Discourse and National Language*

The reason for finally closing the political field and conflating it with capitalism —its transcendental justification— relies on Laclau and Mouffe's reliance on poststructuralism's take on discourse and language. The political model of these authors derives from the poststructuralist idea that a political field is a single discursive structure of differences. That is to say, a political field can be understood as a single

---

<sup>5</sup> After this article was finished, Laclau published his second major work, *On Populist Reason* (2005). Given the length of the article, I will not make references to his earlier *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, for I consider it a prelude and a continuation of his (their) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (*Reflections* is an essay collection containing material older and newer than *Hegemony*). In the following notes, I will concentrate on his later *On Populist Reason*, which does mark a significant revision of his (their) earlier theory.

By shifting his attention from radical democracy to populism, he has precisely attempted to address the shortcoming of his first work, written with Chantal Mouffe. Populism is a more general form of politics, which encompasses democratic and non-democratic forms of politics and spans beyond the narrow history of new-social-movement politics.

Furthermore, he pays special attention to the issue of "heterogeneity:" the political subjects left outside the political discourse of hegemony and antagonism. He implicitly assumes the "simplifying" nature of his (their) earlier proposal for radical democracy when he adds:

We must now move on to the second simplifying assumption implicit in our model of empty signifiers —one which we must now eliminate. We have assumed so far that *every* unfulfilled demand can incorporate itself in the equivalential chain that is constitutive of the popular camp. Is this, however, a justified assumption? Two minutes of reflection are enough to conclude that it is not. (139)

However, his (their) previous work did conclude that it was. Thus, Laclau defines now heterogeneity as the outside of the equivalential chain: "the kind of outside that I am now discussing presupposes exteriority not just to something within a space of representation, but to the space of representation as such. I will call this type of exteriority *social heterogeneity*" (140).



discursive reality, only if the Saussurean definition of language is accepted: a single structure of differences. Quoting Saussure and Benveniste, they conclude: “in an articulated discursive totality, where every element occupies a differential position—in our terminology, where every element has been reduced to a moment of that totality—all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character” (106). As I will explain later, this (post)structuralist and Saussurean approach to politics ultimately relies on a nationalist understanding of language as state reality.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to analyze the way in which a discursive understanding of politics leads to the capitalist closure of the political field in Laclau and Mouffe’s theory. As the following quote makes clear, their definition of the political is discursive:

*A discursive structure is not a merely ‘cognitive’ or ‘contemplative’ entity: it is an articulatory practice which constitutes and organizes social relations. We can thus talk of a growing complexity and fragmentation of advanced industrial societies—not in the sense that, sub specie aeternitatis, they are more complex than earlier societies; but in the sense that they are constituted around a fundamental asymmetry. This is the asymmetry existing between a*

---

<sup>6</sup> In his latest work, *On Populist Reason*, Laclau continues to assume the Saussurean structuralist postulates as the departure point to elaborate his theory of populism (25, 68). However, his attempt to incorporate, following Joan Copjec’s work, the psychoanalytical theory of drive and affect, although necessary, fails in the last instance, because Laclau’s ontological approach to politics as discourse is void of any libidinal apparatus. Only at one point does he explain the libidinal expansion of his discursive model:

The different signifying operations to which I have referred so far can explain the *forms* the investment takes, but not the *force* in which the investment consists. It is clear, however, that if an entity becomes the object of an investment—as in being in love, or in hatred—the investment belongs necessarily to the order of *affect*. It is this affective dimension that I now have to bring into the picture... Affect is not something which exists on its own, independently of language; it constitutes itself only through the differential cathexes of a signifying chain... So we can conclude that any social whole results from an indissociable articulation between signifying and affective dimensions. (110-11)

At no point does Laclau explain where “force” comes from in his elaboration, nor does he elaborate the effects of affect in populism. As a result, the issue of the leader or caudillo, for example, so present in many populist politics, remains fully unexplained in his work. In short, the libidinal apparatus that he attempts to incorporate to his basic discursive approach remains an additive that, ultimately, reinforces the lack of libidinal politics of his work. Laclau’s work remains anchored in a discursive, linguistic approach to politics—an approach that, as I will explain later, is grounded on the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.



growing proliferation of differences—a surplus of meaning of ‘the social’—and the difficulties encountered by any *discourse* attempting to fix those differences as moments of a stable articulatory structure. (96, my emphasis)

The importance of the above quote lies on the fact that it is the only instance in which the authors justify their choice of “discourse” as epistemological and ontological ground for their theory. Although in their work they depart from an exhaustive analysis of Marxist political theory, from Luxemburg to Althusser, and they emphasize their reliance on Gramsci, the first three chapters of the book do not justify the recourse to “discourse” to found their political analysis. Only the above reference hints tangentially to the relation between discourse, on the one hand, and the “growing proliferation of differences” and “surplus of meaning of ‘the social’” in advanced industrial societies, on the other. Furthermore, the use of ‘discourse,’ to talk about reality and articulatory practices (ideology), renders the use of such term even more conflictive.

At no point does the work of Laclau and Mouffe thoroughly reflect on the consequences of universalizing a “discursive model,” which, as they add, is predominant only in advanced industrial societies. After the introductory clarification mentioned above, their book moves to universalize their claims about discursivity, as in the following definition: “we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*” (105). Hence, they simply proceed to universalize a discursive approach and conclude that the latter accounts for “social relations” in general. In other words, discourse, as a *singular* structure of differences, is “where the social is constituted.”

The main consequence of a break with the discursive/extra-discursive dichotomy is the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition, and hence a major enlargement of the field of those categories which can account for social relations. Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead,



they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted. (110)

The only reason Laclau and Mouffe give for the universalization of a discursive approach is that such an approach solves the chronic problem that has plagued Marxist theory to this day, namely, the irreconcilable dichotomy between the political and the economic (or more broadly speaking, base and superstructure). As they conclude, “far from being consolidated, the separation between the economic and the political is hereby *eliminated*. For, a reading in socialist terms of immediate economic struggles discursively articulates the political and the economic, and thus does away with the exteriority existing between the two” (120). Therefore, the only clear reason argued in favor of a unifying discursive approach has to do with the history of Marxism itself. Yet, as I demonstrate in the following, a discursive approach does not solve but reifies Marxism’s problems in new ways.

The fact that Laclau and Mouffe approach the political field and its identitarian open structure as discourse, on the one hand, and the fact that late capitalism remains the closed and transcendental horizon of their political theory, on the other, are not contradictory theoretical developments. They respond to one and same political logic: a monologic and unifying reason that has a very specific geopolitical location. These two seemingly contradictory theoretical developments can be observed in European societies where the field of politics is the (post)imperialist, capitalist nation-state. In these societies, the state becomes the transcendental horizon of politics, which eliminates any exteriority (the colony, the postcolony, illegal immigrants, etc.) and, at the same time, guarantees that the proliferation of social identities be expressed in an open way through language, since language always represents a national language, that is, the language of the state and its apparatuses of interpellation. A national language such as French, English, or German, guarantees that all political differences become equally political while remaining interior to the state---i.e. that the Saussurean linguistic structure becomes political. At a simple linguistic level, several non-national languages and dialects within a single state would shatter the



idea of a single political space, a single public sphere. For example, the linguistic presence of Basque, Romani, or Arabic in France and Spain in the 2000s points to more complex political realities that transcend, are exterior, to the state and to any radical democratic practice limited to the citizenship (migration, postcolonialism, terrorism, nomadism, religion, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe's discursive openness does not transcend the state but, rather, further legitimizes the latter's interiority as the single, unchallengeable horizon of politics. Any differential proliferation of identities and social movements, as long as they are theorized and analyzed as open discourse, do not challenge the state and its political interiority. The state remains the capitalist, transcendental horizon of politics, thanks to its internal, discursive structure, which is ultimately guaranteed by its national language. In short, linguistic openness equals capitalist closeness in the context of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state, which ultimately also portends both traditional Marxism and poststructuralism throughout the twentieth century.

### ***2.3 Independence Day as Radical, Democratic Hegemony***

The following history of representation of otherness, leading to the specific analysis of *Independence Day*, would like to exemplify and concretize the fact that the radical, democratic hegemony proposed by Laclau and Mouffe actually legitimizes the field of antagonisms created by capitalism within the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. Moreover, I want to demonstrate that Laclau and Mouffe's theory does no account for subalternity's exteriority vis-à-vis the (post)imperialist, European nation-state, which, in the history of Western representations of otherness,

---

<sup>7</sup> In last instance, non-Christian religions such as Muslim, Jewish or pagan, are exterior to states such as France, Spain or Germany, which, even though they present different constitutional provisions of inclusion or exclusion, so far they have only made room for Christian religions.



is equated with the alien, the ghost, and the vampire, i.e. with an unrepresentable and repressed form of otherness defined by its uncanny return. These two authors do not consider that capitalism reorganizes forms of subalternity that do not exist—their identity is not defined—in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis different hegemonies defining the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. Moreover, they cannot explain the fact that these forms of subalternity are exterior to the capitalist state: they precede capitalism historically and, in theory, could survive it as well. In short, Laclau and Mouffe's theory is only applicable to "advanced industrial societies" *qua* (post)imperialist nation-states and, more specifically, to any politics internal to such political institutions—the new social movements. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe's theory fails to grasp the radically different geopolitical organization of the world in globalization—which amounts to underscoring the anachronistic nature of their theory. Ultimately it is a modern European theory, epistemologically limited by linguistic nationalism, which, therefore, cannot explain a post-modern-colonial-national global reality.

