

# Roundtable Discussion on 'Windows on Empire: Perspectives from History, Culture and Political Economy'

Organised by the Birkbeck Institute of Humanities, November 2008



Alex Colás



Sanjay Seth



Leo Panitch



Saskia Sassen



Christian  
Marazzi

*At the start of the new century notions of Empire and imperialism had all but disappeared from the lexicon of western humanities. Washington's 'war on terror' and the accompanying invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, coupled with the publishing sensation that was Hardt and Negri's Empire suddenly reversed this neglect. Questions of political hierarchy, military competition and socio-economic domination which had apparently disappeared from the world stage with the end of the Cold War have returned with a vengeance. In recent years, the most innovative scholarship and trenchant political interventions in the humanities have arguably emerged from engagements with such questions, offering a fresh range of concepts, analyses and interpretations on the place of Empire and imperialism in our world today. Sanjay Seth is Professor in the department of politics at Goldsmiths, University of London. Leo Panitch is Distinguished Research Professor of Political Science at York University. Saskia Sassen is Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and the London School of Economics. She is also a member of the Committee on Global Thought. Christian Marazzi is Professor and Director of Socio-Economic Research at the Scuola Universitaria della Svizzera Italiana. The roundtable is chaired by Alex Colás, who is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at Birkbeck, University of London.*

**Alex Colás (AC):** I'd like to start by asking each of our panelists to briefly outline what role the category of 'Empire' has played in their work?

**Sanjay Seth (SAN):** Not all, but a lot of my work has been about colonial India, and the central premise informing that work is that empire and colonialism were self-evidently central events in the history of modern India – and more generally, I would suggest, central events in the making of modernity. If postcolonial theory has any kind of proposition to make, one of the most obvious is simply that empire was not an episode in modernity – it was constitutive of modernity. But secondly, and in a way more substantially, empire has been important in my work because, what I'm most interested in, or have most been interested in recent times, is what one might call the politics of knowledge – my book *Subject Lessons*, is an enquiry into the way in which a mode of knowledge and of being which emerged in early modern Europe eventually became global, and came to claim universality, to the point where, today, all knowledge which is regarded as serious or official, whether it's produced in the East or in the West, is essentially that form of knowledge which first emerged in early modern Europe. And my book is an enquiry into how that came to be, and with what implications and consequences. And of course that story is intimately connected with colonialism, because... that knowledge did not triumph over indigenous knowledges because of the force of the better argument; it triumphed because it came at the point of a bayonet, and was then carried through the institutions of colonial governmentality – offices, law courts, universities, schools, the modern novel, etc. So, for me at least, the categories of empire, colonialism, imperialism are, I think, central to understanding modernity – as simple as that.

**AC:** Leo, you've been one of several people on the left that has recovered notions of empire and imperialism for our time. But your emphasis, is on the American empire. Can you tell us a bit about your own take, either on the American empire, or your recovery of this category?

**Leo Panitch (LP):** Well, whether for good or ill, since I was a student here at the University of London in the late sixties, I considered myself a Marxist. But the term 'imperialism' I always was uncomfortable with, and tend to use it little, except in a rhetorical way occasionally, when I wasn't being careful with myself. And it had to do with the fact that it was useful emotively – especially for those of us who were politicised during the 1960s and the Vietnam War era and so on, but I always felt it was social-scientifically far too loose a concept, and, in the classical Marxist sense, very anachronistic.

I began to use it in the 1990s, at the time that I was writing a series of essays around the importance of the state in globalisation, insisting that, far from states being bypassed by globalisation, or disempowered by globalisation, they were in many ways the authors of what we know as globalisation – essential to making it happen, to codifying it, regulating it, facilitating it – of course, due to class and other social forces within them, but nevertheless. I think that's true of all states – but when you say that, of course, there are states and states, and you need to distinguish between the role that some states play in globalisation and others play in globalisation. And it was in that context that I began to think through the particularly central role of the American state in the making of global capitalism, which is the subject of a large book I'm just finishing with Sam Gindin. And yes, it focuses very much on the American state, because I think it has emerged through the course of the twentieth century with particular responsibility for the making and the policing, and reproducing, of capitalism's globalising tendencies. There's a large question to be asked, which is a large part of the book, about what it was about American capitalism and its legal and institutional structures that led its state to become so central to the making of global capitalism – but I think it has.

So the notion of empire you hear is very different than imperialism in the sense of an act – in the sense of an imperialistic act or impulse. It's empire in the sense of a particular kind of state. If one uses the Marxist conception of the state that developed in the 1960s, in terms of understanding the capitalist state as having as its special qualities and purposes the reproduction of property rights, class rights, and so forth, facilitating the process of accumulation, then, in terms of the internationalising tendencies of capitalism, certain states acquire a particular burden of responsibility, if you like, for facilitating that process; and they do so, of course, partly because their capitalist classes are so much involved in that internationalisation. And they begin concerning themselves with: Do other states sufficiently protect property, facilitate accumulation? And the American empire, in my view, needs to be understood in terms of the internationalisation of the state function. And it plays a very central role, and has done for most of the century – I think globalisation begins in 1945, not in 1980 – in trying to ensure that the world's independent states, because it has been a decolonising force, are reconstructed in such ways that they are functional to the making of global capitalism; and I understand American empire in that way. That's not to say the military dimensions aren't important but that's how I've come to it, and that was begun before Hardt and Negri published their book.

**AC:** Reading the index of your latest book Saskia, I didn't see much of empire, except in a historical sense. You appear to be more concerned with globalisation?

**Saskia Sassen (SS):** Well, here is my take. I think the category 'empire' is very useful. It has clearly a historical base – as was just said by the two of you. I also think that it's a variable: it changes. So I think that today there is a terrain for action, for exploitation, that is indeed imperial. I cannot confine it to one state, no matter how powerful that state is; I think it is beyond the state. I think it's a series of systems and structures and logics and dynamics that inhabit more and more states. Now, I hope that we have time to return to the definitions, because I want to promptly say something else – and that is, the reason that I prefer to use the notion of globalities, is because I want to include many more actors, many more terrains, and many more sorts of conditions and dynamics into some notion that cuts across the nation-state encasement, and that at one end includes some rather nice options.

I think, strictly speaking, we have only two global institutions. There is really very little globality, formally speaking, out there. One is the ICC, the International Criminal Court. Why is it global? Because it does not have the state as a representative of its people – it's us directly, the citizens, or whatever. And the other one is WTO law through TRIPS – not WTO law the institution, because that's supranational, the state is the actor; but TRIPS is global. With TRIPS, you can go straight to any local court and launch a law suit. But what I'm trying to say with these two examples is that there are globalities that are under construction, that are being made and unmade that really have to do with freeing up people, freeing up possibilities. I don't want to collapse the sort of multiplicity of rather foundational transformations that are happening into the category 'empire'. But I do think that there is, also, empire.

In this new book of mine, I try to make a rather strong argument that it is a mistake to think – as Leo just indicated - that Bretton Woods was the beginning of the current era. Let me just mention one reason. The logic – the international logic – that organises Bretton Woods is the notion that national states need to be protected from excessive international fluctuations. The logic that I see emerging and consolidating in the 1980s is pretty much the opposite: it is states preparing the ground so that global systems – in this case we are talking, really, global corporate economy – can install themselves in country after country after country. It's the opposite of what the Bretton Woods and '45 was about. And here I agree completely with Leo – and I've used his work in the earliest iteration, and in this new iteration, in this work that I'm doing on the state – that, strictly speaking, there is no such legal persona as a global firm; it doesn't exist. Now, we know that there are all kinds of firms that conduct themselves as if they were global. What is it that produces the globality that allows these firms to conduct themselves as if they were global? Well, it is what Leo was saying: state after state has produced the instrumentalities – judicial, regulatory, policy, the sort of cultures, if you want, of interpretation of what is good and what is bad – in its countries; so that what you have is a multiplication of spaces across countries, across

the world, that allow a foreign firm to function comfortably – increasingly comfortably.

