



Empire, Marxism, and Nationalism On the Death of Antonio Negri

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Italian philosopher and communist militant Antonio Negri died in Paris on December 16, 2023, aged 90. He was a leading figure in Italian history in the 1970s, but it was from the beginning of the twenty-first century that his political thought became a global reference. The reason for this lies in the impact of the book *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000), written with Michael Hardt and published in several languages and different countries, from Argentina to China. While a sociology of the varied receptions of this work remains to be done—an exercise that will contribute to the history of Marxism after the end of the Soviet era, as well as to the genealogy of the idea of an “Italian Theory” and of a then-emerging academic field, Global Studies—in this essay I will begin by briefly evoking parts of Negri's life, and then give an account of the positive impact that *Empire* had on me, at a time when I was beginning doctoral research into the relationship between communism and nationalism. With this research, I was trying to contribute to the critique of the patriotic and state-centric orientation that communism had taken in a small western European country during the course of the twentieth century. The opening up of a post-national communist horizon, as boldly proposed by *Empire*, inspired my intention.



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As a result of the impact that many of *Empire*'s (Hardt and Negri 2000) proposals had on me, I began to follow Negri's work closely. This included reading *Multitude* (2004), *Commonwealth* (2009), *Declaration* (2012), and *Assembly* (2017), all of them written with Michael Hardt. It also involved discovering older texts by Negri, some of which I will briefly mention in the following pages, as well as writings by his Italian fellow *operaisti* and autonomists. I also interviewed Negri in person in Rome in 2003, shortly after he had been definitively released from the sentences the Italian state had inflicted on him. And from that interview onwards, I was joined to him by bonds of comradeship and friendship that lend these lines a sense of gratitude and homage. Like many others, particularly in countries such as Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Brazil, and Argentina, I was mobilized by Negri's militant vitality. This vitality may be easily acknowledged by anyone who had the chance to listen to him giving speeches or debating politics and philosophy, but perhaps one of its most singular features lay in Negri's active care to receive news and reports about processes and moments of social crisis and political openness taking place in the parts of the world where we—his correspondents, colleagues, comrades, or friends—were. In a short obituary published a few days after his death, Alberto Toscano (2023) assertively wrote that Negri turned one of Spinoza's dicta—"The free person thinks least of all of death, and his wisdom is a meditation not on death but on life"—into "an ethical and political lodestar;" and Toscano (2023) added:

If anything marked him [Negri] out among both militants and scholars, it was a kind of boundless curiosity, a generous desire to learn, in detail, from anyone genuinely involved in a struggle for liberation, which he always saw in the most capacious terms.

From the Italian Long '68 to Exile in Paris

Born in Padua on August 1, 1933, Antonio (Toni) Negri was a prominent participant in social and political movements that, situated to the left of the Italian Communist Party, marked the long Italian '68, a period whose memory has been the subject of much controversy in Italy. His importance in those years was such that the State repression directed against those same movements led to his imprisonment on April 7, 1979. Despite being a leading professor at the University of Padua, he was eventually accused of involvement in the kidnapping and murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro in a court case whose procedures were later denounced by Amnesty International. Already in 1980, Michel Foucault questioned: "But have you heard of a certain Toni Negri? Isn't he in prison simply for being an intellectual?" (Foucault 1980).

Negri's time in prison brought him isolation, but also the desire to delve deeply into reading Spinoza, of whom he became an important interpreter (Negri 1981). Hegel, Kant, Meinecke, or Descartes, before that, and Machiavelli, later, were other names that, as part of the Western thinking canon, were subjects of Negri's reading (Negri 1958, 1959, 1962, 1970, 1992), not to mention Marx, on whom Negri taught a seminar in Paris at the invitation of Louis Althusser, shortly before his imprisonment in 1978. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the political scene was

cause for the skepticism of many on the French left, but Negri's Italian background and his theoretical and passionate emphasis on the possibilities and strengths of a revolutionary subject—no matter what name it took throughout his life, from mass worker to social worker, from worker to multitude—made a difference. Short after Negri's death, Étienne Balibar remembered those days:

The first thing that struck one about him, in addition to his incredibly youthful figure at any age, was his unique smile—sometimes carnivorous, sometimes ironic or full of affection. It grabbed me the first time we met, outside a seminar at the *Collège International de Philosophie*. He had escaped from Italy thanks to an election that temporarily released him from prison. We were devastated by the rise of Reaganism and Thatcherism, which shattered the illusions born of the Socialist victory of 1981. What could we do in this debacle? “But revolution!” explained Toni, beaming with optimism. It was advancing through countless social movements, each more inventive than the last. I wasn't sure that I really believed him, but I came away freed from my dark mood and won over by him for good. (Balibar 2023)

Throughout the sessions of the 1978 seminar in Paris—sponsored by Althusser, as I've already mentioned, and organized by Yann Moulier-Boutang—Negri focused on the *Grundrisse*, which for him and some of his Italian comrades proved to be a great contribution to reflect upon the struggles they were facing. The seminar resulted in the publication of the book *Marx oltre Marx* (*Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri 1979). In a short preface to the English edition of the book *Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri (1991: xvi) would argue that the main question posed in the book concerned the meaning of struggling “against capital when capital has subjugated all of lived time, not only that of the working day, but all, all of it.” This implied “that the struggle against the capitalist organization of production, of the job market, of the working day, of the restructuration of energy, of family life, etc., all of this involves the people, the community, the choice of lifestyle” (Negri 1991: xvi). And from this, he concluded that “to be communist today means *to live as a communist*,” a *motto* that, far from utopian, was grounded on the dynamics of capitalism itself:

In reality, the operation of real subsumption does not eliminate the antagonism, but rather displaces it to the social level. Class struggle does not disappear; it is transformed into all the moments of everyday life. The daily life of a proletarian is posited as a whole against the domination of capital. The real subsumption, far from eliminating the antagonism, immensely enriches it. (Negri 1991: xvi)

Negri's first imprisonment ended in 1983. His election to the Italian Parliament on the Radical Party list led to his temporary release. Before parliament decided to lift his parliamentary immunity, he decided to go into exile in France, taken in by his friend Félix Guattari, with whom he wrote the short essay *Les nouveaux espaces de liberté* in 1983–1984 in Rebibbia Prison (Rome) and in Paris. Here we can already find some ideas whose development would lead to *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000); for instance, when it came to discuss Guattari's notion of “Integrated World Capitalism” (Guattari and Negri 1991: 48–49). Published in English under the title *Communist Like Us*, this essay by Guattari and Negri can be seen as one of the first testimonies to the encounter

between the Marxism of the Italian *operaisti* and autonomists and French poststructuralism. The encounter with Gilles Deleuze—who was also the subject of Michael Hardt’s (1993) doctoral dissertation—was to be another fundamental moment for this theoretical convergence, as is evident in the first sections of *Empire*. But probably the most consistent development resulting from the encounter between Italian *operaisti* and autonomists and French poststructuralism lays in the close ties that have been connecting Marxist and Foucauldian traditions, as if the Marxian idea that capital is a social relation establishes an affinity with Foucault’s notion of power as relation. And while this connection has become more intense in the last decades, bringing together debates on productive forces and discussions on biopolitics, Negri was praising the life and works of Foucault already at the time of his death in 1984: “For my self and many of my comrades...Foucault’s work was a key to a new way of acting politically” (*The Guardian*, 9/8/1984). Not by chance, the first volume of Polity’s recent anthology of Negri’s texts is entitled *Marx and Foucault* (2016).

Nevertheless, Negri’s intellectual activity in France expanded far beyond his friendship with people like Yann Moulier-Boutang and Félix Guattari. His range of interests also moved him beyond the limits of Marxism and poststructuralism. His Italian experience in the context of the so-called *co-ricerca* qualified him to carry out sociological research into the changes taking place in the Paris metropolis in the 1980s, research in some cases promoted by the municipal authorities of Saint-Dennis, governed by the French Communist Party. He then became more sensitive to the transformations taking place in the class composition, labor and modes of production, and life in the big city. The second of his anthological volumes published by Polity was dedicated to these matters: *From the Factory to the Metropolis* (Negri 2018).