In the following, I will sketch a history of the representation of otherness in modernity, which traces different forms of otherness, from the gothic novel in the eighteenth century to the filmic representation of the alien in contemporary Hollywood. The purpose of this history is to emphasize the fact that capitalism evolves historically in Europe by othering subjects which sometimes are incorporated (or in Laclau and Mouffe's language articulated hegemonically) within the (post)imperialist, European nation-state, but oftentimes are exteriorized, expelled, outside the capitalist nation-state, in a beyond that Laclau and Mouffe's theory posits, but cannot theorize as politically and historically existent. Ultimately, incorporating and externalizing otherness are two complementary representational strategies, which constitute capitalism's cultural logic, but Laclau and Mouffe's work cannot think in their complementarity—thus legitimizing instead the capitalist state and its interiority as the transcendental horizon of politics.





As the work of several critics of the gothic novel (Backus, Ellis, Sedgwick) makes clear, the gothic novel of the late eighteenth century represents most of the othered groups and subjects that modernity and the bourgeoisie incorporate to or exclude from their imperialist, national project: the ancient regime and its different political subjects (nobility and peasantry), older modern empires (Spain) and economic centers (Italy), colonial spaces (Ireland, the West Indies), older or alternative forms of sexuality, etc. In this way, by othering all these non-related subject positions and groups, the gothic novel manages to re-center the emerging, male, British, bourgeois subject as hegemonic. Yet, and following Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, only certain forms of otherness are articulated (incorporated as other) in the new hegemonic articulation of the British bourgeois subject, whereas other forms of otherness are excluded, repressed, or pushed to the unthinkable openness of the political field that Laclau and Mouffe posit but cannot theorize as space of politics. This would be the space of the repressed, the uncanny (Freud), or the Real (Lacan). The gothic novel, specifically, highlights the difficulty and instability of this process of incorporating and exteriorizing different forms of otherness. While most gothic characters experience the impossibility of leaving the enclosed space in which they are captives, thus asserting the formation of a new national space, they also show all the forms of otherness that haunt this new, yet anguishing, space articulated by the new bourgeois hegemonic subject. For example, the terror experienced by the hero in gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or *The Italian* (1796), is triggered by uncanny and evil Italian characters associated with the Inquisition. In many other novels, the same character is Spanish (most notably, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, 1795).

Once the study of the gothic novel is connected to that of the historical novel, via Lukàcs's study of Walter Scott's work, we can redefine what this critic calls the "middle-of-the-road hero" (37) in its new historicity: this hero is the hegemonic representation articulated through an empty referent that permits to antagonize, dis-



place, and other some of the subjects and groups described above. In short, the middle-of-the-road hero is simply the articulation, through an empty referent, of the antagonism that arises between the new bourgeoisie and the subject positions mentioned above. In this respect, and as far as it is an empty referent, the middle-of-the-road hero is a negative representation defined differentially by opposition to the other subjects. Yet, and unlike in the gothic novel, the new social space of the bourgeoisie is clearly defined. As a result, the historical novel can contemplate certain forms of otherness, through nostalgia, as historical realities—as historical others: Scottish highlanders, Saxon knights, etc. However, only certain traits and characteristic of the othered subjects are incorporated (articulated) by the new bourgeois subject. Those internalized characteristics are represented as separated—othered—from their original subjects and, yet, they remain ultimately connected to the latter—or as Laclau and Mouffe would defend, they are hegemonically articulated as part of the equivalential chain. At the same time, many othered characteristics/subjects, instead of being incorporated, are expelled and repressed—to the outside of the political field or discourse. For example and in the case of Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), the hero occupies the position of national subject by marrying Rowena, a woman from the rival ethnic group, the Normans, while paying farewell to the other woman who loves him, Rebecca, a Jewish woman who, at the end of the novel, migrates to Spain. At this point, Spain is presented as a decadent empire both othered and expelled from the modern European imaginary through the black legend—hence the reference to Jews in Spain. Moreover, this country is moved to the non-coeval realm of the (Medieval) Orient through the new incipient discourse of Orientalism. In short, some differences are articulated as national, while others are exteriorized as exotic. Yet, both acts of incorporation and exteriorization are necessary to the representation and articulation of a hegemonic subject and discourse.

This analysis allows us to understand two crucial elements in the history of the representation of the other in Europe. On the one hand, the gothic and historical



novels give a new representation of modernity altogether (geopolitical, sexual, historical, economic...) whereby Britain and its new hegemonic class are recentered in differential opposition to some subject positions, on the one hand, and in repressing opposition to yet other subject positions, on the other. This differential and hegemonic construction allows us to see that several subject positions othered by the gothic and historical novels are sometimes included (articulated) but, other times, excluded or expelled from the new hegemonic representation of the British bourgeoisie. In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology they are pushed to the beyond of the antagonistic articulation of bourgeois, national hegemony. Yet, the forms of otherness that are excluded have previous historical existence and, although they become subaltern under the new British hegemony, they continue to occupy a historical position, albeit such a historical position is one of exteriority.

The newly othered and exteriorized position of these subaltern subjects functions according to the logic that, after Freud, has been defined as "the return of the repressed" or "the uncanny." In order to continue with Spanish examples, the uncanny return of the repressed is exemplified by the romantic myth of Don Juan, popularized by Zorrilla. Don Juan plunders sexually—rather than economically—the old dominions of Spanish imperialism in Europe and, after he is condemned and dragged to hell because of his defiance of Spain's actual geopolitical situation—a post-imperialist decadent state represented by the father of Doña Inés—he is rescued by his last conquest and wife-to-be, Doña Inés. She is the embodiment of a new post-imperialist national domestic ideal of Spain, which Don Juan rejects when it is presented in political terms (Doña Inés's father) rather than in sexual ones (Doña Inés). Yet, this uncanny return of imperial Spain haunts the British imaginary (from Byron to Bernard Shaw) and manages to survive in the new Anglo-American imaginary of con-



temporary USA<sup>8</sup> under newly refashioned “Hispanic” figures, such as Antonio Banderas, who now also stands for Latin America’s subaltern position in the North American global imaginary (Gabilondo “Antonio Banderas”). In short, the subaltern, from its othered external position, retains a history that is exterior to the development of capitalism by occupying the uncanny position of “the returning repressed other.”

Yet, when the British Empire expands its dominion to the non-European colonial world and develops new strategies both to represent and to other the colonial subject—mainly Orientalism—subjects such as the working class, the homosexual, and the New Woman are othered through new genres such as science fiction, the detective story, or the vampire novel. In this way, the new British modernist subject, as the empty referent of hegemony, is again redefined (articulated) differentially by opposition to all those subject positions. Yet as the Irish cases of Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*) and Bram Stoker (*Dracula*) exemplify, certain othered positions are externalized (beyond the field of antagonism differentially articulated by bourgeois, British hegemony) and, thus, they return under the othered representation of the uncanny. In the case of *Dracula*, for example, the vampire as external other stands for the Orient, the ancient regime, Ireland, the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, and “perverse” forms of sexuality and gender. *Dracula* represents, in the felicitous sentence of Stephen Arata, “reversed colonialism,” i.e., the uncanny return of the subaltern colonial. This return cannot be reduced to any internal logic of capitalism and, moreover, this is precisely the reason why the colonial subaltern is so uncanny in *Dracula*.

The return of the exterior, subaltern other, such as the vampire, does not go away with the decline of the British Empire. Rather, those subaltern positions, as well as newer ones, reappear under the more recent imperialist discourse of North Ameri-

---

<sup>8</sup> Now, vis-à-vis the USA, Britain takes the position occupied by Spain in the nineteenth century, with new Don Juans such as James Bond.



can globalization at the end of the twentieth century. In that way, the figure of the vampire does not disappear altogether, but rather “returns” in North American representations, as in the case of the aliens in *Independence Day* (1996). It is not too difficult to retrace the genealogy of the new, North American alien to that of the Victorian vampire. The “new vampire,” the alien, which I will henceforth call “the global vampire,” comes from without the limits of the global, North American empire; it has come once before (the film depicts the incidents of Roswell in the 1950s as the first encounter with the same aliens) and, thus, its second return is uncanny; it is a superior technological being; it is a more powerful capitalist (its capital derives from pillage); it is sexually perverse (the metaphors of rape and anal sexuality run through the film); it is economically global (it does not operate within the structures of the nation-state but, rather, duplicates the migrant logic of multinationals and immigrants from the Third World); finally it is a politically superior agent for it incorporates equality and hierarchy within one single political structure (it is both neoliberal-democratic and socialist, since it has integrated both political forms under a cybernetic, social structure). In short, the alien represents the othered forms of the Cold War and contemporary globalization, which the USA needs in order to represent (articulate) itself as the hegemonic subject in globalization.