Now, for me, in there then lies two dynamics. So, one of them is that this making of a space, though what each state does with its own national instruments – its legislature, its executive, its judiciary comes at a price; and one way of naming that price is that it has the effect of de-nationalising what was historically constructed as national. So, for me, when I look today at what's happening, there are both these globalising dynamics and there are de-nationalising dynamics; so that's one point. The second point, and this has to do with the state: the state – any working state, in my view – is a far more complex capacity, capability, than the richest corporation. You know that famous list –after the eleventh-richest country, the rest are the richest multinationals. Well, that's very nice, and it's very illuminating; but really, as regards organisational capabilities, the state is far more complex. So I am not ready to give up on the state – though most states have been too nationalistic for my taste, and not as enlightened as we might have hoped that they could be. And I think that the current period shows that the state has shown, or evinced, a disposition to be a bit international. It has done so vis-à-vis the corporate global economy, but it has done so: it has flexed global muscles in a way that is different from historical imperialism, where it was basically a projection onto another country, you know – India, Africa, etc. And so my big question is, re-entering the state – I'm thinking of Poulantzas, you know, class struggle inside the state– repossessing the state, and using that kind of global power that the state has developed, oriented towards environmental questions, social justice – that, to me, is a political project that I find very interesting, and that is why I just don't want to reduce everything to American imperial power. I think what is happening is much deeper, and it has more values – not just this very negative one.

**AC:** Christian you've been associated with the so-called autonomist tradition of Marxist thinking, closely linked to the recent work of Toni Negri. Do you share his conception of empire in your own work?

**Christian Marazzi (CM):** Well, may I answer in another way, because the question is kind of tricky. Let me answer your original question, to what extent the category of empire has played a role in my work. I have to say that there is a biographical kind of reason for that. I started my political activity, militancy, in the late sixties, early seventies in Switzerland and in Italy. And especially in my country, in Switzerland, I worked with immigrants, so that immediately it was natural for me to have this kind of international perspective, right? But, at the same time, on a more theoretical, analytical level, what actually played a major role in the development of this category of empire was 1971: the crisis of the international monetary system, with the inconvertibility of the dollar and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. That was, for me, the

beginning of what we call today 'globalisation' or 'empire' – that means, in a way, the transition from what we used to call 'imperialism' to what today we call 'empire'.

Let me just recall something about the debate at that time – about the dollar. I remember that there were debates on the opportunity, especially on the leftist kind of economic scene, to install a kind of supranational unit of account, in order to get rid of that asymmetry which was based on the dollar being an international unit of account, in spite of its being a national currency. I always thought that this asymmetry was impossible to overcome – that means that I don't believe that it is possible to achieve, in institutional terms, a kind of global representation of the international relationships. I was always very sceptical, and still am right now, of the possibility of getting rid of this asymmetry between national and international. And I think that the main asymmetry – and that's the important thing of this workerist tradition – lies at the core, in the heart, of the class relationships. I think that the main asymmetry which makes this globalisation a process which is a process, and not something that can be solved in one way or another, a variable kind of process, is precisely the fact that it is the terrain of the growth of class relations that impede a definite global organisation of this contradiction.

The other reason why empire plays a role in my work is based on my interest, basically, in the changing nature of work. I think that 'empire' means something which is precisely different from 'imperialism'. 'Empire' means that there is no outside – that what used to be a relationship between the centre and the periphery, north/south, in imperialism, with the category of 'empire', is now interior, is being interiorised. This is something that, in work on the transformation of work, is very important. Because I think that, today, work is something that cannot be confined spatially and temporally, as it used to be in the Fordist epoch. I think the distinctive nature of what we call post-Fordism, or knowledge economy, or whatever you want to call it, is the extension of the process of exploitation outside the gates of the factory. So, in this respect, empire is a category which applies very much to what is going on at the very concrete level of work. And as far as the importance of the state, to what extent as Saskia says, the state is still a relevant, and important terrain or field of mobilisation? Well, I think that the difficulty today is that we are witnessing a process of re-statalisation – do you say that in English? – through, for instance, sovereign funds, which are something that makes this process of re-statalisation something even more complex, if that is possible, in the sense that, for instance, to take, again, my little country as an example: in this financial crisis, the major banks of my country have been I don't know for how long saved by Asian funds, sovereign funds. So there is something that goes along with this re-statalisation which, in a way, puts the birth of the new state at a transnational level.

**AC:** I want to move on now to a series of sections relating to questions of method, historiography, the connections between space and time that have already been highlighted in our understanding of the modern world. And perhaps to start this round with Leo – you said earlier that your approach is a historical materialist one, a Marxist approach, but you reject, I think almost outright, one of the main sources of the Marxist analysis of imperialism, namely that which took place around the beginning of the twentieth century, associated to Lenin most famously, but also Bukharin. And I wondered, methodologically, why you make that move?

**LP:** Well, I think that was a conjuncturally usefully analysis, although it had various faults even then. I think, as an attempt to understand the inter-imperial rivalry that led to World War I, there was something to it. I think the extent to which Hardt and Negri embrace that as relevant for that period and correct for that period, but wrong for ours, is also wrong, because they tend to accept the over-accumulation thesis in those theories almost fully. And, you know beginning with Luxemburg but it's really common to all of them the explanation of what was going on was that the European imperial countries were acquiring colonies in the rest of the world because they had over-accumulated at home, and they had to do something with their surplus – or they had to find outlets for realising their profits, to put it in Luxemburg's terms. It was of course understandable they'd miss it, but what they were missing was the deepening of capital in the social relations in the central countries – in Europe and the United States. At that very moment we get the beginnings of what we later began to call Fordism – that is, the incorporation of the subordinate classes, and the penetration of the subordinate classes, into the deepest capitalist relations. I mean, what does it mean to say, in 1900, that the United States has reached the end of its frontier and it's invading Nicaragua because it can no longer accumulate at home? California has barely begun to be an arena of capitalist accumulation; and much more important to America's development was the development of capitalism in California, rather than the development of capitalism in Nicaragua.

So it was misleading even for its time. And I think it's misleading today, as I've tried to show, because, in my view, from 1945 on, the Western European states and Japan, in a slightly different way, were what I like to call, since I'm a Canadian, 'Canadianised.' That is, they were penetrated and incorporated into the informal American empire. And the explicit purpose of that – and here is perhaps where Saskia and I disagree a little, I don't think much – was established in the wartime period, in the run-up to Bretton Woods. The goal of Bretton Woods for the American state, which was a whole complex of contradictory forces, but what they arrived at when they got to that Bretton Woods meeting was a goal to re-establish the basis, the conditions for international trade and free capital movements. That couldn't

conceivably be done, of course, after 1945, without incubating nation-states and their national economy for a period. But the explicit goal of the Americans, and it was very explicit, because they didn't adopt capital controls, and they said they never would, was to eventually get to the point whereby they would be able to re-establish, and go further than had ever been established, free trade, and above all free capital movements.

The conditions for that in Western Europe were established by the end of the fifties. It began first with the convertibility of European currencies, the establishment of a eurodollar market, with the Kennedy round in the GATT negotiations in the early sixties; the tremendous growth of foreign direct investment under multinational corporations – all of which leads to the breakdown of Bretton Woods, but is essentially capitalism breaking out of the incubator. Keynes was defeated, if you like – although I think in many ways Keynes was confused, and he certainly lied when he came to the House of Lords here in London, and said that he had accomplished at Bretton Woods what he had promised to accomplish, and he was defeated there – and he knew it wasn't. If you read Skidelsky's biography, it's very clear.

