

Powers of sovereignty: State, people, wealth, life

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Abstract: Hardt and Negri's trilogy describes an American Empire as shaping a world split between global capital and disenfranchised multitude, leading to a final confrontation between the Empire of capital and the counter-Empire of workers everywhere. However, their interpretation is limited by their philosophical abstraction and revolutionary vision, which fails to recognize the implications of actually existing processes of sovereignty and capital at this global juncture. The situation found in Asia challenges their analysis. In contemporary China, experimental assemblages of sovereign powers, capital, techne, and ethics have not weakened, but, in fact, have strengthened political sovereignty, nationalist sentiments, and collectivist ethos, presenting a different picture of biopolitics from that of Hardt and Negri's global theory. The authoritarian outcomes in China are political solutions forged in circumstances that mingle the global, the historical, and the situated. This article argues that Asian aspirations are rearranging capitalism and political sovereignty as Hardt and Negri understand them.

Keywords: assemblage, biopolitics, China, Empire, global capitalism, Multitude, sovereignty

Shifting sovereign powers

“When someone writes the history of our time 50 or 100 years from now, it is unlikely to be about the Great Recession of 2008 ... or about the fiscal problems that America confronted in the second half of the 21st century. It will be about how the world adjusted to the movement of the theatre of history toward China.”

—Lawrence Summers¹

Bursting upon the world at the end of the twentieth century, *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000)

was a book that made all of us proud to be both academic and relevant. With philosophical rigor and passionate urgency, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri reinstated the centrality of capitalism in serious work on the global contemporary. *Empire*, followed by *Multitude* (Hardt and Negri 2004) and *Commonwealth* (Hardt and Negri 2009), lays out an ambitious program of world revolution, pinning hopes of their inevitable revolution on an emerging revolutionary subject located in a global multitude disenfranchised by global capital. The global sweep of Hardt and Negri's claims, however, are per-

haps more reflective of their philosophical ambition to reclaim the world than of an analytical goal to renew structural Marxism.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, they see an American Empire as unchallenged in the world, shaping a world split between global capital and disenfranchised multitude. This progressive simplification of the capital-labor contradiction, they argue, will lead to a final confrontation between the Empire of capital and the counter-Empire of workers everywhere. Furthermore, the philosophers project a convergence of proletarian consciousness and Christian fervor in a global solidarity that will foment as a democratic alternative to Empire. Caught up in their epochal revolutionary vision, however, Hardt and Negri seem to miss the giant of the Chinese economy looming on the horizon.

Even as *Empire* rolled off the press to great academic acclaim, China had been bankrolling US capitalism for over a decade. By 2011, sovereign wealth funds mainly from Asia and the Middle East hold half of the outstanding federal debt of the US government. The People's Republic of China (PRC), a backward behemoth just 30 years ago, is now the vital lifeline that keeps the US economy afloat. This awkward partnership between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party has been dubbed "Chimerica" by the historian Niall Ferguson. A rapid reassembling of capitalist forces has taken place, recentering in East Asia. There is no more vivid challenge to claims about a US-led Empire or global order. China is the emerging heavyweight, shifting the political and economic tectonic plates of our times.

In recent years, shake-ups in global events and in the social sciences have required a shift away from models of stabilized world arrangements to the analysis of heterogeneous situations contingently shaped by global forces. Instead of projecting a framework of fixed transnational relationships, we problematize universal categories by studying the dynamic interrelationships that form a diversity of globalized environments. We invoke "the global" not as a metaphorical or achieved instantiation of a sin-

gular logic, but as a historically contingent concept that points to configurations shaped by the interaction of global and situated components. "Global assemblages" of capital, politics, and ethics define a space of inquiry, pointing to ways in which "the human" is at stake (Collier and Ong 2005). Rather than flying at a high level of abstraction, anthropologists have always preferred a low-flying approach to emerging situations crystallized in the interconnections of capital and politics, technology and ethics. Indeed, by hovering close to the surface of observable human practices, we discover not the structural uniformity of capitalism's deprivation but, rather, highly varied economic, social, and cultural outcomes. For instance, in Asia, some countries participate in global markets by exporting increasingly large ratios of their labor force to richer countries. But where the state is strong, strategic exceptions are made both in favor of capital and of social well-being. Attempts are made to combine neoliberal logic and biopolitical interventions in order to align goals of wealth production on the one hand with securing varied visions of the good life on the other.