At the same time, *Independence Day* incorporates the project of a radical democracy: every form of “new-social-movement politics,” highlighted by Laclau and Mouffe, is articulated as part of a new global, democratic, North American hegemony. In other words, the film also shows forms of otherness that are incorporated into the global, North American hegemony through antagonism: they are internal others. The film presents a female vice-president, an African-American war hero, an ecologically-sound Jewish scientist, and a sensitive, WASPish president who resists partisan politics and rises to the occasion by embodying “true” world leadership. In this way, most new social movements have a representation and position in the film. Each represented position is defined by an individual character and, thus, this radical democ-



ratic hegemony is pitted as a national, North American discourse. In short, the film responds to the individualistic political organization that Laclau and Mouffe posit for the new social movements. As a result, every subject position resulting from this new democratic antagonism is articulated individualistically as both North American and global. Every other political subject position is othered and expelled as alien: as non-individual, non-democratic, non-North American, and non-global.<sup>9</sup> For example, after the aliens are vanquished by three individual heroes, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July becomes the global day of independence celebrated by the masses all over the world. Moreover, the fact that this film turned an African-American actor (Will Smith) into a very commercial and successful actor capable of acting and carrying a global blockbuster, for the first time, shows the ultimate power of such hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, the new representation of the external other or global vampire reveals the contradictions of a new radical, democratic, capitalist, North American hegemony—which, the theory of Mouffe and Laclau cannot explain. Even when the new deployment of democratic hegemony reaches a global level and, thus, affects all humans, capitalism manages to represent forms of otherness that are exterior to humankind (a global alien) and, by doing so, is also able to create an external limit: North America and its global hegemony versus an exterior subaltern (“the Third World,” old socialist regimes, alternative sexualities, etc.). In other words, it does not matter how radical the democratic hegemonic discourse is; capitalism can always redeploy it externally (aliens). In this way, capitalism always ends up creating an ex-

---

<sup>9</sup> It is most revealing that, in order to move from a national to a global hegemony, gender and sex differences must be eliminated (the female vice-president dies and the overt homosexual colleague is obliterated too) and the resulting masculine homosocial difference (ethnic and racial) is celebrated instead as global.

<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, serious and thorough sociological research must be undertaken in order to complete the complicated and contradictory nature of any hegemonic discourse and interpellation. The theatre in which I saw the premier of *Independence Day* was located in downtown Philadelphia in an area that was predominantly non-white. The audiences rooted for the aliens rather than for the North American heroes.



ternal limit that expels the subaltern subject and reduces politics to the new internal boundary of North American imperialism (the first world, Europe, heterosexuality, homosociality, etc.).

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the exteriority articulated by Hollywood, through the representation of the global vampire, always encompasses forms of subalternity that are not necessarily part of the antagonism articulated by North American hegemony. *Independence Day* is very illustrative of this fact. When the antagonism between humankind and aliens escalates to full-blown war, the film only represents the USA and, peripherally, its first-world allies. Therefore the viewer is cinematically forced to adopt the hegemonic point of view of the North Americans (and its first-world allies) in order to dis-identify with the aliens. Yet the fact that there is no third cinematic position of identification (only North American/first world or alien), creates the cinematic and ideological effect of equating every non-North American (or non-first-world) subject position with the aliens, that is, with the uncanny other of the USA. Thus, the non-North American (non-first-world) viewer him/herself, through the viewing of the film, alienates or exteriorizes him/herself. That is, his/her position becomes subaltern or repressed vis-à-vis the new North American-global hegemony.

Moreover, after the war is won and aliens are defeated, the film cuts to several locations throughout the world and, for the first time, images of the southern hemisphere are shown, most tellingly, Africa. The Masai tribe shown in a short sequence works as the repressed subaltern position that comes at the end of the film to unsuccessfully legitimize the new global antagonism generated by the cinematic, North American hegemony. At the beginning of the film, different images make clear that the aliens are not attacking Africa, for there are no vital interests there. Yet, at the end of the film, at least one alien ship falls on African ground, thus explaining the representational inconsistency, redundancy, and excess of Africa in the film. In short, the subaltern excess and redundancy of the Masai tribe at the end of the film is a





noise or “meaningless” representation that, rather than negating the new global North American hegemony, upholds it and gives meaning to it.

Similarly, the film presents a very interesting secondary character: a supposedly white, North American father, whose children are, nevertheless, either Latino or Native American—this indeterminacy is another sign of the othered status of both subject positions. The film’s necessity to present this ethnicity as well as its representational inability to incorporate this ethnic difference to the new global North American hegemony, points to the fact that the Native-American and Latino positions are similar to those of the Masai tribe. They become the representational stain that appears but cannot be symbolized or discursively articulated. As a result, the Native-American and Latino positions become exterior to the new global USA and, thus, are moved to the representational field of the alien. In the film, the white father joins the aliens by blowing himself up; as a result, his children become “fatherless,” in a film about the new “founding fathers” of a global nation.

Yet these very subaltern positions, excessive and exterior, must be rescued, for they point to an exteriority that capitalism creates in order to legitimize itself as hegemonic through internal political antagonisms.<sup>11</sup> Thus, my analysis of *Independence Day* would like to emphasize the fact that the new proposal for a democratic, radical hegemony proposed by Laclau and Mouffe is already being used, at the ideological level, by global capitalism in order to legitimize a new form of “radical,

---

<sup>11</sup> Although Laclau and Mouffe wrote their book in 1985, that is, before the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Gulf War of 1991, the authors still insist in 2000, in the preface to the second edition, on the validity of their theory:

Given the magnitude of these epochal changes, we were surprised, in going through the pages of this not-so-recent book again, at how little we have to put into question the intellectual and political perspective developed therein. *Most of what has happened since then has closely followed the pattern suggested in our book*, and those issues which were central to our concerns at that moment have become ever more prominent in contemporary discussions. (vii, my emphasis)



democratic, global politics,” which ultimately functions as the empty referent for a North American hegemony.

My critique of Laclau and Mouffe would like to underscore the fact that, only in the unconscious political horizon of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state, do all the forms of otherness produced by capitalism coincide with a democratic political field—all otherness is included; the only other not included remains the classical Marxist lumpenproletariat. In this way, the resulting internal antagonisms can be turned, through a chain of equivalents, into a radical, democratic hegemony whose openness can be endlessly expanded without questioning the (post)imperialist, European nation-state as political horizon. Yet, the ever expanding openness that defines the correspondence between the antagonisms created by the capitalist state and their democratic organization ceases outside the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. The large masses of subalterns are continuously exteriorized and pushed outside to an ever-expanding, non-democratic, uncanny exterior. Any democratic hegemony, including its most radical version, is always bound to generate subalternity as its open exterior, if the geopolitical location of such radical, democratic, hegemonic theory is not questioned. I am referring to the (post)imperialist, European nation-state and the discursive differential interiority that the state’s national language and apparatuses guarantee.

It is not a coincidence that the Subaltern Group Studies in India, from which most thinking on subalternity derives (and rediscovers Gramsci), departs precisely from the disintegration of the nationalist project in postcolonial India. As Ranajit Guha, the founder of the group, states, one of the most important assumptions of the Subaltern Studies Group was precisely “the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*. There were vast areas in the life and consciousness of the people which were never integrated into their hegemony” (xv). The historical revision of that exteriority generated by Indian nationalism allows this group to elaborate a theory of subalternity that does not reinscribe the latter within the nation. Similarly, Gayatri



Spivak, reflecting on the ways in which poststructuralist theories (Deleuze/Foucault) approach the (post)colonial other, denounces the European transparency that allows these theories to erase the subaltern other. As she concludes: “On the French scene, there is a shuffling of signifiers: ‘the unconscious’ or ‘the-subject-in-oppression’ clandestinely fills the space of ‘the pure form of consciousness...’ Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced” (274). Laclau and Mouffe’s work represents another form of ‘the subject-in-oppression’ as ‘pure form of consciousness,’ which erases any form of subalternity that does not reflect the pure form of consciousness that legitimizes the subject of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> In his latest work, *On Populist Reason*, Laclau attempts to rescue the exteriority of subalternity by resorting to the idea of “heterogeneity” as the outside to any political field, of which populism is the most basic and general form. In order to do so, he resorts to the Marxist concept of lumpenproletariat, as theorized by Peter Stallybrass.

Laclau begins by positing the exteriority of the *lumpenproletariat* as its condition of existence: “So the character of pure outsider of the *lumpenproletariat*, its expulsion from the field of historicity, is the very condition of possibility of a pure interiority, of a history with a coherent structure” (144). Laclau emphasizes the importance of this category for it transcends its narrow historical description in classical Marxism: “For if that feature [exteriority] applies to sectors wider than the *lazzaroni* [poor, destitute], its global effects would also be wider, and would threaten the internal coherence of the ‘historical’ world” (144). He even discards a negative, dialectical exteriority for the lumpenproletariat (or for its new theorization “heterogeneity”): “That is why heterogeneity is constitutive: it cannot be transcended by any kind of dialectical reversal” (148).

Yet, Laclau ends up positing the lumpenproletariat, as the interior that guarantees the antagonism of a populist hegemony. Laclau explains: “The opaqueness of an irretrievable ‘outside’ will always tarnish the very categories that define the ‘inside’. To return to our previous example: any kind of underdog, even in the extreme and purely hypothetical case in which it is exclusively a class defined by its location within the relations of production, has to have something of the nature of the *lumpenproletariat* if it is going to be an antagonistic subject” (152). Thus, Laclau concludes that “the political game” will take place between “the homogeneous and the heterogeneous or, in our example, between the proletariat and the *lumpenproletariat*” (153). In that way, heterogeneity only becomes the limit of homogeneity and, thus, every political subject is heterogeneous only in so far as it limits the interiority of the political field. As a result, every populist subject becomes exterior for Laclau: “The ‘people’ will always be something more than the pure opposite of power. There is a Real of the ‘people’ which resists symbolic integration” (152). Once every form of exteriority is assimilated as already part of any populist antagonism, Laclau moves to theorize exclusively the interiority in which populist antagonism and hegemony are articulated. In short, he does not theorize the politics of both the limit and the outside, which are occupied by subalternity. This is what Spivak calls “the-subject-on-oppression” filling the space of “the pure form of consciousness.”