Now, I'd only say this: methodologically I think it's very important in relation to both points that have been made, and also in relation to the colonial nature of previous imperialism. Obviously, I'm also interested in globality, in the looser sense; and I'm also interested in capitalism as a set of social relations around the world, which, I entirely agree, has now indeed done away, if you like, with a portion of the world - yet not being made up of capitalist social relations. But it seems to me, methodologically, we need to make a distinction, within that, between what is the political, and what is cultural, and what is economic. And what I don't like about the notion of empire as Hardt and Negri use it is that they displace that distinction – empire becomes all of the processes and institutions that are engaged in the creation of capitalist social relations. States, in that sense, are not distinctive. And similarly with the notion of globality: I think what we need to be looking at is what role do states play – and some of the states are imperial, in that they have a greater responsibility for this ... they are more integrated in the process. And that allows us precisely to get back to the kinds of questions you were raising about, are we going to see a shift, to some extent, in the role the state is playing directly in economic relations, as opposed to simply facilitating them. But I think we have to keep that distinction. And yes, I admit, I'm a state theorist, so I am interested in the role that the imperial state, the American state, is playing in all of this.

**AC:** Sanjay, your methodological emphasis seems to be on the problematic of Eurocentrism and modernity, and in one of your writings you posit a contrast –

admittedly for heuristic purposes – between a sort of historical sociology that tries to reorient the trajectory of modern world history towards Eurasia, as against what you call a postcolonial approach that is less concerned with genealogies and modernity and more with the politics of knowledge. So, I wondered if you could tell us a little bit about what that strategy involves, and what it brings to the table. What does the category ‘postcolonial’ in that context bring to the table in our analysis of empire?

**SAN:** What struck me in the preceding discussion, from which I’ve also learned, is the way in which the categories through which we analyse the global and the imperial are of course inevitably consequences of the global and the imperial. And what I’m interested in is a sort of reflexive moment that asks: How adequate are the categories to understanding the phenomenon of which they are purportedly the consequence, as well as the tool of analysis? And it’s in that context that - and I don’t want to be Mr Postcolonial here, by the way – postcolonialism is a portmanteau term that includes all sorts of stuff, some of which I think is very, very interesting, and some of which is rubbish; you know, it’s bandwagon-effect, people jumping on ...

But, you ask what does it bring to the table. Very briefly, I think what it brings to the table is the suggestions that the categories through which we’re analysing the global are themselves a consequence of the global. That’s both true and not true: they are a consequence of the global, but they’re the consequence of a particular European global. The categories through which we understand and constitute, and frequently live the modern, have deeply European genealogies – concepts like civil society, state, the distinction between society and nature - all of these. In using these terms we buy into the modern narrative that says that they’re true, that other forms of knowledge are approximations, at best, to the final form we moderns achieved. It’s what I call the ‘once I was blind, now I can see’ narrative. You see it in Weber – disenchantment. You know: previously the world was enchanted; we moderns were forced to see that the world does not resonate with meaning and purpose; the physical world is nothing more than impersonal processes and laws, and so on. Marx: production has always been at the heart of all societies; it’s only when it’s separated out from religion and everything else, as it is in commodity production, that we can finally see that production has always rested at the heart of all societies. Or, you know, Marx’s famous remark in the *Grundrisse* about, the key to the understanding of the human ... How does it go? The key to the anatomy of the ape is the human – it’s only, post factum that you can retrospectively see. All of these categories, which are modern categories, through which we understand and live the world, are also European categories – they have a deeply European genealogy. That’s not to say that they’re therefore wrong, or that they’re innately provincial – and this is not a nativist plea, because I also use the same categories. I’m not a Sanskrit pandit ...

But I do think we need a moment of reflexivity, where we recognise that, and ask: How adequate are they to describing and comprehending the phenomenon under consideration. It doesn't disable our analysis; it's not a call for us to stop doing work – it's a call for a sort of reflexivity. I think of myself as from and of the left, but I think it also applies to the left. I mean, I think Marx also is very much part of this, once-we-were-blind-but-now-we-can-see narrative. Marx also, and sometimes quite overtly – and, by the way, Hardt and Negri quote him very approvingly – it's Marx who sort of talks about the superstition and degradation of the Indian village and, although the British were bastards and did it for their selfish reasons, nonetheless they were the unconscious tools of history. That Promethean vision which exalts at the destruction of primitive, circumscribed forms of life also, I think, needs to be questioned. We need to ask: By what standard do we judge other forms of life to be circumscribed and degraded, and the modern to be Promethean and liberatory?

**AC:** I would only add that, in my reading at least, Marx was quite equal-opportunity about his venom: rural idiocy is basically about Germans; peoples without history are Serbs or Yugoslavs... Let me move on to Saskia, I have to confess, I struggled a bit in identifying a particular method to your book *Territory, Authority, Rights*. Maybe that eclecticism is a method in itself, but some of the categories I picked up, which I'd like you to illuminate a little bit, included 'analytical borderlands', for instance you talk about the project of avoiding the 'endogeneity gap'. As a political geographer, political economist, you seem to posit this transition, or this contrast, between two 'pertinent wholes': nation-state and the world scale. What's the methodological root to those kinds of categories?

**SS:** Let me start by picking up on what you were saying. And I must say that, I'm sure most of you know, the book by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, I learned a lot – he was my colleague when I was at Chicago; just fantastic. But anyhow, I have been told that I am a pragmatist and a constructivist. I don't know what it means, but I'm just saying. But I do find that my response to these problematics that Sanjay just raised is, for instance, with this question of what is the global corporate economy, rather than accepting the category, which is why I re-researched the question. A lot of globalisation scholars don't even know that the global firm doesn't exist I mean, they know it *de facto*, but they don't know it theoretically, if you want. And similarly, when I say that one of the processes that is happening, which has to do with the formation at one end of empire, and at the other end of some rather liberating geographies – new sort of jurisdictional geographies that are global, that are being made by citizens who do not have power – is the fact that this process of de-nationalisation, which assumes very specific contents, practices, instruments in different countries: it is different in

China from what it is in Japan, from what it is in Nigeria.

In that way, I try to – at a very pragmatic level, at a level of material practices and also cultural practices, modes of interpreting – exit this narrow framing of the global and the national. And, in fact, the reason I took territory, authority and rights was as a way to free myself from the global or the national. When I do my research on immigration, I do not use the word ‘immigration’, because it is one very narrowing and confining version of what we’re trying to name. Similarly with global corporate capital – I don’t use that term. I try to understand what are the practices, what are the instruments that produce something that then gets named in those terms. So, when I’m giving a quick speech, of course I use that – it’s shorthand - but when I’m doing my research, you know, then ...

So, coming back to you. Territory, authority and rights, I argue, are foundational to any complex organisational form. In that sense, they have a trans-historical quality, but they get constituted – back to your problematic also – in very specific ways: in tribal societies, in colonial settings, in pre-modern states and so on. So it is a way of freeing myself from these overarching categories that really blind us, the one eye, and maybe even the two eyes, to really understand what is happening. For shorthand, then I re-aggregate. ‘Analytic borderlands’ for me, is a device to enter something that is presented as a line that divides to mutually exclusive conditions, spaces; and it’s a way of entering so that I can open it up, and make it a site for research. Again, a certain pragmatism there, right? I want to understand what is happening, so, often, when two systems of representation intersect, there is a silence – this is our experience, and it might be also a Western experience, you see. So I am fighting that, but I can’t fight it with beautiful complex terms, I need to fight it with actually doing research.