Sovereignty and biopower

Modern political reason concerns itself, by definition, with intervening upon human life and modes of living. In Hardt and Negri's formulation, however, "[m]odern European sovereignty is capitalist sovereignty, a form of command that overdetermines the relationship between individuality and universality as a function of the development of capital" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 87). This questionable synthesis of sovereignty and an abstracted universal capitalism, they claim, was historically extended to the rest of the world through European colonialism. With the end of colonialism, "the declining powers of the nation," and the rise of American capitalism, there is a passage to a form of "imperial sovereignty" that Hardt and Negri call "Empire" (ibid.: 137). Here, sovereignty is reterritorialized from the waning state onto the

machinations of a global capitalism that subverts or circumvents classical categories of sovereignty and their dependence on the system of nation-states. This projection echoes other claims that market-centered deregulation has contributed to “the declining sovereignty of states over their economies” (Sassen 1998: xxvii–xxviii). Such “denationalizing” effects of globalization are synchronized by global bankers, executives, and capitalists at meetings such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. As I have argued elsewhere, claims about the impending end of the nation-state could not be more off the mark, even when articulated in the days of the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. Instead of assuming a decline of sovereign power in an economic storm, it would have been useful to observe how crises compel states to become flexible in their responses by manipulating capitalist circuits (Ong 2006: 97–120). It is especially a mistake to fuse political sovereignty with capitalist might, as these are separate technologies of power that interact in complex ways. We tend to find state-guided development in postcolonial countries where state sovereignty was not merely imagined into being (Anderson 1983), but largely embraced as the necessary political institution charged with defending national well-being in a competitive global environment.

The irony of abstract claims about capital flows ending political sovereignty is that these very flows have had the practical effects of strengthening some nation-states, a phenomenon dramatized in the meteoric rise of the “Asian tiger” countries in the 1980s to 1990s. The articulation of authoritarian politics and neoliberal reason engendered a flexible approach to capital circulations that, rather than depleting national sovereignties into a singular depoliticizing global capitalism, can even shore up authoritarian rule.

An anthropological study of the neoliberal identifies the situated articulation of neoliberal reason and state policies. One effect of neoliberal political reason has been the disassembling of the national territory and population into separate zones for linking up with capital cir-

cuits. Indeed, special zoning techniques have been widely implemented in East Asian countries, in order to strategically position specific spaces to different economic and political ends. Especially in the PRC, the technique of zoning areas of political exception is frequently wielded to create special industrial zones and to enforce a regime of graduated rule across a vast territory (Ong 2006: 102–111; Ong and Zhang 2008). Rather than a uniform application of sovereign power, neoliberal calculations dictate policies that make the most of differentiations in the productive capacities of population and space within the national terrain. The neoliberal as a technology of governing for optimal outcomes challenges the conventional view of capitalism steamrolling over political sovereignty, or of neoliberalism as a set of irreducible elements that can characterize entire nations (Harvey 2005). The novel Asian milieu constituted in the articulation of neoliberal logic, authoritarian politics, and capital reject the view that every encounter is an instantiation of capital’s imperial sovereignty overcoming political sovereign rule.

Besides ignoring actually existing states, Hardt and Negri claim, also in a philosophical vein, that Empire has engendered conditions for a unified totalizing biopower, expressed as a set of rules over life on earth.² They recast Foucault’s concept of governmentality as “a passage within the notion of sovereignty, as a transition to a new form of transcendence” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 88). In this formulation, Hardt and Negri argue that “biopolitical production” of informational, material, and social networks across the world transforms heretofore differentiated labor forces into a common multitude (2004: xv–xvi, 94–95). According to Foucault, biopower and biopolitics refer to techniques of political government in which an ensemble of technologies act on the population in order to optimize life, but not in a uniform or totalizing way. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault (2007) identifies different modalities of power—sovereignty, discipline, and security—that are variously coordinated in specific constellations of governing practices. These strategic ensem-

bles of practices express a combinatorial logic that Collier (2009), reading across Foucault's earlier and later works, calls "a topology of power." The specific topologies that emerge in the combination of forms of governing variously enact different problematics of life and the living.