Furthermore, he does not explore the violence and repression that constitutes the subaltern as exterior. Therefore subalternity is reduced to the condition of the non-political limit upon which to elaborate



Furthermore, subalternity resorts sometimes to non-democratic means of politics—as in the case of many fundamentalisms. In short, Laclau and Mouffe's theory cannot account for subalternity's historical exteriority, let alone subaltern politics, which also includes violence.<sup>13</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, one could sum up this

---

the politics of populism and populist hegemony. The final implication is that any form of subalternity that is not the limit of a populist antagonism and hegemony is once again eliminated by Laclau and banished into an unthinkable outside. Every outside is postulated as contributing to the limit of populist antagonism, so that every exteriority becomes a political subject with the possibility of creating this limit. In short, every subaltern subject is incorporated within the politics of populism; there is no historical or political exteriority to populist politics for Laclau. Every subaltern subject becomes visible and interior as limit. This generalization of "subalternity as limit" posits every subaltern subject as a political subject of populist politics, so that every subaltern subject becomes "transparent" as limit to Laclau.

This new political transparency is simply an extended version of the new-social-movement politics that Laclau and Mouffe postulated in their earlier work. The unconscious paradigm from which to think the space of heterogeneous, populist politics as a transparent and accessible political field remains the (post)imperialist nation-state. Laclau does not theorize the violence and repression that keeps the subaltern outside. Ultimately, Laclau's theorization of the Real, as I will explain in the following two endnotes, fails to grasp the violence involved in the traumatic attempt to keep the Real outside the symbolic order---and thus the violence of every (post)imperialist, European nation-state.

Another way to trace the (post)nationalist, European, national genealogy of Laclau's new definition of heterogeneity and populism is to look at the empirical material he analyzes. The majority of examples are circumscribed to Eastern Europe, Europe (Italy and France), the USA and Argentina (a nation-state defined by its "European" social profile: middle-class hegemony and lack of major social groups defined by race, unlike, say, Bolivia, Mexico, or Peru). Turkey could be named as the only exception, although what he studies is precisely Turkey's modernization (208-14). All these examples follow the pattern of the European, (post)imperialist nation-state. Most tellingly, when discussing the North American, populist movement known as The People's Party (201-08), issues of race and gender remain exterior to the discussion (204). Furthermore, all the populist movements he analyzes are framed within the structure of the nation-state. No populist movement organized around an empty signifier involving race, gender or sexuality is analyzed.

Similarly, Laclau's discussion of the theoretical formation of the concept of "crowd" at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from Le Bon to Freud (21-64) is circumscribed to Europe, although this is the height of European imperialism and thus the "largest crowds" were actually located on the colonial field.

Finally, when dealing with globalization, Laclau does not account for the paradoxical situation that arises from his analysis: following his model, we would have to conclude that "there are hegemonies within hegemonies." That is, neoliberalism articulates national hegemonies within each country, which nevertheless respond to the global hegemony of the USA. When analyzing globalization, one could surmise that Laclau's model yields a very interesting paradoxical conclusion: there is no room for global populism, since any form of hegemonic populism, so far, remains confined to the borders of the nation-state. Furthermore, Muslim radicalism would be the closest thing to a global populist movement; yet Laclau does not study it.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in the events of 9-11, the suicide of the terrorists piloting the planes that crashed in the World Trade Center cannot simply be explained as a capitalist contradiction and antagonism, internal to capitalism. The fact that they were willing to commit suicide and, thus, take themselves out of the sphere of capitalist influence and North American anti-terrorist retaliation cannot simply be accounted in terms of economic contradictions, internal capitalist dynamics, etc. Their violence points to an out-



shortcoming by stating that Laclau and Mouffe do not differentiate the other (with a small “o”) from the Thing, in their elaboration of hegemony and antagonism. In short, they cannot think the Real/subaltern.<sup>14</sup>

---

side that has to be understood precisely in those terms: as subaltern outside. The fact that the spectrum of terrorism is being constructed by North American ideology as uncanny (as the returning repressed) points to the fact that this violence is subaltern. This subalternity speaks through violence and thus cannot be incorporated into any political discourse of radical democracy: it highlights precisely the radical limit of democracy. In many instances, subalternity exceeds political democratic representation.

<sup>14</sup> In the debate between Butler, Laclau and Žižek, the latter underscores that the central issue at stake is the status of the Lacanian Real (Butler 308). Laclau and Mouffe, when they differentiate between hegemony and antagonism, they do not point out that every subject and discourse involved in the articulation of hegemony in antagonism is part of the symbolic order (they are all effects of political referents, to use Lacan’s definition of the subject), whereas the Real is the internal limit of the symbolic order which, nevertheless, is always outside and thus cannot be symbolized (it is not a referent). As Laclau and Mouffe construct antagonism, all subjects remain within the symbolic order and, thus, foreclose the exteriority of the Real, which, politically speaking would be subalternity. In Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse, the symbolic order can be equated with capitalism, hence the foreclosure of the Real. This point is made even clearer in Laclau’s *Emancipation(s)* (36-46).

In his later *On Populist Reason*, Laclau does theorize the Real, following Copjec and Alenka Zupancic, but he ends up focusing on the impossible *jouissance* that defines the Real as the original union of child and mother (112-115). He does not elaborate the symbolic violence involved in keeping the traumatic pull of the Real outside the symbolic order (as internal limit of an unsymbolizable outside).

Alberto Moreiras, in his article on the debate between Butler, Laclau and Žižek, concedes that Laclau is aware of the problem of subalternity/the Real:

There is no blindness in Laclau. His refusal to think beyond hegemony’s quasi-transcendentalism and into the plane of immanence that constitutes it... subalternity... is the result of a carefully thought-out political and intellectual decision. [Moreiras quotes Laclau as choosing “finitude”]. Laclau’s insight into the necessary coupling of blindness and insight — and that is finitude—raises rather than elides the question as to what it is that condemns the contingency and historicity of hegemony theory not to push its own determinations to the limit, where they could open onto a consistent investigation of its own presuppositions. (126-27).

Moreiras advances a theory of the “passible remainder;” however, this theory is not fully developed and it is not geopolitically situated either, which points to the fact that he might be reifying the same problem in a more deconstructive vein.



### 3) HARDT AND NEGRI

#### 3.1 *Biopolitics and the Globalized/Multitudinal Working Class in Empire*

Although cut-clear genealogies are not the issue here, one can nevertheless observe that Hardt and Negri's discourse and inspiration hails from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *One Thousand Plateaus*. Although, they borrow the idea of "biopolitics" from Foucault, the structure and style of the work, and even the use of biopolitics, are closer to Deleuze and Guattari's work and their use of "desiring machines" than Foucault's.<sup>15</sup> As a result, more traditional Marxist issues such as hegemony and capital accumulation disappear from their analysis in behalf of a discursive understanding of politics. Every subject occupies an equivalent position in a new global economic and political formation called "Empire," which stands for the worldwide rule of late capitalism. Hardt and Negri postulate that all subjects and their political differences become "singular," because of the differential position they occupy in the new discursive reality of biopolitics. The authors refer to this sum of biopolitical singularities as "multitude." Moreover, because of the inclusive nature of this multitude, their analysis does not accept any form of exteriority or subalternity in Empire.

As I will discuss in the following, Hardt and Negri's discursive understanding of "Empire, biopolitics, and multitude" can be traced back to their unconscious geopolitical reliance on the (post)imperialist, European nation-state and, more specifically, on the state-class structure and national language, which create the biopolitical effect of complete interiority and differential singularity the authors claim for their theory of Empire. Thus, it is important first to see the way in which Hardt and Negri present and articulate the concepts of "Empire," "biopolitics," and "multitude" in order to, then,

---

<sup>15</sup> I believe that the paradoxical distance from Foucault is due to the unacknowledged mediation of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1996), which develops the concept of biopolitics in a way that is more similar to that of Hardt and Negri. Agamben is only acknowledged once in *Empire*, and only to criticize his work (366).





analyze the geopolitical unconscious that supports and structures their Marxist discourse: the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.<sup>16</sup>

According to Hardt and Negri's elaboration, "Empire" constitutes the new economic and political form that late capitalism takes in postmodernism. It is important to note that they emphasize the transcendental ubiquitousness of Empire, which does not allow for any form of exteriority and, as a result, encompasses all social aspects; it includes what in traditional Marxism is considered base and superstructure. In the words of Hardt and Negri, Empire is a "unitary machine" with no outside:

Postmodernization and the passage to Empire involve a real convergence of the realms that used to be designated as base and superstructure. Empire takes form when language and communication, or really when immaterial labor and cooperation, become the dominant productive force... The superstructure is put to work, and the universe we live in is a universe of productive linguistic networks. The lines of production and those of representation cross and mix in the same linguistic and productive realm... Production becomes indistinguishable from reproduction... Social subjects are at the same time producers and products of this unitary machine. In this new historical formation it is thus no longer possible to identify as a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is "outside." (385)

Finally, it is important to underline that, according to Hardt and Negri, everything is connected in Empire because of the new linguistic and communicative turn taken by production and capital.