So I find a lot of analytic borderlands, let’s say, in my research on the state apparatus. I don’t mean the nation-state – the nation-state is a very fuzzy category – but I mean the state apparatus. I’ve done fieldwork in central banks, in ministries of finance. I want to know at what point does the global actually get constituted inside ministries of finance and central banks, but always coded as national. And the way that process happens will vary – in South Korea, in China, in Argentina. So those are my pragmatic moves to get at what you call the postcolonial. You see, if I use ‘postcolonial’, I’ve already nailed myself against the wall. And that is why I do like Hardt and Negri’s ‘empire’, as opposed to ‘imperialism’. That is a very important distinction. We can call it empire – I don’t call it empire; I use other terms, you know, because I disaggregate: I really do try to get a lot of sort of the material practices – that is one of my things. A shorthand way for me to get at this stuff is to say that what we call global capital is a multiplication of de-nationalised capitals – it didn’t just fall from the sky. However, then it constructs itself in a way that we could call ‘empire’, and it

inhabits, more and more, national states; and the global city is then a bridge – a lot of cultural work gets done in the global city to bridge between what is still not part of that system. So another shorthand is to say that I want to liberate those three categories – territory, authority and rights – from their nation-state encasements. When I put those lenses on, it really helps me to see all kinds of things that otherwise I wouldn't see. And one that I hope we can talk about at some point is this other notion that I develop, which is that powerlessness is a variable – and at one end it's elementary, it's victimhood, it's Weber: you either have it or you don't have it, and if you don't have power – pfaff! – the other one can hit you over the head. But at this end it is complex; and in that complexity lays the possibility of politics. And that is why I care about all these other globalities, because these globalities do enable certain kinds of struggles, and they help make powerlessness complex, and that, to me, is extremely important.

**AC:** We're definitely going to come back to that. Christian, one of the most suggestive things in your work is the combination of your main area of interest, finance, with language – the explanatory power, the conceptual power, you attach to communication in finance. You suggest, that language is not only a vehicle for transmitting financial data and information, but also a creative force. You speak of 'semio-capitalism', for instance. What is 'semio-capitalism'?

**CM:** I got interested in the importance of language, communication, when I tried to understand, pragmatically, how production functions today – today, I mean, starting from the restructuring of capitalist enterprises in the eighties, on the model of, you know, just-in-time, of the Japanese Toyotism, and things like that. And what was important in my understanding of these changes was precisely the role of communication, and therefore of language, in overcoming the rigidities of the Fordist mode of production – of the assembly line, for instance. I think that communication today has become a sort of assembly line of what we call immaterial work. In a way, it is a modality of transmitting information, communication, in order to produce value. I always make the example of language as what oil used to be in the forties – the mode of production, writing; it lubricates the process of production at the local and at the global level. And the importance of language goes further back – it precedes the information technology revolution; it goes back to precisely the Japanese kind of overcoming of their situation after World War II by trying to do exactly the opposite of what was going on in the United States, as far as modes of production, were concerned.

So this is the first point: language as a vehicle of the production of value. But then I also realised that, as soon as you speak of language, or the importance of

communication in a capitalist society, you speak of life – of our life. Because that's the distinctive characteristic of language, as an instrument, as a tool for value-production that it is inside us. It is a human characteristic that never leaves us. As we used to leave the instruments of work, you know, after six o'clock in the evening, today you never leave work. So the further step was precisely to look at the importance of life as a source of value. Not just in this kind of post-hegemonic era, but in terms of the mode of production – that is precisely what I said before: the fact that the processes of value-production doesn't stop at the factory gates, but goes into society.

And that leads to the third question: How does financialisation fit into that? I think that financialisation today is something different from what, for instance, even Giovanni Arrighi considers in his last book. Financialisation today is something that is not confined to the last segment of the business cycle, as it used to be in the twentieth century or nineteenth century – that means, a way of recuperating, falling profits, at the level of 'money makes money.' Today, finance starts with the beginning of the business cycle. So there it permeates the business cycle. Today, you don't even buy this glass of water, without being in the financial relationship. So I think financialisation is the perverted form of this new mode of production. That is, a mode of production in which the production of value is more and more outside of the traditional places of production and, to this extent, finance looks more and more like a new form of profit-realisation of something that is dispersed in society. And that's why I think that it is important, you know, for any Marxist to understand the role of language in the new modes of production, in this new capitalism. But, at the same time, it is important to move from language as life to the new mechanism of financialisation as a way of capturing the value that is produced within society.

**AC:** Saskia, your own recent work draws very much on these kinds of things, through the processes or technologies of digitalisation. In fact, you speak of digital networks re-scaling under the global age, and these new imbrications between authority and territory. So, I want to move straight on to some discussions about the conjugation of capital, territory, authority, by asking you a bit more about this role of digitisation.

**SS:** Can I be slightly subversive? I'm a bit of an anarchist, not just a pragmatist. So, I want to pick up on what you just said, because I've just finished a research project. Let me talk about something that is close to home, literally: the subprime mortgage, and how it has been misunderstood. And the subprime mortgage really functions as a mechanism for primitive accumulation that potentially goes towards the billions of low- and modest-income households around the world. It is far more powerful than outsourcing; it's far more powerful than lowering wages; and it really is a mechanism whereby you extract, in one blow, all the savings that low- and modest-income

households have, because, when they have a chance for a mortgage, they will put their last dollar in there.

Now, why does it work for finance? And that is where you're absolutely right – I totally agree with your analysis. Because the source of profit is not the creditworthiness of the one who gets the mortgage; the source of profit is, you get as many as you can – as you already see a Philips curve in terms of creditworthiness and numbers – and you bundle them up, you mix them up with high-grade; you slice them at least into 500, because otherwise you're not going to get a rating; and then you sell it in the secondary market. That's how you make your money. A lot of firms who hang on to subprime mortgages have gone under, but a lot of firms made a pile of money because they kept them. So it is a most insidious instrument that finance has invented, because it means that they don't care whether you can pay your mortgage or not: you lose your house, you lose your savings, and they are circulating in another level. Now, some will be left, like in a game of musical chairs, holding the bag, because somebody winds up with those instruments.

The second point, I just want to very quickly make is that we really have two crises: one is the one linked to the subprime mortgage. Now, in the United States – I don't know what it is here – the commentary is: 'Ah, those people who don't know how to handle a mortgage – like, a lot of minority people, a lot of modest-income'. That is absolutely false, for the reason that I just said. But the other thing is that, in August of 2007, all kinds of big banks – the Bank of China, Paribas, all kinds of American banks – suddenly understood because of the foreclosures that was information for them, that was not the source of the crisis for them – they understood that they had defective instruments that they had invested in, and they froze: they stopped giving credit. It was the response, the interpretation of banks which were sitting on piles of money. Second crisis: August 2008, September 2008, which is the credit default swaps – 55 trillion. Subprime mortgage, 144 billion, and credit ... that's the real biggie one that we have now. In the United States you still hear people saying: 'it's, you know, low-class people who don't know how to handle a mortgage that have credit'. It's just a fiction; I just wanted to say that.

Now on digitisation, I'm just going to say one thing, because I've already taken my time up. My starting point, in order to understand the impact of digital technology, is a distinction; and that is that the logic of the engineer, the computer scientist, who designed the technology, who designed the software, is different from all the various social domains – from finance to electronic activists – who use those technologies. And one of the reasons that so many predictions have fallen flat on their face is because the notion was, if the technology can do A, B, C, the technology will be used in a way that does A, B, C; and if the technology can do X better than another technology, then that technology will be used to do X. So, in the case of finance, the

notion was that, you know, finance wouldn't need financial centres, because it could distribute globally and be systemically integrated. But the logic of finance, finance is totally imbricated with these technologies - it needs these technologies. But the logic of finance is not the logic of the engineer or the computer scientist. Once you have that as your starting point, you can enter all kinds of domains – and I'm particularly interested in interactive domains where a sociality is constituted. I'm not interested in data pipelines. But once you take that distinction, you sort of see things that you otherwise don't see. Otherwise you fall flat on the engineer's logic, if you want – which is fine, you know, if you are developing infrastructure, but it's not so fine if you are dealing with social domains.

**AC:** I was going to ask Leo about his notions of the internationalisation of the state, but he very promptly highlighted that he's just edited, together with Martijn Konings, a book entitled *American Empire and the Political Economy of Global Finance*. The introductory chapter is entitled, 'Demystifying Finance' – so, Leo, over to you: demystify it for us!