In France, Negri also taught at universities, particularly Paris VIII, and organized collective projects such as the journal *Futur Antérieur*. Founded in 1990, at a time when the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe were crumbling, the journal was launched by Negri, Jean-Marie Vincent, and Denis Berger and would last until 1998. It can be seen as a conceptual and theoretical laboratory that—from philosophy to sociology and economy—anticipated concepts and hypotheses that are still being debated today. Part of the intellectual panorama that animated the writing of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) is certainly inseparable from that period. In the first issues of the journal, we find texts by authors as diverse as Gilles Deleuze, Claus Offe, Bruno Latour, or Alisa del Ré, but also Maurizio Lazzarato and the young Michael Hardt.

In 1997, however, Antonio Negri decided to return to Italy, hoping that this would lead to an amnesty for his case and others similar to it. His hopes were disappointed and he was arrested as soon as the plane landed in Italian soil. He then served his second term in prison, and his criminal record would weigh on his shoulders for the rest of his life. For example, access to countries like Japan and others was made difficult, and Negri was forever be barred entry to the United States. And yet it was precisely from the United States that his figure started to gain global intellectual prominence.

Empire

Published in 2000 by Harvard University Press, appearing on the international publishing scene as an alternative to *The End of History and The Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992), and translated into several languages, the book *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) and its conceptual apparatus came to establish—albeit with varying intensity—relationships of affinity with some political and social collectives and movements at the dawn of the twenty-first century. This was the case with the *Disobidienti* in Italy, but also the *Piqueteros* in Argentina, or social centers and political collectives in Spain, such as the *Universidade Nomada*.

Proposing a communist agenda for analyzing and intervening in post-industrial societies, and iconically celebrating the example of Francis of Assisi—“Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis’s situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 413)—the book rescued methods and concepts from the Italian Long ’68, but also from Guattari, Deleuze, and Foucault, as I’ve already mentioned. At the same time, by advocating a revision of the geopolitical worldview dear to the communist anti-imperialist tradition, *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) also ended up cohabiting—not without tensions—with left-wing projects for the conquest of state power. This was the case in South America, where left-wing and progressive national projects sought to create an alternative to Western capitalism without advocating disconnection from the ongoing processes of globalization (Cocco and Negri 2005). It was in this context that, throughout the twenty-first century, Negri and Hardt’s (2000) proposals came into dialogue with experiences and actors as diverse as Bolivian sociologist and vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linera (Negri et al. 2008) and Lula’s *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Santiago, Tible, and Telles 2017).

Within a more strictly intellectual circle, the book has provoked reactions of various kinds. Verso publishing house dedicated a volume to it, which brought together texts of various kinds—although almost all of them strongly critical—by academics such as Giovanni Arrighi, Charles Tilly, or Ellen Meiksins Wood (Balakrishnan and Aronowitz 2003). A leading figure of Marxism in South America, the Argentinian Atilio Boron, wrote a small book dedicated to criticizing *Empire* (Boron 2005). In France, one of the most detailed and critical studies of Negri and Hardt was produced by Christian Laval, El Mouhoub Mouhoud, and Pierre Dardot (2007). In the UK, Pluto Press published two volumes of essays by different authors—several of whom were close to Negri—under the title *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri* (Murphy and Mustapha 2005). And these are but just a few examples.

Moreover, throughout the last two decades, Negri and Hardt have maintained a critical dialogue with different thinkers who were equally influential in the Marxist and post-Marxist intellectual “club” being formed within some intellectual circles of the Western left—an example of which were the conferences held in London in 2008 under the title “The Idea of Communism” and sponsored by Birkbeck College (Douzinas and Zizek 2010). The criticism by philosophers Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière (2002) was similar: for both of them, Negri and Hardt were still excessively hostage to an economicist logic characteristic of Marxism. Postcolonial scholars

like Dipesh Chakrabarty (2006) and Sanjay Seth (2002) tended to share these critiques, although giving them a more epistemological sense.

While this is not the place to develop the many issues at stake in these dialogues and debates, perhaps we can find a common denominator in them: the criticism of the optimism that, according to many authors, Negri and Hardt's (2000) historical-political reading suffered from. According to some critiques, this optimism was supported by an unconfessed teleological sense of history. If Marx, hostage to a progressive conception of history, advocated that capitalism would give rise to the proletariat which, in turn, would lead to the overcoming of capitalism itself, Negri and Hardt (2000) understood the multitude to be the subversive fruit of capitalism in the age of Empire.