In this context, the theorization of biopolitics becomes crucial for the authors, since capitalist production and consumption merge with bodies, so that the latter become "producers and products of this unitary machine." Hardt and Negri contend that this fusion is the basis for their deployment of "biopolitics." Therefore, it is important to underscore that, unlike the work of authors such as Immanuel Waller-

---

<sup>16</sup> Given the length of this article, I have not included the monograph on *Empire* edited by the journal *Rethinking Marxism* 13.3/4 (2001). A longer version of this article will include the monograph.





stein, the work of Hardt and Negri does not make room for geopolitics; it only concerns itself with biopolitics. Furthermore, because of their lack of a geopolitical theorization, the two authors contend that biopolitics has ontological repercussions; it becomes the ultimate horizon of being and doing in late capitalism:

When our analysis is firmly situated in the biopolitical world where social, economic, and political production and reproduction coincide, the ontological perspective and the anthropological perspective tend to overlap... The biopolitical world is an inexhaustible weaving together of generative actions, of which the collective (as meeting point of singularities) is the motor... Generation, that first fact of metaphysics, ontology, and anthropology, is a collective mechanism or apparatus of desire. *Biopolitical becoming celebrates this "first" dimension in absolute terms.* (388, my emphasis)

Hardt and Negri complete their description of Empire by concluding that the ontological result of this new biopolitical "becoming" is the formation of "the multitude," which, according to them, becomes the new central subject of politics in Empire. The multitude is constituted by the re-productive interaction of every subject who, because of its biopolitical location within Empire, is always a singularity that cannot be reduced to the nation, the people, the masses, or any other collective subjectivity. Moreover, Empire is only reactive to the biopolitical thrust of the multitude:

Producing and reproducing autonomously mean constructing a new ontological reality. In effect, by working, the multitude produces itself as singularity. It is a singularity that establishes a new place in the non-place of Empire, a singularity that is a reality produced by cooperation, represented by the linguistic community, and developed by the movements of hybridization... Standing the ideology of the market on its feet, the multitude promotes through its labor the biopolitical singularizations of groups and sets of humanity, across each and every node of global interchange. (395, my emphasis)

It is important to emphasize that, for Hardt and Negri, the singularizing work of the multitude does not contradict the logic of capitalism but expands it, since singularization is an effect of the multitude's labor. At the same time, although singularization implies non-interchangeability, it also entails equivalence in the biopolitical



grid: every subject in Empire constitutes a non-hierarchical point that participates equally in the formation of the multitude and its political potential for revolution. Ultimately, every subject represents biopolitical “homogeneity” in singularization; it is “homogeneously” singular. At no point in their book do Hardt and Negri address the issue of hierarchy, inequality, geopolitics or power differences within the multitude. Or as Laclau adds in a more technical way, their work does not present an ideological articulation and, thus, there is no room for antagonism (“Can Immanence” 26). As the reference to language in the above quote already shows (“represented by the linguistic community”) and, as I will argue below, the latent paradigm of Hardt and Negri’s multitude is “discourse as grid of referents” or, more specifically, “discourse as national language:” a single discursive structure constituted by differences that define each other syntagmatically and paradigmatically (Saussure) and are nationalistically shielded from the influence of other state languages and linguistic realities (invasion, diglossia, hybridation, extinction, etc.) by sovereign state apparatuses.

Finally, and following Marxism’s utopian and teleological impulse, Hardt and Negri also propose that the multitude’s political goal is to break down every limitation or repression imposed by capitalism in globalization, so that the former can continue its biopolitical expansion (“singularization of groups and sets of humanity”):

How can the actions of the multitude become political? How can the multitude organize and concentrate its energies against the repression and incessant territorial segmentations of Empire? The only response that we can give to these questions is that the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire. It is a matter of recognizing and engaging the imperial initiatives and not allowing them continually to reestablish order. (399)

This political action takes, in Hardt and Negri’s formulation, a teleological character that complements the multitude’s ontological being. As they clarify, “[T]he telos of the multitude must live and organize its political space against Empire and yet within the ‘maturity of the times’ and the ontological conditions that Empire pre-



sents” (407). The authors emphasize again the teleological nature of this movement when they conclude, at the end of their book, that the multitude’s biopolitical self-organization will reach its historical and political realization when the latter overthrows Empire’s order:

Certainly, there must be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event. This is when the political is really affirmed—when the genesis is complete and self-valorization, the cooperative convergence of subjects, and the proletarian management of production become a constituent power. This is the point when the modern republic ceases to exist and the postmodern posse arises. This is the founding moment of an earthly city that is strong and distinct from any divine city. (411)

The conclusion of the book resonates with the utopian echoes of the *Communist Manifesto*: once the historical and material conditions of capital exploitation are right, the new postmodern biopolitical “working class” will overthrow capitalism.

Yet, for Hardt and Negri, the working class no longer is an economic class. As a result of late capitalism’s biopolitical organization, now there is a new proletariat they call the multitude: a postmodern biopolitical “working class” that encompasses, in its biopolitical singularity, every difference, from sex and gender to race and ecology. Yet, as Hardt and Negri acknowledge, their approach is still too conceptual and abstract (399). As I will elaborate in the following, this biopolitical expansion of the “biopolitical working class,” ultimately does not transcend the location in which the working class is historically formed and theorized: the (post)imperialist, European nation-state.

### **3.2 The National Lineage of Empire’s Geopolitics**

Hardt and Negri continue to theorize from a Marxist position that assumes the (post)imperialist, European nation-state, rather than globalization, as the episte-



mological and ontological horizon of politics. As they emphasize, the point of departure to theorize biopolitics, Empire, and the multitude is class.<sup>17</sup> However, their reliance on class is complicated by the Marxist tradition from which they hail. Only from an unconscious acceptance of the (post)imperialist, European nation-state as political ontological horizon, do all forms of subalternity lose their historical difference and, then, can be absorbed within a biopolitical horizon whose matrix remains social class. The nation-state, from its unconscious space, ensures that biopolitics fully coincides with class difference, so that any other difference becomes a biopolitical extension of class difference, on the one hand, and is thought out as derivative of such class difference, on the other. In this way, capitalism becomes the transcendental and ontological horizon that ensures the geo-biopolitical correspondence between class and difference. As a result, subaltern difference is eliminated by the transcendental horizon of an all-encompassing capitalism still grounded on the (post)imperialist, European nation-state and its homogeneous class structure. In this way, subaltern exteriority ceases to be biopolitically visible. Only from within the (post)imperialist, European nation-state does the biopolitical expansion of capitalism create the unconscious geopolitical effect of inclusion, homogenization, and equalization, which Hardt and Negri claim for the new multitude in Empire.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> In the introduction to *Empire*, the authors state: "We structured the book this way in order to emphasize the importance of the shift from the realm of ideas to that of production... We intend this shift of standpoint to function something like the moment in *Capital* when Marx invites us to leave the noisy sphere of exchange and descend into the hidden abode of production" (xvii). After the discussion and critiques on *Empire*, in their new book *Multitude*, the authors further clarify this point: "In this chapter we will articulate the concept of the multitude primarily from a socioeconomic perspective. Multitude is also a concept of race, gender, and sexuality differences. Our focus on economic class here should be considered in part as compensation for the relative lack of attention to class in recent years with respect to these other lines of social difference and hierarchy" (100-1). Afterwards, they assert the following: "Multitude is a class concept" (103).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Fritzsche makes a very compelling case for the nationalist, European understanding showed by Hardt and Negri towards North America's imperialism and ideological exceptionalism, which requires that they forget the massacre of Native Americans (43-52).



In last instance, the discursive approach to biopolitical difference adopted by Hardt and Negri, which equalizes class and difference, relies on the unconscious effect of the state's national language. Only from within the nation-state can one claim that representation and politics coincide and that any politics is internal (to Empire); only then is any form of politics biopolitical and multitudinal. When the authors state that "[T]he lines of production and those of representation cross and mix in the same linguistic and productive realm" (385), they assume that representation, language, and politics coincide, so that any political difference also becomes a representational difference—it is politically represented. Furthermore, and as a result of Hardt and Negri's poststructuralist epistemology, their discursive approach further amplifies the above geopolitical deadlock. Only the differential nature of language and, more specifically, the transcendental status that language acquires in the (post)imperialist, European nation-state can guarantee the match between politics and representation. Only from within a national, linguistic, epistemological theory, does each subject represent its biopolitical difference in a single discursive horizon that is understandable to the rest of political subjects, so that every subject becomes a biopolitical, multitudinal singularity.

This transparent political positionality derives from that of the signifier in language, as postulated by poststructuralism, following Saussure. Hardt and Negri's reliance on the poststructuralist discursive model of the signifier allows the authors to combine all social differences as if they constituted a single language. Through syntagmatic and paradigmatic combination, all political subjects find their differential place within the new unitary language of biopolitics. This universal access to representation and understandability can only take place within the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. As Spivak reminds us, for the subaltern subject, the lack of representation and translation becomes the political issue itself (*A Critique* 198-311).