**LP:** Well, let's begin with the subprime thing, because I think that Saskia's presented an interesting analysis, but not an entirely dialectical one. The people who got into subprime mortgages are not just victims and they weren't just expropriated of their savings. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. When the Keynesian welfare state went into crisis in the 1960s and '70s, and as the dynamic capitalism that had been nurtured in the incubator of the post-war period grew out of the capacity of the reforms to contain it, the Great Society programmes – the war against poverty; the enormous state expenditure in the United States which had been directed at incorporating and compensating the African-American communities for their role in the Vietnam War, where young black men were mostly being conscripted; for their radicalism, whether via the Civil Rights movement or the Black Power movement, or what have you – the ability to keep on incorporating them, attempting to bring them, the most difficult portion of the American working class to integrate into American society – could no longer be done through public expenditure.

What you needed – and Saskia has written about this, and knows this better than anyone – was the equivalent of Red Vienna in every American city. You needed a massive and much more creative set of public housing programmes and other infrastructural devices in the cities than had ever been created. That hadn't been done; it was no longer on the public agenda, because what was required now was a reduction in state expenditure. And therefore, the left wing of the Democratic Party – the Congress in 1974 was made up of very left-wing, McGovernite Democrats, many of whom we would call social democrats – got the Community Investment Act passed in

1978. It was progressive; it came out of the same kind of mentality that people here in the left of the British Labour Party were pushing when they were advancing the Alternative Economic Strategy – that banks should be required to red-line zones in every area they lent to which were poor, i.e. largely African-American and they had to lend 5 per cent of their assets to those communities.

Every banker in the United States opposed it, except for one – a small Chicago banker spoke in favour at the Congressional hearings – and of course they had to strike a deal with the banks. The deal they struck was that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac would massify the secondary mortgage market: the market whereby you package the mortgages that were given to people, and then resold them in the derivatives market. And this was the first big derivatives market apart from currency, which had developed in Chicago in the 1970s, when currencies became free-floating. It didn't go anywhere much in the eighties, because of the recession of the early eighties and the recession of the early nineties, but when real estate took off, in the 1990s, when Bill Clinton was elected and did away with American welfare – which is what he did – and he then introduced amendments to the Community Investment Act strengthening it, and requiring the banks to go further with it, and for this he was called the black president, because businessmen in the African-American community were pressing him to do this, you got this enormous expansion of poor people going into the mortgage market in this way. Why shouldn't they have?

We're all told that the American dream is to own your own house, right? And although American workers have already been integrated into the financial system in the way that Christian speaks of it, through their savings – the savings they put into mutual funds, pension funds as well as borrowers on credit cards, and so on – the one asset they really hold for their own is their home. Many of them take out secondary mortgages in order to maintain their consumption when you have stagnating real wages, when trade unionism has been defeated; but a lot of them that don't have homes want to get into the game. And many of them do indeed get mortgages with no savings. But they're encouraged to do so – instead of a public housing programme, they're told: we can solve America's problems. It's just like New Labour in Britain. By integrating the whole of this society into markets; markets will be fine if we integrate the whole society into them. So it isn't just a matter of what Wall Street does to poor people – it's a matter of what the Democratic Party does to poor people.

**SS:** Yes, I agree with that ...

**LP:** And this is very important. But it is also part of the larger phenomenon of the enormous asset inflation that contemporary capitalism has been about – for all the

fact that we hear that monetarists founded neoliberalism, you have an enormous increase in the money supply, which has gone into asset inflation: that is, what they called M3, is all kinds of financial instruments which are very fungible, and very difficult not to define as money. It didn't create price inflation, because trade unionism was defeated; it created asset inflation – that doesn't mean there wasn't real accumulation. You're absolutely right: those theorists, including Giovanni Arrighi, who think that 'we get a financial bubble; you don't get real accumulation' – that's not been the case. You've had enormous real accumulation, not least in the United States, in the revolutionary digital, computer, biotech industries, which may lay the basis for an American regeneration after this depression – we'll have to see.

I just would like to make one other point that I think's very important, and it's very much related to Sanjay's very important point. When I'm using American empire, I'm not using it in the sense that when that state acts, it acts in the American interest. You remember, I said that it is burdened with the responsibility of trying to keep global capitalism going. So the American state's in a very contradictory position – it is a state of its own social formation, it has to reflect the class forces inside, but it is also burdened with the responsibility of trying to keep global capitalism going. Like Saskia, I spend most of my time trying to look at the way in which globalisation's being made inside real institutions. Well, you know, the central bank of India is not the only one that's being globalised in this way – the Federal Reserve of the United States is being globalised in this way; and we have to study how it's acquiring that responsibility.

When you look at what it's been doing in this crisis, the main reason it nationalised Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac was because of the fact that so much of China's and India's savings were tied up there, and they had guaranteed them the way they would guarantee Treasury bills. So the American state's viability, in terms of its ability to promise, 'We will not default on our debt', was bound up with this. The Federal Reserve today engages with swaps for currencies it doesn't want, that are largely useless, right? What it's doing is trying to ensure that those economies that it's giving American dollars to in exchange for Hungarian florins, will continue to function in the capitalist world-system, and it's acting in that sense as the world's central bank. Now, do we exult in this? No – obviously we don't exult in the fact that African-American communities in Cleveland have their homes owned, effectively, by Deutsche Bank, and Deutsche Bank in fact owned almost the largest portion of the subprime mortgage packaging derivatives in Cleveland. We don't exult in what's happening to those communities; nevertheless – and it's tragic, I entirely agree – there's asymmetric power, the people at the bottom do have power, but history has been a matter of those who have not lived in these types of capitalist social relations being swamped by them, being penetrated by them, being incorporated into them.

I just finished supervising a PhD thesis by a woman who went to work in the Canadian north, in the Yukon, as a teacher, and in that process she became the most – I don't know how to describe it – vulgar materialist that I have ever known. That is, she said, look, they are engaged in a process in the north, and the Canadian state is helping them to it, of trying to teach aboriginal children how to hunt, how to retain their old ways of living, as a result of which they aren't becoming literate numerically, they aren't learning how to operate in a capitalist society, and I think that we're doing them harm. And she wrote a thesis actually using words like 'savages' – in other words, she reincorporated the old anthropology. And I was often engaged in fights with her about being a racist and so on. Someone who'd gone to work with the natives, and devoted herself to that. But what she got caught up in was: there's no hope of retaining the aboriginal way of life; our role therefore ought to be complete integration, and then all kinds of naive stuff about, they'll join the class struggle. But if you can't ignore, on the other hand, it's not a matter of exulting in it – it's the way in which India is now being incorporated into global capitalism; the big question is whether the American empire can Canadianise it, which is very unlikely, given the social forces in India.

**AC:** Sanjay, in your book *Subject Matters*, you look at education in colonial India and talk about the 'cramming instrumentalism' amongst elements of the Indian population at that time. I wonder if you see a continuity between those practices, or attempts at creating a subjectivity, a knowledgeable subject in the British Raj, and the contemporary experiences – be it in the Indian subcontinent or elsewhere – of using, again, skills, training, digitisation for the purposes of valorisation. Christian for instance speaks of a crisis of measurability in our post-Fordist economy, but arguably – and, as I say, it's a question directed mainly at Sanjay – there are clear elements of continuity, in that, sure, it's language, it's communications, that is being commodified, but it's still practised under conditions that involve clocking in and clocking out. So I wonder if there's any connection in your mind, from a politics-of-knowledge perspective, or sociology-of-education, between that colonial world and this imperial world?