Some of *Empire's* (Hardt and Negri 2000) arguments were indeed bold indicatives of political optimism. An optimism stemming from the logic according to which neoliberalism would be better combated if we understood the emancipatory desires that—at the same time—it denied and expressed. For example, the crisis of the figure of the “worker” should not fail to be recognized as the effect of the proletarians' own disaffection with work, a disaffection that was nonetheless liberating. As if the new forms of human resource management were a reaction to the workers' slogans of refusing labor (*rifiuto del lavoro*).

A second sign of optimism was related to nation and nationalism: if capital no longer respected national borders, according to Negri and Hardt (2000) this disrespect should also be seen as a sign of the transgressive and transnational power of migrants and the labor movement itself. Capital's tendency to operate internationally should be seen as a response to those transgressive forces.

Mario Tronti's Copernican Revolution

Notwithstanding the relevance of the debate around the permanence of an economicist logic in Negri and Hardt (2000), it is worth pointing out that their search for symptoms of emancipation within processes of domination can be understood in the light of Negri's Italian trajectory, namely his affiliation with the *operaist* tradition. Mario Tronti, who also died in 2023, and his “copernican revolution” were major references in this tradition (Tronti 2010). Born in 1931, the young Tronti's initiation into politics took place when reading Palmiro Togliatti's long speeches published in *L'Unità*, a regular newspaper in his home and the organ of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), in which Tronti would militate from the 1950s and beyond, with the exception of a period in the 1960s. A period that, although brief, would inscribe Tronti's name in the history of the European left, consecrating him as the founder of so-called *operaismo*.

Tronti's international reputation certainly pales in comparison to that of other thinkers on the Italian left. It certainly lags behind that of Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist author whose global academic impact today is closest to that of Karl Marx. And even when one talks about “Italian Theory”—making reference to the recent prominence in the Anglo-Saxon world of a group of authors of that nationality—it is philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Antonio Negri who are most often mentioned. Nevertheless, if we had to choose the most

important texts in the history of the European left over the last 100 years, *Operai e Capitale* (Tronti 1966) would be one-of-a-kind. In this book, translated into English under the title *Workers and Capital* only in 2019, Tronti came to demand a radical reversal of the method and point of view that, according to him, had guided the analysis and action of Italian communists and socialists since the second post-war period. For Tronti, and for the militants of *operaismo*, the development of capitalism needed to be understood as a response to workers' struggles—and not the other way round. This inversion—Tronti's Copernican revolution, as Yann Moulier-Boutang called it in a preface to the Portuguese edition of the book (Tronti 1976)—had both scientific and political effects. On the one hand, it advocated that the functioning of society would become more intelligible the better we knew the subjectivities produced in and through workers' struggles. On the other hand, and counter-intuitively, men like Raniero Panzieri, Tronti, and Negri recommended that the genealogy of capitalist development was to be found in the history and life of anti-capitalism.

For the *operaisti*, it wasn't simply a question of trying to form a new consciousness of history, but of experimenting with methodologies such as the workers' enquiry. This, more than an x-ray of workers' living conditions, should be a constituent expression of their desires. Carried out in the heat of their own struggles, ignoring the division between subject and object of research, the *operaisti* ignored the manuals of good academic behavior. At the same time, the scientific revolution of *operaismo* was unfolding in a political sense. If workers' struggles dictated the terms of capitalist development, then the working class had no reason to continue to be understood as a victim suffering at the hands of capitalism. The *operaisti* discovery that the Earth revolved around the Sun—and not the other way round—meant praising the power of that biggest star. Starting with the workers' struggles was a question of method and knowledge, but also of political insolence, recovering the intemperance of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in October 1917 (Neves 2023). One had to break with the institutional prudence of the PCI in the second post-war period. Bugged down by the question of Italian “backwardness” and insensitive to the changes in the subjectivity of the working class during a period of accelerated industrial development, particularly in the north of the country, the PCI failed to meet a new workers' radicalism.