But such statements must be subject to the interrogation of grounded and situated investigation, the kind of attention that anthropologists recommend. Has the global circulation of capital everywhere undone political sovereignty, or has it in some cases compelled the state to be more flexible and agile in dealing with market challenges? That is, if capital cannot be said to simply obliterate sovereignty, we might be more attentive to the ways in which capital articulates situated political rationalities and aims, and in these assemblages, how sovereign power itself mutates. Clearly, it is necessary to distinguish between state sovereignty and biopolitics as different but interacting forms of rule that shape a particular topology of power. To understand unfolding situations in East Asia, for instance, we need to pose further questions. How does the exercise of sovereign power and political reason modulate a fast-moving capital, turning the market into a site of both political and economic experimentation that enhances national security? In what ways can biopolitical strategies shape people's power and biological fate within a national space? Below, I will briefly discuss three unfolding situations whereby sovereignty becomes intensified at multiple scales through the mix of risk technologies that govern labor, finance, and life in conditions of globalized uncertainty.

People's sovereignty

In May 2010, massive worker unrest roiled in Shenzhen (Guangdong Province), one of China's giant manufacturing complexes. Labor strikes in Honda Motors brought production to a halt, and the unrest spread to other factories in the vast labor zone. A spate of suicides by workers put the global spotlight on Foxconn Technology. Foxconn, based in Taiwan, is the world's

biggest contract electronics company, and employs 800,000 Chinese workers who assemble computer components for Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and Apple.

For Americans, such labor protests may seem to be an instantiation of the unifying multitude in Hardt and Negri's formulation. After all, our favorite portable devices—smartphones, laptops, electronic tablets—are largely the handiwork of these Chinese workers, many of whom are migrant teenagers who are exposed daily to toxic fumes while assembling our digital toys. Outrage against huge corporations and the simmering guilt of global consumers are captured in a new play staged in Berkeley, California, *The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*. In this one-man show, artist Mike Daisey narrates stories gathered from workers in Shenzhen. His goal is to pinpoint "the charged ethical dilemma that is literally in our pockets" (Carstensen 2011).

But while the products are internationally distributed, the labor conditions of production are enforced by Foxconn (a Taiwan company), the major anchor of the world's largest industrial complex in East Asia. As the world's leading subcontractor for high-tech companies, Foxconn is notorious for imposing excessively fast assembly lines and high demands for overtime. The sped-up exploitation of Chinese workers is the work of Asian industrialists, contractors, and factories, and such draconian practices interface not US labor policies, but those of the PRC.

The articulation of global companies, Asian industrial discipline, Chinese labor, and PRC policies shapes particular conditions of biopower in these factory zones, and also conditions shifts in management in moments of crisis and opportunity. Studies on the rise of trans-Asian informational agents and infrastructure have focused on the accumulation of labor skills and "quality" (*suzhi*). However, contrary to Hardt and Negri's claim that information workers are allies of labor (2000: 298–300), only a handful of Chinese digital advocates have defended and argued for labor rights, and they are continually hounded off cyberspace by the state security apparatus. Another possible misreading may in-

terpret the spate of worker suicides as an incipient catalyst for labor solidarity with the global multitude. Instead of this proletarian fable, the factory suicides in Shenzhen became an opportune moment for the state to adjust its controls on labor and corporations.

For two decades of accelerated privatization and industrial growth, the Chinese state propelled millions of migrants to work in coastal Special Economic Zones (Ong and Zhang 2008). Beijing and local authorities forcibly forbade workers to strike and walk off the jobs in order to secure conditions of stability for the continuation of accelerated capital accumulation. The high-profile worker suicides of 2010, however, signaled a breaking point, and occasioned a shift in political strategy. It became clear to the Guangdong provincial authorities that the model of extremely cheap labor and high productivity could not be sustained in an era of rapidly rising costs of living in the Chinese coastal zones. As recently as 2003, severe labor shortages created conditions for sustained worker unrest (Ong 2006: 137–138). But in 2010, as the cost of food, goods, housing, and land mounted in southern China's Pearl River Delta, authorities uncharacteristically stood back and let worker demonstrations run their course. The cumulative effect of sustained labor unrest was that a few months later, both Honda and Foxconn agreed to raise the wages of many by 33 percent. Apple gave pay hikes that more than doubled worker salaries. By skillfully manipulating the suffering of industrial workers, political authorities leveraged their grievances. By using the grief of workers to put pressure on corporate power, the authorities created conditions for rising wages and improved living conditions. In other words, this exception to the active role of the state in suppressing labor unrest produced a shift in biopolitical regulation of labor in Shenzhen. The flexible exercise of exception—for instance, in favor of capital when the economy is booming, but in favor of labor when things get a bit out of hand—keeps workers tethered to and disciplined by the nationalist project of the Chinese economy, while also offering a means of reining in corporate power.