**SAN:** That's an interesting question, and I don't know that I'll be able to answer it adequately. I'll approach it in a slightly oblique way, by first adverting to some of the other things that have been said, and responding to ... well, everyone, really. The example of, you can't even drink a glass of water now without being imbricated in a host of relationships – you know, financial, capital, and so on – is absolutely right. What interests me, though, is, the same person who has that glass of water – and I'll take India, because I know it best – that same person can then hop behind a scooter, which they've taken on loan, so further examples of being imbricated, and - anyone

who's travelled in India knows- they'll have two or three rather hideous pictures of gods on the front, and they'll utter a little prayer before they set off on their journey. What interests me is the way in which the language you all use, which is not usually the language I use - is absolutely central to understanding the contemporary world.

So, my call was not a call for nativism, or preserving the native in his or her natural habitat - the world has been transformed, and these categories that are being employed around this table are essential to understanding those transformations. What interests me is, even as new logics transform the world, they don't entirely remake lives. So the language of the social sciences is never fully adequate to the social space - it's indispensable to the sort of questions that are being asked around this table, but it doesn't exhaust the social space; there are all these other things happening which are not outside of capital - this is where I agree with Hardt and Negri. I wrote a longish review article of their work, and a very appreciative one. And they say at one point that postmodernism and postcolonialism are sort of redundant because capital itself is, in a way, dematerialising binaries, there's no outside point from which critiques can be launched. And I agree, largely agree, with that too. Again, it's not a call for nativism, for some point outside of capital. It's, rather, the observation that even from the belly of the beast, social life, capital does not exhaust the social - even as it remakes it.

**AC:** I'd like to move onto questions of war and race, and racism: Christian, you say in your book *Capital* that the war on terror was the new economy by other means. Yes? It was about - your language the war on terror has been about absorbing some of the surpluses in the new economy, particularly surpluses related to digitalisation, to the dotcom boom, and so on and so forth. Can you talk us a bit through that connection between the new economy and the war on terror?

**CM:** That idea, of course, was very much the idea of war on terrorism as a continuation of the new economy, in a Clausewitzian way, was very much linked to what was going on. What happened, immediately after the crisis of the new economy, with 9/11, and the fact that the war actually allowed to immediately go out of the recession, first of all, and at the same time to kind of recycle a lot of that digital cornucopia that was overproduced during the last year or so of the nineties, which offers, in a very traditional way, an outlet to that overproduction of digitalised goods.

But maybe there is another meaning that we can give to this role of war. When I think of, for instance, the category of 'empire' - for instance, Toni Negri keeps repeating that the Bush administration tried to do a coup d'état on empire- in a way, that is something which I always found problematic with *Empire*, because, at the very moment it came out, it seems that everything turned the other way round. That is,

power had become immediately, with Bush, an imperialistic kind of problematic. Negri and Hardt were very much criticised by the Trotskyists, by the Marxist-Leninists, and so on, because they said: 'What the hell are you talking about? Don't you see that America is again an imperialistic nation?' And maybe this leads to what's going on now that Obama has been elected. But are we back to the category of 'empire', or are we going out of this contradiction between 'empire' and the temptation to become again imperialistic?

But I think that the war on terrorism is something that is pretty much independent of Bush or Cheney or ... it is something that refers also to what ... we may call, using a classical category, the new class composition around the world. There is something that was said earlier in an excellent way, there is something that escapes from the capacity of power to control, to discipline. And that something is not any more the working class – something that had a culture, a spatial identification, a community; it's something that is dispersed in a multiplicity of subjectivities, of differences and that has something to do with terrorism – with terror, if you want; not terror in its class meaning. That is something that is a danger, that confronts capital, and is something that cannot be represented. I think that the real terror for capital is that the class - the subjective, the multiplicity, what we call 'multitude' – maybe we go back to that category – is that it cannot, or it doesn't want to, be represented in the traditional, classical way, by parties, by unions, and so on. That's dangerous; and that's why the relationships of power today are very much relationships of war.

**AC:** Saskia, you say in your book – I'm quoting – that 'warfare has become a less significant event', partly due to economic globalisation. You seem to make a sort of super-or ultra-imperialist claim that warfare is pretty much disappearing as a result of economic integration?

**SS:** You left out the second part of that sentence! Which is that the terrain for warfare is no longer inter-imperial, if you want – it's not World War I, it's not World War II; it's not, even, actually Vietnam. It's the outsourcing of war, the outsourcing of conflicts to other terrains, Vietnam perhaps fits into that. So it's not Germany and France that are going to go to war, and it's not the United States and Europe that are going to go to war. War to me is also one of those words that, when I'm trying to understand something about war, I can't use the word 'war' – it comes with an enormous charge.

So here is my take. My take is that, in this time of asymmetric ... I'm actually doing a project on cities and war now, asymmetric warfare urbanises war. It affects, in other words, a strategic space, if this were happening in Europe or in North America, in China or in Japan. And since asymmetric war is the dominant form, it will urbanise war, which then makes legible something very interesting: that the pursuit of national

security – a classical geopolitical category – produces human insecurity. And it makes that legible, because it exits the framing of patriotism, dying for your country. Something else is happening. So I think that that is a very powerful dynamic that is emerging today – hence, do we call this ‘war’. It’s no longer a Clausewitzian war: these are wars that never end. There is no marker; there is no armistice option. So, what do we call this? Mary Kaldor says ‘new wars’. Well, I’ll go with that, but maybe we also need to decode what it is that we’re talking about, you know, and give it a more brutal name.

There was something else I wanted to say which connected to what you were saying before: in the nineties, with Clinton –all this stuff that goes beyond party politics, you know, as Leo was also saying. Our big armament industry totally imbricated with high-tech – not infiltrated, but imbricated – had no good, solid war to sell all that stuff. So what did they do? The budget to control the frontier between Mexico and the US was weaponised – you can’t even call that ‘militarised’, because the military are an institution; they’re not always warring. So you weaponise a border. So the budget went from about 200 million to 1.6 billion a year, and it really gave all those armament industries in the nineties a nice source of demand.

**AC:** Leo, you and Colin Leys have produced the *Socialist Register* this year with the title ‘Violence Today: Actually existing Barbarism’. I take it that the approach there is that capitalism, in its contemporary form, is violent. Can you elaborate on these connections?

**LP:** When Rosa Luxemburg coined the phrase ‘socialism or barbarism’, or said, this is what Kautsky really meant, what Engels really meant, she said: Look around you, it’s World War I; this is what barbarism is. Well, in another sense, as one looks around the world today, you can see that we’re living in barbarism – but the point of the essay precisely was to try to get at what Sanjay was getting at: that you can’t reduce the violence today simply to capitalism or the logic of capitalism; and a great deal of the book is about what we call ‘violence amongst the peoples’, playing on Mao’s ‘contradictions amongst the peoples’. And while, no doubt, the condition that people are in, in global capitalism, is an element in understanding the pattern of determination that leads to oppressed people and exploited people killing each other, molesting each other and so forth, it cannot be reduced to those conditions. So it’s the same point that you were making that inspires this book, and that much of the book is about; although, of course, the book is also about what led Bush to invade Iraq, and what is taking place in Colombia today as an instance of primitive accumulation, and so on.

**AC:** Sanjay, you've done a lot of work on violence in sixties, seventies on the Naxalite movement, for instance. To what extent can one, through the lens that Leo has presented for us, see that kind of violence – that kind of revolutionary, insurgent violence, within a postcolonial setting – as a legacy of empire? Is that helpful in any way?

**SAN:** You know, in the specific case of the Naxalites, who were the Maoists in India, the movement took off in '67, and it's named after the village of Naxalbari in eastern India, where there was a sort of peasant uprising led by cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which subsequently split, and the radical Maoist wing led a peasant insurgency – a fairly spotty one, but ... it wasn't country-wide. And a feature of it was violence on a scale that couldn't be explained in tactical or instrumental terms – you know, they chopped off the heads of landlords. And a lot of the left, leave alone the bourgeois press, were quite horrified because this seemed excessive in relation to the ends. And the essay that Alex is referring to, I ask myself the question: How do you make sense of this revolutionary excess, as it were? Because, in conventional Marxist terms, you could do nothing but condemn the Naxalites – I mean, you know, this was nutty. Their political successes were pretty short-lived, truth be told, but there's another sense in which, I think, as do many others – it's not just me – it was actually a turning point in modern Indian history: something changed after that, and it wasn't because they were strategically brilliant; it wasn't because of their quotes from Mao, much of which were simple-minded in the extreme. And my question was: How do you make sense of this violence?