From an *operaist* and autonomist point of view, the question of backwardness also implied a renewed geography, in that the refusal of PCI's more moderate attitude was reflected simultaneously in the adoption of both a revolutionary stance and a radical internationalist vision. The idea of a national road to socialism meant that the social revolution and proletarian internationalism—that is, a world without masters and frontiers—could be postponed. Moreover, the *operaisti* not only didn't conform to any left-wing national way to socialism but were equally averse to the third-world imaginary that seduced other sectors on the left of the PCI (Tronti 1976: 21).

This conception of proletarian internationalism goes hand in hand with Negri and Hardt in *Empire* (2000), when they argue that globalization would be less the name of an enemy to fight against than a terrain on which to fight. The left should stop being held hostage by the nation, and it is on this point that I intend to dwell at greater length in the next section. Seen as irreconcilable

with any attempt to instrumentalize the nation for left-wing political projects, *Empire's* (Hardt and Negri 2000) position on the national question was in line with Negri's Italian history, even if we must acknowledge that *Empire* was also criticized by militants and authors engaged with *operaismo* and autonomism (Holloway 2002); while at the same time being in tune with the calls for "another world is possible," which were then beginning to be heard from some political sectors on the left.

However, in the next and final section I will also try to suggest that Negri and Hardt, throughout the twenty-first century, while remaining critical of the idea of instrumentalizing the nation for emancipatory purposes, did not, at times, fail to recommend an astute approach by the left to the national question.

Communism and Nationalism

When *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) was published, I was beginning my doctoral thesis, dedicated to studying the relationship between communism and nationalism in Portugal (Neves 2008). At the end of the 1990s, Nationalisms Studies were making some headway in Portuguese universities, with various colleagues analyzing the nationalism of the *Estado Novo* regime, which was significantly influenced by Italian fascism in the 1930s, or the late phase of its colonial ideology, from World War II onwards. Instead, my research sought to analyze how the communists in Portugal constructed their own nationalist discourse, which at the same time reinforced and contradicted that of other nationalisms, namely republican nationalism and fascist nationalism. In other words, I sought to investigate the historical process that led the Portuguese communists to conceive the nation as part of the *solutions* rather than the *problems*.

My aim was supported by some international academic literature. At the end of the 1980s, Roman Szporluk (1988) published *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx vs Friedrich List*, suggesting that twentieth-century Marxist political culture had become as indebted to List's economic nationalism as it was to Marx's class viewpoints. At the beginning of the 1990s, historian Yuri Slezkine (1994) published a seminal essay on how the Soviet state had produced a series of ethno-cultural particularisms that were no stranger to its own dissolution and which, we might add, help us to understand the current political preponderance of ethno-nationalism in various parts of Eastern Europe. Finally, in 1995, in a study on the relations between Marxism and nationalism in India, Sanjay Seth (1995) situated anti-colonial nationalisms in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, such nationalisms were a weapon in the struggle against European colonial domination, on the other, they constituted a vehicle for the expansion of the nation-form to the non-Western world. In different ways, these and some other studies pointed to the existence of what, in my thesis, I ended up calling communist nationalism.

But at the turn of the twenty-first century, studying communist nationalism was for me, first and foremost, a way of academically integrating a political topic which was controversial within the militant and cultural circles I frequented: the relationship between the nation and the left. At the time, I was moving away from the Portuguese Communist Party, of which I had been a member

for a good part of the 1990s; and one of the reasons for my distancing was what seemed to me to be the Party's excessive state-centrism and patriotism, and the corresponding sidelining of the Marxist critique of the state, the nation and work. And it was in this circumstance that the publication of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) found me.

Reading, discussing, and writing about the book allowed me, on the one hand, to continue deepening those political and ideological controversies; if they returned me to interpretative disputes around classic Marxist texts, the fact that *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) was dubbed the *Communist Manifesto* of the twenty-first century gave it an equally polarizing effect. On the other hand, despite its ideological core, *Empire* was a book with some academic pedigree (even more, as it was originally published by Harvard University Press) and carried out the critical examination of bibliographical references to which, for one reason or another, my thesis was leading me. In other words, the intellectual climate of *Empire* challenged me both from a militant point of view and academically.