In short, Empire and the multitude are ontologically global and inclusive only if subalternity is erased from the geopolitical limit of biopolitics. Even in Hardt and



Negri's latest work, *Multitude*, Empire's immanent interiority is posited and justified as a result of capitalism's ontological transcendence. Capitalism continues to be the all-encompassing structure that justifies and ontologizes any singularity and history:

No group is "disposable" because global society functions together as a complex, integrated whole. Imperial sovereignty thus cannot avoid or displace its necessary relationship with this unlimited global multitude. Those over whom Empire rules can be *exploited*—in fact, their social productivity must be exploited—and for this very reason they cannot be *excluded*. Empire must constantly confront the relationship of rule and production with the global multitude as a whole and face the threat it poses. (335-36)

My above critique can be expanded to more radical and deadlier political situations. AIDS and ethnic cleansing, for example, point to a deadly exteriority in which bodies are disposed off as a result of their subaltern position. To attempt to explain this exteriority in biopolitical terms is only a way to avoid the problem in its radical exteriority: death.

### ***3.3 Independence Day as the Geopolitical Exclusion of Non-Biopolitical Subalternity***

A more concrete approach to a biopolitical node such as Hollywood, in which "language and communication" intersect with the new "immaterial labor," will allow us to test the contradictions, limits, and potential of Hardt and Negri's general and abstract model in a more specific way. The following analysis will concentrate on the film *Independence Day*. However, and in order to understand the new changes brought about by Hollywood in the geo-biopolitical organization of labor and communication, it is important, first, to exert a historical analysis of the hegemonic nodes of representation in the West.

Lukàcs theorized in his *The Historical Novel* that the Napoleonic wars mobilized European masses in unprecedented ways: lay French people, drafted for the first time, found themselves at the gates of Moscow or Cádiz. As a result, the rural



communities of these places had to mobilize themselves and react against “the invasion of modernity.” This general and massive mobilization of people, Lukàcs explains, gave rise to the formation of history, as the new form of perceiving and being in time: Europe had entered history as the time of open-ended events. No European mass or group was exempted from the historical effects of those events, unlike, say, in the Middle Ages. As a result, the previous cyclical rural understanding and experience of time was altogether marginalized in favor of the progressive open-ended one, that is, history. In turn, the formation of “history” gave rise to nationalism. According to Lukàcs, nationalism is a historical reaction to the cultural and economic differences encountered by people at war. Finally, Lukàcs explains that the “birth” of history and nationalism, in the early nineteenth century, is represented by and coded in the romantic historical novel, first, and the realist novel, later. The “middle-of-the-road hero” present in Walter Scott’s historical novels, which condensed history into an individual, narrative subjective form, served Balzac to articulate the bourgeois subject of his realist novels. Therefore and according to Lukàcs, literary realism can be understood as the new symbolic order that registers, encodes, and legitimizes European history and its nationalist bourgeois subject. Although Lukàcs does not elaborate the feminist and postcolonial side of this representational history, one could add that nationalism relegates the domestic and colonial field to the negative space of non-history: the re-productive field of nature.

Although a more detailed account of this “history of representation” I am effecting here would have to incorporate modernist literature and art, as coming together with the full expansion of European imperialism at the turn of the nineteenth century, it will suffice to say that modernism still holds on to the representation of the modern subject—in the negative guise of crisis—and, thus, is a continuation of the modern realist tradition (Bürger). Only after World War II, with the rise of American global hegemony and late capitalism, does a different type of representational economy emerge: mass culture, which is audiovisual rather than literary. Fredric Jameson





locates in this historical moment the break between modernity and postmodernity (1-54). Although, in a first moment, mass culture can be understood as the national articulation of a hegemonic, North American, middle-class subject, the Cold War and the Marshall plan make clear that this culture is already rooted in an imperialist framework of expansionism, as Hardt and Negri also acknowledge (*Empire* 176-82).

This new representational and cultural formation, i.e. audiovisual mass culture, represents a break similar to the one isolated by Lukàcs at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although this shift begins during the Cold War, only after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when North America gains global dominance and engages in localized wars against different political enemies (Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan...), is the historical experience of war turned into a spectacle for the majority of spectators of the first world. If the Napoleonic wars “inaugurate” history, the new, global, yet localized wars of the aftermath of the Cold War give raise to a new understanding and perception of time, which no longer follows the logic of history, but rather that of “spectacle.” In turn, this new perception of time brings both the end of modern history and the beginning of a new “spectacular time.” Let me cite the central spectacular war that constitutes the (arbitrary) landmark of this new reorganization of both representation and history: the Gulf War of 1991.

It is well established that the Vietnam War was the first time television covered war in a systematic way. However, at that moment in television history, it took days to deliver the footage to the audience. In this respect, the Gulf War of 1991 represents the first time in which coverage and broadcasting became simultaneous. Thanks to the exclusive satellite hookup arranged by CNN, the cable audience was able to watch alive the Gulf War of 1991 as it unfolded in front of their eyes. Furthermore, as a result of the live satellite broadcast, cable audiences throughout the entire world followed the war coverage as a single audience. In other words, different national audiences no longer depended on a later broadcast made in their own different national times and schedules. As a result, this was the first time in history in which



the technologically advanced world came together to watch a “real event,” as it unraveled in front of its eyes—even though the Kennedy assassination and the landing on the moon were important precedents.

I want to distinguish a “real event” from a “planned event,” such as the Olympic Games, which take place every four years and are planned accordingly. Both real and planned events are spectacles but, in the former case, the open-ended course of unplanned events unfolds in front of an audience. The “reality” of those unplanned events shapes and legitimizes them as worth-seeing and, in turn, gives them the shape of a spectacle. Although planned events such as the Olympic Games paved the way for the coverage of the Gulf War, the latter was the first “real event” to be followed simultaneously by a global audience as a spectacle.

Yet, the simultaneity between coverage and viewing in the case of the Gulf War, which in itself simply amounts to a technological advance, nevertheless brought about a change that exceeds the merely technological: the formation of a global audience as *global subject*. When watching the Gulf War, the viewers knew that, as history unfolded in front of their eyes, the rest of the global audience was also watching the same event. In the Gulf War coverage, the idea of a global community went from being a simple geo-biological fact—we all live in the same planet—to becoming a geo-biopolitical global formation: a subject existing simultaneously in global and spectacular time for the first time in history. This was the first time a historical event was perceived by a global audience—self-aware of its own existence in space *and* time as global. The coverage of the Gulf War of 1991 marks the formation of a globally imagined community and subject. Hegel postulated that the modern man had substituted religious prayers with reading the newspaper in the morning.<sup>19</sup> Anderson

---

<sup>19</sup> “Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one’s attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands” (Buck-Morss 844).



adds that reading the newspaper in the morning is one of the crucial acts involved in imagining the nation: "What more vivid figure for the secular historically-clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?" (39). If we reconsider the above discussion on the Gulf War of 1991, we can revise Anderson's take on Hegel and conclude that the act of imagining the global community takes place when a global audience watches war unfolding in front of its eyes.

If Lukàcs ciphered the beginning of history in the encounter in war of different European people, which was not historically mobile till that point, one could establish a parallel with the Gulf War and its coverage. The simultaneous encounter of a global audience with itself ended modern history and gave rise to a new form of human temporality: imperial spectacular time, one that is not historical but rather chronological and genealogical. "Spectacular time" is ultimately ahistorical and relies on non-historical chronologies, similar to those of medieval annals (time is told according to hegemonic genealogies, royal or otherwise; White 1-25) or even parallel to those of religious imperialisms, such as the Spanish.<sup>20</sup>

At first sight, it would appear that the above history of representation would reinforce Hardt and Negri's thesis on the formation of a biopolitical global multitude—as well as Guy Debord's claims about the society of spectacle. The multitude could be understood as a global audience and subject. Furthermore, given that visual culture engages the viewer's desire and identification and, thus, it is ultimately biopolitical, the production-articulation of spectacular time through war is in itself a form of labor and consumption: the North American military complex and the cable-advertisement industry are involved and, by extension (advertisement), the entire commodity market as well (from The Gap to McDonalds).

---

<sup>20</sup> I have elaborated the Lacanian and Althusserian implications of this global spectatorship elsewhere ("Postnationalism" 82-84).



However, this specific historization sheds a more concrete light on Hardt and Negri's abstract thesis and shows its geopolitical limitations: the global viewership of spectacular wars is not by any means equivalent to the whole of humanity and, by biopolitical extension, to "the multitude." Only those subjects who speak or understand English, can afford cable, and have spare time to watch CNN, constitute the primary audience of spectacular war. Those other subjects, who can only watch their own national televisions in their own languages, constitute a second-degree of global spectatorship, removed one language and one degree of simultaneity from the core global audience. Finally, those subjects who do not own a television or cannot afford the time to watch it, constitute a third-degree of global spectatorship, one that is defined negatively by its lack of access. These latter subjects are the new subaltern subjects of global audiovisual culture. As the above scenario shows, globalization does not create a biopolitical multitude of singularities without an outside. Rather the opposite, different groups and hierarchies are organized according to levels of access to and exclusion from globalization. Consequently, the resulting geopolitical hierarchization also creates different forms of exteriority, among which subaltern groups, in their extreme exteriority, are not even part of the biopolitical multitude and/or globalization.