Now, in this case I don't think it was actually the legacy of empire. I think it was a violence rooted in semi-feudal conditions, where one of the striking things about capitalism is ... and this won't come as news to anyone around the table, or indeed to most of you, but perhaps worth re-saying as a means of contrast, one of the striking features of capitalism is the way in which radical asymmetries in power are nonetheless accompanied by a certain egalitarianism – by which I mean that, in developed capitalist countries, inequalities of power tend, by and large, not to be inscribed in clothes, body-language – you know, one's whole bearing. They have to do, in the purest case – which doesn't actually exist – but in the purest form of capitalism would be where the asymmetries are directly connected to money. Now, in a society like India in the 1960s, and especially rural India, the asymmetries of power were inscribed everywhere – in how you walked, in how you talked, in what you wore, with what you ate. And in this context, I think violence really was the world turned upside-down. The only way to escape a form of subordination which was inscribed at every level really was the symbolic value of chopping off the landlord's head, precisely was that this was an emancipatory act because it turned all those power relations completely

upside-down. And the way I read Mao's importance-because, I have to confess, I don't think 'Contradictions amongst the People' is a penetrating piece of philosophy – in fact I think Mao is at his best in the 'Hunan Report' – he writes with extraordinary subtlety and understanding about peasant militancy. You know, he's got this phrase of, the peasants entered and they parked themselves in the chairs and lolled about where the gentry had done so previously. I mean, I think there was an understanding there of the reversal of these power relations.

I'll just end with one further example Bertolucci's 1900. There's a scene where the peasants revolt, and they storm the padrone's house, and they're led by a young – I think, about 16-year-old – young boy, who has a sort of scythe with which he's been cutting things. And they're running in, and they're obviously going to execute the landlord; and they get to the front of this grand house, and they of course live in hovels. And he's about to run in and kill the landlord, and he stops, and he wipes his feet, and then he runs in ... I think that captures what I'm talking about – and that's the source of that violence.

**AC:** Let's close the discussion by looking at anti-empire – and strategies, tactics, ideas about contesting empire or imperialism. Sanjay, very briefly, could you open this last section of the debate by telling us what kinds of subversions to the kinds of power relations that we've been discussing, are available from your perspective

**SAN:** You know, I think others at this table will have more interesting things to say about this. But, briefly, this is where I am, in some ways, an old-fashioned leftist. To revert to the earlier discussion, I think there are whole areas of life and forms of meaning that have been remade, but nonetheless have not been entirely reformulated according to the logic of capital – they live in the interstices, as it were, of capital. They're resistance in the Foucauldian sense – in the sense that they're not remade; they're not necessarily resistance in the heroic mould of fighting back against, nor are they always good things. I mean, when we say things escape the interest ... live within the interstices of capital, they include practices which are abhorrent – including female infanticide and a whole lot of other things.

So they're not necessarily good things – this is an observation, not an exaltation. I think the response will actually be, the form of resistance is eventually immanent – and this is the sense in which Marx still speaks to me profoundly. I think there are two things going on: one is, there are practices and modes of life that, for good or ill, escape being entirely remade by capital. The processes of resistance, however, will come from the immanent logic of capital. This is an observation, and it's an observation about the limits of the languages of the social sciences; it's not something with any obvious political import. And that's why I say, in a way, I'm less

suiting to answer this question than other people at this table. But if I had to give an answer, I would give an old left answer: that resistance will come from a logic immanent to capital; and it may not be the working class in the traditional sense, but as capital remakes and as capital destroys, it sometimes also creates the circumstances for resistances which do arise from the logic of capital – and that’s what makes them effective, that’s what makes them resistance.

**AC:** Leo, you’ve brought out recently a reissue of *Renewing Socialism: Transforming Democracy, Strategy and Imagination*. That sounds like a political programme – what is it about?

**LP:** It’s not a programme – I wish it were. First of all, I think at this moment we need to perhaps bring the discussion also to an area that I think has been very useful, about what the logic of capital doesn’t capture, to the present moment. You know, a great deal of what has appeared as perhaps anti-globalisation or anti-imperial has been anti-American, and it’s been anti-Bush, in the current context. And I think many of the practices that will now be undertaken by a black president of the United States – as symbolically important as that is, and remarkable – will now, I think, be received rather better in large parts of the world: partly because it will be more multilateral, partly because it’s a Democrat, partly because it is an African-American. I actually fear that the large parts of subordinate classes – especially people of colour – may applaud a bombing of Iran if Obama does it. I pray that he will not fall into what Kennedy fell into, which is a plan to invade Cuba, which was entirely made under the Eisenhower administration, which he didn’t have the courage to say no to, when he came in as president – and something similar may be on the table for Obama. And in any case, he is full of a certain type of human rights imperialism himself, which is very dangerous. And yet I have great hopes for another New Deal in the states, and not including labour law reform, and so on.

But I just want to make the point that we also have to be careful when we use terms like ‘globality’ and ‘empire’ in the sense that Hardt and Negri do, precisely because they’re trying to get it away from the specificities of particular capitals and states as they’re historically made, with real classes, real languages, real cultures. We need to realise that a lot of globalisation has been Americanisation – and I don’t mean that in the cowboy sense of the term, but the way in which the world’s financial systems have been transformed; the way in which laws, accounting laws, financial systems, have been changed – they’ve been made more similar to the type that emerged historically in the United States: a very decentralised banking system. And that’s been part of the role that American finance and its state has played, simply by virtue of the asymmetry that Christian was speaking of. So there has been an

Americanisation – not just in the sense of penetrating the rest of the world, also in terms of the vortex that New York and its satellite, London, is; as Indian capital, as Indian surpluses, or Chinese surpluses, are left in New York, or left in American banks in London, they also enter into financial relationships of a very specific kind, and have a legal framework, an accounting framework, and a cultural framework – and even a language framework, right? – which is very different from the ones that Indian capitalists necessarily grew out of.

So there is an American side to it, and part of the struggle, I think, will take, in that sense, very concrete forms that are not against globalisation, but are against an American form of globalisation – and we ourselves fall into it when we say, gee, we wish there was a European form of globalisation. Habermas keeps saying this, right? It would really be nice if we had a more humane form of globalisation, which was a German form, or a European form – or some may say, some day, a Chinese form. Because capital doesn't exist in the abstract logic of capital; it exists as an actual historical entity with all of these carbuncles attached to it. So I think that's important when we think about, you know, what is about to happen in terms of anti-empire or anti-imperialism. I just say that I, with Sanjay, am rather traditionalist about this. I don't think that the multitude, if that stands for a practice associated with network politics, with the world social movement anti-globalisation politics – which I think is very inspiring in many ways, and there's much to learn from it – can take us very far any longer. Because it has been about trying to engage the process at too transnational a level. The famous example I use is, after Seattle, the big demonstration was in Washington, DC, and the marchers walked right past the American Treasury in order to stand in front of the World Bank. And that reflected a deep misunderstanding of where institutional power really lay in the global world.