An example of this double challenge was *Empire*'s (Hardt and Negri 2000) critique of the book *Imagined Communities* (1983), which Benedict Anderson published in 1983 and since then has become one of the most influential works in the social sciences. As is well known, there Anderson argues that the nation is an imagined community, that is, although most members of a nation do not usually meet face-to-face, the nation is capable of establishing bonds of cohesion similar to those that can be found in a village community. This capacity for identification and collective mobilization is supported, according to Anderson, by cultural and technological processes, such as the production and consumption of the daily newspaper; the emergence of which made it possible for people scattered in different locations to synchronously follow the same news stories, and thus imagine themselves as part of the same national community. While subscribing to Anderson's thesis that the nation is an imagined community, *Empire* questioned how the nation had become the only way of imagining communities:

It may be true, as Benedict Anderson says, that a nation should be understood as an imagined community—but we must recognize here that this claim is reversed, so that the nation becomes the only way of imagining the community! The whole imagination of community is overcoded as nation, which has the effect of singularly impoverishing our conception of community. (Negri and Hardt 2000: 107)

In other words, drawing on Anderson's (1983) work, *Empire* sought to understand the historical reasons for the national phenomenon, but at the same time, going beyond Anderson, the book warned against the risks of such a historical understanding, namely the risk of it suggesting that the nation is an inescapable reality. In this way, Hardt and Negri (2000) tried to make room for the hypothesis of an alternative globalization, one that would do justice to the idea that the workers have no fatherland. This concern to prevent the understanding of the national phenomenon from resulting in its naturalization also guided my research: for me, it was a question of writing the history of communist nationalism, "denouncing" its existence, but at the same time refusing to accept that communism had to be confined to the nation-form.

The second reason *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) was a relevant interlocutor for my doctoral research had to do with the way in which the history of Western capitalism and anti-colonialism were related in the book. For Negri and Hardt (2000), anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance to the global expansion of capitalism was one of the main incentives for the transformations of labor and life that were underway in Western societies in the last decades of the twentieth century. To simplify the argument to the point of caricature, it could be said that as capitalism faced more resistance when it came to exploiting non-Western territories, it had to find innovative ways of exploiting the Western population.

In my research into communist nationalism in Portugal, I ended up establishing a relatively similar historical link. One of the main aspects that differentiated communist nationalism from fascist nationalism, namely from its more ruralizing and pastoral dimension, was the communist conviction that, to quote a PCP slogan from the 1940s, “Portugal was not a poor country.” This conviction stemmed from Portuguese nineteenth century agrarian reformism and was also contemporary with Soviet and post-war social democracy's enthusiasm for industrial policy. And it also owed something to the economic valorization of formal education on both sides of the Iron Curtain—or had Stalin not said, before the Chicago School popularized the idea of human capital, that the most precious capital the USSR had was man? And yet, the economic nationalism of the PCP in the second post-war period was also the fruit of something that, at the time, no other Portuguese nationalism advocated: the end of the Portuguese Empire.

Suspicious of being chimerical, the communist aspiration for a developed, modernized, and prosperous Portugal should be understood, or so I argued, as an indirect effect of the anti-colonialism of the Portuguese communists. It was because they did not authorize themselves to look at the African colonies as a territory at Portugal's mercy that Portuguese communists insisted that the population and territory of the metropolis itself were not poor. Against the idea that Portugal would not be viable without a colonial empire, the Portuguese communists argued that Portugal's economic viability depended on the implementation of a national development policy that would take the country out of its comfort zone, so that its economy would gain muscle, in line with a recommendation issued by both List's German economic nationalism and Mao Zedong's: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

A third point of affinity between *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000) and the research work I was doing at the time may also be acknowledged. For Negri and Hardt (2000), and as we have already seen, it is resistance to capitalism that forces the latter to acquire its form and dynamics, as if anti-capitalism preceded capitalism. Indebted to the Italian *operaist* and autonomist tradition, this assumption is also familiar to the relational conception of power associated with Michel Foucault, as we have already stated, and it is at this confluence that Negri and Hardt present their particularly optimistic reading of Foucauldian biopolitics. Biopolitics is not only the totalitarian control of life by the State and capital, but also the ability of life and the desires that animate it to condition the actions of capital and the State.