The realignment of the three-way relationship between the Chinese state, Chinese labor, and foreign investors is therefore also constitutive of the self-understanding of workers as a political community. Their modest success vis-à-vis capital seems to animate a historical sense of people's sovereignty, that is, the will of the Chinese masses in their century-long struggle against foreign invaders, a hallmark of nationalist rhetoric and imagery in the Chinese modern period. Every day, the Chinese state faces thousands of incidents of labor or peasant unrest, most of which are harshly put down or left unreported. However, by tolerating worker demonstrations against Honda and Foxconn, the state permits mass resentment against global capital, not to mention against better-paid overseas workers and consumers who benefit from cheap Chinese labor. "Global capital" thus stands as an ambivalent player in this field of relations, to be alternately invoked in the event of both suppression of and permission for labor unrest.

The selective political approach to worker unrest demonstrates a complex state engagement with the still-resonant notion of people's or nation's sovereignty versus the threat of foreign capital. This state strategy capitalizes on the historically grounded socialist notion of people's power, and the molding of worker subjectivity in the crucible of their nation's emergence. While market reforms have attenuated socialist aspects of labor's self-understanding, the resolutely Chinese (in political and cultural senses) character of protesting workers remains. Over the past few years, as the labor market has become destabilized, the Chinese state has paid greater attention to the welfare of laid-off workers than to other poor people in the cities. There is recognition of the potential threat posed by unhappy workers amassed in cities, with their historic claims to political agency and legitimacy, and the need to pay attention to their basic subsistence needs. Fundamentally, the contract with the people's sovereignty is based on sustaining economic development, creating employment, and consumer opportunities, for urban workers as well for the middle class. The political construction of these "citizens" (*gongmin*) as op-

posed to the rural masses (*nongmin* or *qunzhong*) is that they be productive workers who are also loyal (Cho 2009; Hoffman 2010; Ong and Zhang 2008). Meanwhile, ongoing online and offline protests over wages, pollution, land grabs, tainted foods, and official corruption are met by state responses that alternate between the enforcement of a cyber firewall and the mollification of some public concerns. A combination of authoritarian rule, market opportunities, and selective biopolitical interventions fosters a sense that state stewardship is responsive to the people's will, or at least not unilaterally opposed to it.

An analytic of interacting powers (state and people) recognizes the situated mix of resistance, accommodation, and manipulation, and uncertain outcomes. The state goal is to manipulate any political situation in order to achieve an implicit state-people bargain that trades acceptance of political authoritarianism for sustained improvements in economic and social well-being. Each event crystallizes conditions of struggle in which the state seeks to thwart or use the will of the people. But we need to grasp the convergence of events and opportunities at different moments in time, and how the interactions crystallize heterogeneous possibilities and outcomes, not predetermined victory for the people or for state authoritarianism. That is, the authoritarian state, in its multifaceted embroilment with global capital, cannot be frozen in a posture of opposition to the masses, but must strategically intervene in unstable conditions, one moment acting as a draconian oppressor of workers, the next as a protector of labor against the depredations of global capital. Besides its dynamic and heterogeneous sites of struggle, the distinctive circumstances of China's rise also make it hard to imagine Chinese masses would politically identify with a borderless global multitude.