But it's more than that – it's also the anti-party thing; it's the anti-representation thing. My feeling – I've been to many world social forums, involved in many of these processes at a local level in Canada – is that, just because you say, I don't want to be represented; because you don't use the word 'representative', but you use, as is now being done in Latin America: *vocero*, rather than representative, doesn't mean that there isn't a problem of substitutionism. I often felt when I was at the world social forums, and I would hear very able people speaking for particular groups: Who were they accountable to? Who elected them? And in fact they usually are activists like ourselves, who take up a particular cause, whether it's ecological, or water, or indeed a class one. But all of the problems associated with party representation in the history of the left, or trade-union substitutionism in the history of the left, also exist in the social movements. And what has been particularly bad about the social movement literature, from Laclau and Mouffe on, is that they have not asked the questions of social movements that they ask the parties: Who do they

represent? What is their form of organisation? To what extent are they representative? All this stuff about articulation, right – do they have those articulations validated by the people they represent? So, whether it's movements or whether it's classes, the difficult question of, will you have forms of organisation which are liberating as they are engaged in transformation, apply as much network and social movement politics as they do to the old class politics.

**AC:** Saskia, you said earlier that you saw a politics of powerlessness as hopeful. Tell us briefly about that.

**SS:** Well, I have to say first something about that – what Leo just said. I think, Leo, that we can't just fall back – not that you are saying that, but it's a continuing conversation, right? – on parties and labour unions. You know, they were very much part of the constituting of a certain kind of capitalism; there was a sort of a hegemonic quality to them. Here's my take: we've got to insert temporality and trajectory. Right now, we might be – this is my interpretation, I might be wrong – at the beginning of a new phase that is marked by a multiplicity of little movements of... the people who obsess about trafficking in migrants; the people who obsess about human rights violations, torture, and so on. So, right now, what I see also marking the nation-state, if you want, is centrifugality: the centre no longer holds. Now, that can also... as a footnote: yes – American... Anglo-American law, Anglo-American accounting; trajectory again: that public good – those laws, those accounting rules, whether good or bad, are extricated from the American state, and they then enter – and this is where empire maybe helps, the notion of empire – they constitute a third space: it is no longer the American state.

So we blind ourselves when we think that it is an Americanising. Of course there's a truth to that, but that's one moment in a trajectory; we need to capture that second step in the trajectory. So, this multiplication of voices – who knows what shapes they will take? Parties are not going to go away; labour unions are not going to go away. We know from Beverly Silvers that labour unions are very strong in many parts of the world. But that is not enough to capture 'the political' today. And I think that the making of the political happens in multiple languages and multiple spaces that go way beyond also capitalism in the terms that Sanjay was using before, but also beyond, certainly, party and labour unions. Not that you are denying that, Leo – not at all. So, to me it is a question, and it's a question that I cannot answer: What are the new shapes for the political that may coalesce, ... that's the question.

Now, coming back to your basic question: What are the programmatic for today? I can't think programmatically, but I do know that when that type of issue emerges in my research, or in my writing there are sort of three vectors within which I

make a disciplined inquiry. One of them is that power is made – power is not an attribute; it's not something that you have or don't have. Power is a complex condition that has to be made, managed, serviced, debugged – a lot of work goes into making power. If power is made, it can be unmade. That's sort of one issue, and, frankly, no formal system of power has lasted forever, except the Catholic Church – and Berlusconi looks like he's next. The second vector, for me, is that, if I ask myself the question: Do the powerless make history?, I have to insert a temporality issue: yes, they do, but it takes them much longer - Bush goes and bombs the hell out of Iraq in six weeks and then that other kind of struggle emerges. So there is a real asymmetry in the temporal frames within which the powerful make history, and within which the powerless make history. It means you really have to shift temporalities, if you want.

Now, the third one, what I was saying before, is that powerlessness is a variable. If you're an undocumented migrant worker in a corporate farm in California, your powerlessness is pretty elementary. If you stand there with a sign and say, I have the right to have rights, the employer either says, you know, 'go back to your work', or calls the INS. You're elementary in your powerlessness. If you stand with half a million people on the streets of Chicago, and with another half a million in Los Angeles, and you say, I have the right to have rights, you don't gain power – I'm not talking empowerment; I'm still within the zone of powerlessness – but your powerlessness becomes complex.

Let me give you an instance of how this complexity of powerlessness works. So, take our powerful western states – Europe and the United States – and look at how they have distorted, reoriented, whole components of these very powerful states in their obsession to control undocumented immigrants. I wrote a piece that I call 'Fear and Strange Arithmetics' – because the numbers are not there to legitimate this type of state dedication to controlling so few people. So, in that sense you might say that those powerless immigrants, they don't gain power, but they are making a bit of history, by reorienting this powerful apparatus. I would say the same thing about human rights – you know, beautiful laws, nothing happens if they don't get used. So, my question, when I look at a law, at a formal instrument of whatever kind, I say: Who makes it perform? Who makes it deliver the goods that it is meant to deliver? In the case of the human rights regime – of course, it's meant for that – it is immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers; most cases where a judge adjudicates have to do with that – and plus women and genital mutilation and so on. Now, the immigrants, even if they are the object of an adjudication, they don't gain power; but there is a complexity to their powerlessness - it is a history that rolls slowly and is micro.

The final element, for an answer to your question, is something... I wouldn't use the language of immanence, but what I do say – and there is also where Marx works for me – there are certain systemic conditions, and in this empire as a

system, plus all the other (we have lots of other systems, not just the global economic one), that are installed in multiple countries – you have condition X, Y, Z, recurring, in country after country, under its own specific manner. And in that sense, the struggle around environment, human rights – those are two very well known - recur in country after country, in little site after little community. That, to me, creates a systemic condition that can make something activate, and I think we are just beginning to see that – and in that sense, to me, this is the beginning of an era that goes way beyond the language that we are using now, of globalising, de-globalising. That's just looking at the global economy, frankly, and ... the further extension of states in the economy

**AC:** Christian –millions of people, mobilised for a campaign networked using new media, new technologies, a youthful mobilisation; then they turn up to celebrate Obama's victory in Chicago. Is this the multitude?

**CM:** Listen, I think that the multitude is not a sociological category; it's a political category. It goes back to Hobbes, and to the forces centrifugal, rather than centripetal. Hobbes said that you need the state in order to make a people, right?: popolo. Whereas, when the state does not function in this way, you produce a multitude – multitude is something that is opposite to the idea of popolo, or people, with a unity ... a centripetal force ... centre. So, in this sense, it goes back to the question of representation, of no representation, which is really the problem of how do we organise the multiplicity. Is it a nonsense – a contradiction in terms? Because we need organisation. I am myself totally involved in struggle in a very local situation, which is in the railway sector, and every day we are confronted with this problem.

Now, I think that the question is: How do we concretely organise struggles? Because, you know, the problem as I see it is that the category of territory, for instance, today, in political terms, is a very ambiguous category. And when you look at the struggles that are very local ... very often, they are fascist, also, you know. It's not all of them, of course; but the danger of going back to a populist kind of idea of territory, of nation, or local nation, and so on, is always there, waiting in the dark. So, how do we, in a way, transcend this? I think that the example you made, you know, Obama and the networks and so on, in a way, helps very much, because Seattle, the movement of Seattle, was also preparing that way. By using technologies, communication technology in a different way; and the students' movement today in Italy, for instance, is actually organising itself in the same way, you know, by using these technologies, and by territorializing and de-territorializing at the same time their mobilisation, right?

But, to just conclude, as far as I'm concerned: let me just say that I don't believe in the American decline, first. First of all, because too/so many people talk about the American decline, which is in itself something very suspicious. But I don't

think so, precisely because of the things we said about financialisation– I think the United States will come out of this world crisis even stronger than as it happened in the thirties. So, I disagree with the idea that China and Japan are the future. In any case, we have the presupposition for a new kind of imperialism. So, again, the idea of empire is useful in this sense. But I don't think that the United States will come out ... or, decline ... But once I say that, I think that, for instance, a New Deal is actually necessary today, and Obama, in this sense, is the man of a possible ... New Deal. But remember something: the New Deal of the forties was in fact realised thanks to the cycle of struggles of the second part of the thirties, which is exactly what I can imagine or foresee for the near future – a cycle of struggles, not in a classical way; struggles in which the collective body will be constructed and mobilised through a multiplicity of local organisation. That's what I think.