The events of 9-11, which were originally thought out according to this new logic of spectacular war by the terrorists, do not constitute an exception to the above scenario but, rather, its intensification: now the North American subjects can watch themselves (first-degree of global spectatorship) as the rest of the world watches them being attacked by terrorists. As a result, now the rest of the world is moved to, at least, a second-degree of global spectatorship. Consequently, only the North American subjects experience globalization in its full simultaneity: they are the subjects of both violence (being attacked) and representation (broadcasting/watching being attacked). They become the center of spectacular war and time. For example, the Iraqis could not watch themselves in their own national television as they were



being bombarded by the North American air force; yet the rest of the world watched those same Iraqi images. The possibility of Iraqis watching themselves was a technological impossibility generated by the breakdown of Iraqi telecommunications. Thus, the events of 9-11 are the final stage of this logic of spectacular war: now North Americans are the new subjects of globalization, whereas the rest of the world is removed from this global centrality by increasing degrees of mediatic separation.

The above argument can be further expanded if we consider a close analysis of the film *Independence Day* (1996). The historical reasons to choose this film have to do precisely with the spectacular expansion of globalization. Although the organization of New Hollywood can be traced back to the 60s, when classical Hollywood enters its crisis, it only becomes a full-blown biopolitical global formation in 1994, when the majority of revenues from film rentals no longer originate in the North American domestic market but overseas. As Tino Balio states: “[B]y 1994, the overseas market surpassed the domestic in film rentals for the first time” (60). At that point, New Hollywood truly becomes globalization’s central node in charge of shaping and structuring desire (for consumption) and, thus, also biopolitics.<sup>21</sup> As a result, *Independence Day* (1996) is, historically speaking, the first blockbuster emerging from the newly globalized post-1994 New Hollywood. If you allow me an arbitrary but historically helpful claim, one could state that *Independence Day is the first global film*.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> I am referring to New Hollywood because the latter is the informational and industrial node in which the desire and libido of the global masses, in so far as they are primarily viewers of North American mass culture, are articulated. In short, New Hollywood is the communicational node where the global production of information, which constitutes the immaterial labor of Empire, intersects with global desire, as articulated by the biopolitical activities of narration, representation, and consumerism. New Hollywood produces high-tech images, global narratives, and stardom cult as audiovisual experiences that articulate and structure our communicational desire and pleasure. Furthermore, in so far as New Hollywood is able to commodify visual pleasure through different commodities (theme parks, shopping malls, videogames, TV programs, computer programs, etc.), it becomes the center from which the global desire of the masses (or multitude) is articulated.

<sup>22</sup> I believe that strategic essentialism (Spivak “Subaltern Studies”) is necessary when facing the construction of a new global history that otherwise will be written according to the hegemonic logic of capitalism.



The fact that it was released few years after the first Gulf War and its plot deals with a North American war against a global alien, responds to the logic of spectacular war. In short, with *Independence Day*, film becomes a biopolitical and libidinal experience for an audience that is global.<sup>23</sup>

From this historical approximation, a closer textual analysis of *Independence Day* sheds further light on the issue of the different hierarchies involved in global spectatorship as well as on the more specific problem of subaltern exclusion from globalization. The first third of the film is centered on a single and apparently innocuous activity: watching. The different characters of the film, from the president of the USA to the homeless of New York, look in awe at the arrival of the huge alien ships. Furthermore, the highly technological detection of the aliens precedes their media coverage and, in turn, the media coverage precedes the physical ocular watching of the event. In other words, this narrative logic of technologically inverting the process of perceiving reality (radars > television > eye) sets the epistemological ground of the film: having access to a global event is directly related to its North American technological-media coverage. The further removed from the technology-media, the less informed and less global the subject in the film becomes. Conversely, the closer to coverage-simultaneity, the more global the subject turns out to be in the

---

<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the new tailoring of national cinemas to the filmic conventions of New Hollywood, specially in Europe but also in Latin America and Asia, also shows that national cinemas are no longer exterior to Hollywood: they become national versions of New Hollywood's "blockbuster" cinema. Jackie Chan's success in Asia (*Rumble in the Bronx*, 1995) or the earlier French "cinema of the look" that begins with *Diva* (1981) and *Betty Blue* (1986) are milestones of this new transformation.

At first, one could conclude that the fact that *Independence Day* and other later films organize global viewers as homogeneous and equivalent audiences of global films produced by the libidinal node of Empire—New Hollywood—would corroborate the abstract claim made by Hardt and Negri about Empire and the biopolitical organization of the masses. Furthermore, the fact that around the same time, New Hollywood moves to absorb independent film—a separate practice and market till that point—further proves Hardt and Negri's claim. If one considers the paradigmatic boom of Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which emblematically cannibalizes J.L. Godard's cinema—the epitome of independent and art film—, the popularity of the Sundance Film Festival, or the launching of an independent film TV channel, it would appear that filmic exteriority is absorbed by New Hollywood by the mid 90s.



film. In this respect, the film follows the technological and institutional organization of spectacular war outlined above.

Yet, *Independence Day* reveals a second way in which capitalism, globalization, biopolitics, and subaltern exteriority intersect. Almost every image in the film has been cannibalized from previous Hollywood film and television. The list is long: *Them!*, *2001: Space Odyssey*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Doctor Strangelove*, *E.T.*, *Alien*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, World War II films, etc. An analysis of this filmic cannibalization reveals a second degree of biopolitical globalization that the CNN coverage of the Gulf War or the events of 9-11 do not show readily. The images of *Independence Day* allowing the formation-legitimation of spectators as global subjects derive from Hollywood film history. As result, only Hollywood's cultural tradition is legitimized as capable of enabling the process of global subject formation. That is, the cannibalization of older Hollywood film culture, in films such as *Independence Day*, legitimizes Hollywood tradition as the only filmic history that allows the spectator to become a global subject.

Therefore a filmic memory of and desire for Hollywood are ultimately necessary to legitimize any subject as global and, if we follow Hardt and Negri's theorization, as biopolitical. Other filmic traditions no longer count or qualify as pertinent to narrating or representing globalization through its core biopolitical event: spectacular war. Any other tradition becomes secondary or is turned into a subaltern filmic tradition, since it blocks the audience from becoming global. If this is so, once again, late capitalism is creating an exteriority, a subaltern exteriority to be more precise, which is not biopolitical. In the same way that specific technologies (such as BETA video) have been discarded as a result of the advance and consolidation of a globalized technology, other filmic or technological traditions are also being pushed outside the biopolitical, global circuit of production and consumption. Some of these traditions might be later on rescued and commodified as vintage or retro objects (nostalgia culture), but definitively not all of them, not even a majority. Any subaltern position that





does not even have a national filmic tradition, such as the French or the Indian, but just a small body of films and a language that is not English, falls outside the biopolitical formation of the global multitude argued by Hardt and Negri. Although more than one critic might resort to hybridization (Bhabha), it is important to remember that, according to specialists working with Unesco, “6,760 different languages are spoken in the world. However, 96 percent of these are spoken by only 4 percent of the world's population... 95 percent of all languages would disappear, or be on the brink of extinction, in the next 100 years” (*Red Book*). In a near future, some films might even lose their original linguistic audience. In short, hybridation does not account for the annihilation or obliteration of culture; hybridation can only account for subaltern formations when all the cultures involved in hybridation are imperialistic in origin (Spanish, English, etc.) and their languages are not endangered. In short, a more cultural-ecological approach to globalization proves that the biopolitical formation of the multitude in Empire, as theorized by Hardt and Negri, creates an exteriority that is fundamental to the expansion of late capitalism.

It would take more space than I have here to elaborate this point, but I would like to claim that what I have proved above for filmic cultures and languages also applies to race, sex, gender, and ethnicity. If we combine the technological exteriority argued earlier with the cultural exteriority I have discussed here, we can conclude that capitalism creates forms of subalternity that are external technologically, culturally, or both: capitalism places some subaltern subjects outside its economy-technology and/or culture. There are different degrees of exteriority. Theorists of subalternity such as Walter D. Mignolo clearly and vehemently argue this point—the existence of exteriority—precisely in order to counteract totalizing discourses such as Hardt and Negri's. When Mignolo proposes “border gnosis” as a form of geopolitically situated knowledge, he does so in order to rescue the space of subalternity:

Border gnosis as knowledge from a subaltern perspective is knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system, and border



gnoseology as a discourse about colonial knowledge is conceived at the conflictive intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspective of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas/Caribbean... Finally, border gnoseology could be contrasted with territorial gnoseology or epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge, as we know it today (from Descartes, to Kant, to Husserl and all its ramifications in analytic philosophy of languages and philosophy of science): a conception and a reflection on knowledge articulated in concert with the cohesion of national languages and the formation of the nation-state... (*Local* 11)

Hardt and Negri's approach to the biopolitical constitution of a global mass or multitude overlooks the fact that, on the one hand, there are different degrees of biopolitical subjectivization and, on the other, there are subaltern masses defined by their lack of access to both biopolitics and its mediatic and/or geopolitical deployment. Non-biopolitical subalternity does not enter Hard and Negri's equation precisely because their approach centers on capitalism; they overlook the fact that there is an exteriority to capitalism. As many critics have pointed out, their theory is immanent precisely because it resorts to the transcendence of capitalism to justify its immanent ontology (Laclau "Can Immanence") and teleology. As Sylvère Lotringer states in her foreword to Paul Virno's work on multitude: "a multitude capable of doing such a feat doesn't exist—or doesn't exist yet... the idea that capital could simply be 'destroyed' by such an essentialist notion is a bit hard to swallow... The telos... *precedes* the multitude, and for the most part replaces it" (15). The exteriority I am defending here is necessary and structural to capitalism's advance and cannot be accounted by Marx's original formula of capitalist expansion, since other geopolitical factors (race, pre-existing political structures, the aftermath of decolonization, etc.) have to be accounted. The tradition of subaltern studies departs precisely from this assumption (Gramsci, Guha): what Marx denominated "lumpenproletariat" is not simply a negligible excess, but rather the condition that points to an exteriority that ex-



ceeds capitalism and turns such an exteriority into the foundation of a non-capitalist historicity.