In short, in *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000), the action of the movement and the will to resist tend to be the starting points for a transformative understanding of society, the world, and life. As we have already seen, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance is understood as a creative element in a new world dynamic, in which European colonialism and North American imperialism are at a loss, even if they retain some of their strength. And the historical resistance of Western working classes to factory exploitation is seen as a driver of deindustrialization itself. In my doctoral research, valuing the role of resistance was also important in differentiating the national economic development proposed by Portuguese communists from that defended by the tradition of agrarian reformism, or from the ambitions of the more modernizing industrialist sectors that gained some influence over the regime after World War II. And this was so because the Portuguese communist political and economic discourse was largely formed in the context of the social and labor movements that took place in Portugal in the final years of the second world war. In situations of food shortages, the waves of strikes, and the episodes of popular robberies of warehouses and commercial warehouses led the communist discourse to criticize inequality and call for redistributive policies and even direct redistributive action. Created in this context, the formula “Portugal is not a poor country” began to mean that there was enough wealth in the country to immediately remedy the situation of poverty in which the majority of the population found themselves. Only later, as the 1940s drew to a close, did the formula “Portugal is not a poor country” become a promise of future development (Neves 2012).

In other words: in *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000), the open or diffuse resistance of a Western working class to industrial labor was suggested as a factor in the innovation of capitalism itself, the post-industrial logic of which thus co-opted anti-industrial resistance. In my doctoral thesis, I interpreted the communist economic nationalism of the phrase “Portugal is not a poor country” as a way of coopting the radicalism of the strike movements and popular protests of the final years of the second world war.

Concluding Remarks

Criticizing the importance of patriotism for the PCP was one of the starting points of my doctoral research. The research I carried out didn’t change my critical standpoint; but it has led me to emphasize that nationalism has a plural nature that embraces different, if not contradictory, political ideologies. Embracing nationalism does not necessarily mean that the differences between the ideologies are erased. By analyzing a slogan like “Portugal is not a poor country,” I’ve come to understand better that the national community has the capacity to contain—that is, to preserve and to limit—the common of which communism claims to be a politically performative agent. Let’s say that the common is alienated in the nation, which, if we take into account that alienation is an open-ended process and not a stabilized reality, is the same as saying that communism doesn’t stop being communist because it becomes nationalist.

It is this hypothesis that I believe can be found, although in a different way, in the third book of the series that Negri and Hardt (2012) have written over the last 20 years. In *Commonwealth*, they write:

In spite of the revulsion they inspire in us, we should remember that the family, the corporation, and the nation do engage and institutions present networks of productive cooperation, resources of wealth that are openly accessible, and circuits of communication that simultaneously whet the desire for the common and frustrate it. The multitude must flee the family, the corporation, and the nation but at the same time build on the promises of the common they mobilize. (P.163)

This approach was certainly not indifferent to the changing political climate on the left throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. In particular, the affirmation of the Socialism of the twenty-first century (*socialismos del siglo XXI*) in South America showed that the maximum political radicalism at the time was expressed in a patriotic key. And in Europe the political appraisal of the concept of the multitude—understood as a global revolutionary force—was to decline significantly with the retreat of the alter-global movements. In Spain, the movement of the “*acampadas*” (occupations) and the 15M eventually led to the formation of a political party geared towards winning elections and seizing state power. In his doctoral thesis, *Multitud y acción colectiva postnacional: un estudio comparado de los desobedientes: de Italia a Madrid (2000–2005)*, the young Pablo Iglesias (2008) quoted Negri in his epigraph. When he and others created the political party *Podemos*, it was already the hypothesis of a left-wing populism, theorized by Mouffe and Laclau (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), that ended up most exciting them.

In any case, whether in its more offensive dimensions or in its more moderate formulations, Negri’s political thought and militancy has always sought to keep the commonality of communism on the horizon of the possibilities immanent in today’s world. His big ears were useful for this, to quote Judith Revel (2024), philosopher and Negri’s partner in the last three decades again, allowing Negri to hear the latest news on revolt and social movements from different parts of the world. But, as Revel also and tenderly mentioned, the same is true for his great nose, that is, his olfactory ability to anticipate and intuit the great historical trends, in the tradition of the author of the *Grundrisse*, and the possibility of those trends being called into question and put into crisis by emancipatory and revolutionary movements, as Lenin sought to do (Negri 2014).

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