One could argue that the logic of capitalism will continue to expand and absorb these forms of global subalternity; but that is not the case. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that every subject/family/group in Africa<sup>24</sup> will some day have a television set and a satellite-cable hookup.<sup>25</sup> However, this capitalist-centered logic overlooks the fact that different groups in Africa already have different technological cultures based on oral traditions (and radio) and, thus, the fact that they are subaltern is not defined by their lack of cultural technology—oral culture—but rather by the fact that their technology is subaltern—exterior—vis-à-vis capitalist, audiovisual culture. Therefore, and although it would take more space than I have here to prove this point, I would like to postulate that, by the time the majority of groups and states in Africa acquire audiovisual TV-culture (if that ever happens at all), this culture, just like oral culture today, will remain subaltern vis-à-vis newer developments in global capitalism—namely, and for the time being, computers.<sup>26</sup> That is, the non-biopolitical exterior—the subject formations involved in this exterior position—are not defined by lack of technology or commodification, but rather by the subaltern status of such technology, which at that point, stops being biopolitical. Hardt and Negri's biopolitics absorbs all masses in Empire as if they were democratically reified and commodified by capitalism and, thus, were able to join in a biopolitical, multitudinal revolution to overthrow Empire. Yet, capitalism always creates its own exteriority, that is, subalternity. Empire does not create a biopolitical multitude that is equivalent and homoge-

---

<sup>24</sup> Here I do not mention Africa in some new form of subalternizing Orientalist fashion. I depart from the fact that the film *Independence Day* itself uses Africa to signify the Real, the exterior.

<sup>25</sup> "The low penetration of television can be attributed to poverty, to the lack of electric links, to poor transmission conditions and to the high cost of television sets. It is estimated that, in 1997, there were 67 million television sets in Sub-Saharan Africa (not including South Africa). There were 18.5 million of them in 1975 and 43 million in 1985." (Wedell and Tudesq).

<sup>26</sup> Kevin C. Dunn makes a similar case for politics in Africa, where he explains that the formation of states does not explain local politics, which are exterior to the state, capitalism, and biopolitics.



neous in its biopolitical particularity so that, eventually, it includes all subjects in the world, as Hardt and Negri would have it.<sup>27</sup> Biopolitics always requires a geopolitical reconsideration.

#### 4) TO CONCLUDE

Only a new historization of globalization, which does not unconsciously rely on the (post)imperialist, European nation-state and its lack of non-economic differences as the final horizon of politics, will allow us to understand the implications of biopolitics and globalization. This theory will first and foremost have to account for the different forms of exterior subalternity and difference that globalization and late capitalism perpetuate or create, as I have demonstrated in the case of representation, film, and Hollywood. My attempt to rescue subalternity and exteriority are central to a new understanding of politics in globalization, since such an exteriority is the site from which globalization can be thought otherwise, challenged, subverted, and overcome historically, without relapsing in the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. The member of the Subaltern Studies Group, Dipesh Chakrabarty, has already called for “provincializing Europe.” My discussion of the above theories responds precisely to this subaltern-studies drive to locate geopolitically any “European” discourse. As of now, we are still looking at modernity from the epistemological and geopolitical point of view provided by a Europe that no longer is hegemonic. It is time we incorporate

---

<sup>27</sup> Even in *Multitude*, their next work, they still hypothesize a multitude without exteriority:

This first multitude is *ontological* and we could not conceive our social being without it. The other is the historical multitude or, really, the not-yet multitude. This multitude has never yet existed. We have been tracking in part 2 the emergence of the cultural, legal, economic, and political conditions that make the multitude possible today. This second multitude is *political*, and it will require a political project to bring it into being on the basis of these emerging conditions. These two multitudes, however, although conceptually distinct, are not really separable. If the multitude were not already latent and implicit in our social being, we could not even imagine it as a political project; and, similarly, we can only hope to realize it today because it already exists as a real potential. The multitude, then, when we put these two together, has a strange, double temporality: always-already and not-yet. (221-22)



other points of view and generate new theories that can account for exteriority and subalternity as the central place from which to think politics, history and globalization.

If we theorized globalization from the exteriority of any subaltern group left outside the expansion of capitalism, the very same concepts of work, politics, circulation, and identity would change. As a result, new forms of subjectivity could emerge across the capitalist divide—outside and inside. This geopolitically situated thinking exceeds capitalism while making it impossible to be absorbed by the latter. Here, I have only hinted to a starting point for such a task: to denounce poststructuralist geopolitical reliance on the nationalist and linguistic tenets legitimized by the (post)imperialist, European nation-state. A geopolitically situated thinking would even change the problem of contingency, hegemony, and universality, and thus produce a more global, yet more situated knowledge, outside provincial Europe.

## 5) CITED WORKS

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays by Louis Althusser*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, n.d. 127-186.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Arata, Stephen D. "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation." *Victorian Studies* (1990): 621-45.
- Backus, Margot Gayle. *The Gothic Family Romance. Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Balio, Tino. "A Major Presence in all of the World's Important Markets': the Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s." *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Steve Neal and Murray Smith. New York: Routledge, 1998. 58-73.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "Hegel and Haiti." *Critical Inquiry*. 26.4 (2000): 821-65.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso, 2000.
- Debord, Guy. *Society of Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red, 1983.



- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia. I. Anti-Oedipus. II. A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 1987.
- Dunn, Kevin C. "Africa's Ambiguous Relation to Empire and *Empire*." *Passavant and Dean*. 143-62.
- Ellis, Kate. *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and Subversion of Domestic Ideology*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Emmerich, Roland. *Independence Day*. N.p.: 20th Century Fox, Centropolis Entertainment, 1996.
- Fitzpatrick, Peter. "The Immanence of Empire." *Passavant and Dean*. 31-55.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Ed. and trans. Colin Gordon. et al. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74. XVII. 219-259.
- Gabilondo, Joseba. "Antonio Banderas: Hispanic Gay Masculinities and the Global Mirror Stage (1991-2001)." *Studies on Twentieth-Century Literature*. (forthcoming).
- Gabilondo, Joseba. "Postnationalism, Fundamentalism, and the Global Real: Historicizing Terror/ism and the New North American/Global Ideology." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 3.1 (2002): 57-86.
- Gelder, Ken. "Ethnic Vampires: Transylvania and Beyond." *Reading the Vampire*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 1-23.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Guha, Ranajit. *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Haraway, Donna J. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 183-201.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.





- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits : a selection*. New York : Norton, 1977.
- Laclau, Ernesto. "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggle?" Passavant and Dean. 21-30.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso, 1990.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985.
- Lewis, Matthew G. *The Monk*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Lotringer, Sylvère. "Foreword." Paolo Virno. *A Grammar of Multitude*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004. 7-19.
- Lukàcs, George. *The Historical Novel*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983.
- Marx, Karl and Fredric Engels. *The Communist Manifesto: Annotated Text*. Ed. Frederic L. Bender. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Moreiras, Alberto. "A Thinking Relationship: The End of Subalternity-Notes on Hegemony, Contingency, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:1 (2002): 97-131.
- Passavant, Paul and Jodi Dean. *Empire's New Clothes. Reading Hard and Negri*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. London, J. M. Dent & sons, ltd.; New York, E. P. Dutton & co., inc. 1931.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Scott, Walter. *Ivanhoe*. Norwalk: Heritage Press, 1950.
- Sedgwick, Eve. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. 271-313.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak, eds. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.





Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

UNESCO. *Red Book on Endangered Languages*. <http://www.tooyoo.i.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook/index.html>.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991

Wedell, Georges and André-Jean Tudesq. "Television and Democracy in Africa. The Role of Television in the Democratisation of the Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa." [http://www.gret.org/parma/uk2/ressource/etude/rap\\_pdf/tvdemo.pdf](http://www.gret.org/parma/uk2/ressource/etude/rap_pdf/tvdemo.pdf).

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form. Narrative, Discourse, and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Modern Library, 1998.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

Zorrilla, José. *The Real Don Juan*. Bath, Eng.: Absolute Press, 1990.

Protocolo para citar este texto: Gabilondo, J., 2006, "Global Subalternity, Exteriority, and Independence Day. Rethinking Radical Democracy and Biopolitics. Notes on Laclau-Mouffe and Hardt-Negri", en *Papeles del CEIC*, nº 21, CEIC (Centro de Estudios sobre la Identidad Colectiva), Universidad del País Vasco, <http://www.ehu.es/CEIC/papeles/21.pdf>

Fecha de recepción del texto: mayo de 2005

Fecha de evaluación del texto: septiembre de 2005

Fecha de publicación del texto: mayo de 2006