Sovereign wealth funds

Besides a robust and historically entrenched sense of people's sovereignty, Asian states have built up national capital accumulation. Sover-

eign wealth funds (SWF), or surplus capital controlled by sovereign nations, have become key players in global investments and financial markets. For instance, SWF from Singapore and China have come to the rescue of failing banks and corporations in Europe and North America. In addition, SWF have contributed to the rise of new financial centers in the so-called global South and magnified the pooling of global finance in the region (Ong 2011). The fast accumulation of SWF in Asia and the furious gyrations of global money markets have destabilized a recent architecture of global cities: London, New York, Tokyo (Sassen 1992). New financial hubs—Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Shanghai—are all racing to the top of the list for initial public offerings (IPOs) in 2010. Hong Kong took the top spot (its IPO volume topped \$52 billion that year) not least because it enjoys a commanding position to serve the vast Chinese market (Mullen 2011).

The rising affluence of East Asian countries has contributed to a transformation of financial flows and a reorganization of the spatiality of markets. As financial capitals move south, they fuel rivalry between emerging centers outside the classical circuit of "global cities" such as Dubai, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Within the vast Chinese economy, new financial centers compete with one another. Despite exploiting its position as the gateway to China, Hong Kong, since 1997 a Special Administrative Region of the PRC, is struggling to maintain its lead as Shanghai and Shenzhen on the mainland rise in their IPO rankings. The mainland markets remain largely closed to foreign investors, causing many companies to list their securities in both China and Hong Kong. There is an inter-Chinese competition between Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and non-PRC Singapore, but the financial momentum is taking on a regional coethnic dimension as China plans to make Singapore its offshore base for trading in the yuan futures market.

The rise of the PRC-centered financial region has drawn huge volumes of international trading away from traditional centers in the West. Recent investments in financial technolo-

gies have accelerated the pace and volume of trading, and expanded the absolute scale of financial transactions in East Asia. The new focus is on high-speed trading techniques that will allow trades to be completed in 90 microseconds, faster than the 98 microseconds that NASDAQ takes. The new techniques and faster trades thus enforce a disciplinary uptick that demands longer trading hours, resulting in traders having lunch at their desk. In short, the mix of political logic, high-speed technology, and sped-up work conditions creates conditions for the emergence of financial markets and their accelerating scale of operation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Now, there is a possible Hardt and Negri-style reading that sees the shift of this financial cartography as, first, merely the expansion of the Empire and global cities framework and, then, reading this as a metonym of the expansion of a capitalist system to the last impenetrable bastion of China. My claim, on the contrary, is that in East Asia there is not an easy subsumption into capitalism, but rather that the demand to harness and direct flows of global capital (both to China and also differentially to multiple Chinese sites) induces particular kinds of reorganization of sovereign powers in relation to markets. In this dynamic, reconfiguring financial environment, a static global cities model cannot account for the ways not only in which specific assemblages of urban aspiration play out in emerging centers, but also how the entry of these local forms into the global financial actually transforms the whole paradigm of what counts as a global city or a capitalist empire in some important way. Indeed, the rise of monetary hubs in Asia is mutating the ways that financial exchanges are becoming reordered on some formal or ontological level.

In other words, the velocity of East Asian monetary growth does not create the conditions by which “the state” is overrun or battered down by fast-flowing global capital. Rather, emerging Asian sites are organizing new centers for capital formation through their stock exchanges, which are strategic national assets and symbols. For instance, Singapore is trying to expand its

trading volume by buying foreign stock exchanges, but has been rebuffed in its attempt to take over Australia’s ASX. Meanwhile, the trend toward exchange mergers has fanned monetary nationalism throughout the world. The deal to merge NYSE Euronext with Deutsche Borse of Germany, for example, is giving US regulators and politicians pause over the deep impact on the national economy. There is growing national resistance to regional mergers of exchanges as stock exchanges are increasingly viewed as resources of national pride and well-being. Since 2007, about half of the assets raised in IPOs were sold on Asian exchanges (compared with 19 percent in the US) (Lucchetti and Chon 2011). There is a new network of Chinese and Asian capitals that pulls the financial center of gravity to East Asia, thus dislocating Hardt and Negri’s Empire.

Besides the ways in which Asian political sovereignty is strengthened through the control of capital circulation and accumulation, there is a diversity of financial practices and arrangements that subvert the possibility of any one unified capitalist system-logic that underpins the Empire concept. Indeed, the great complexity and velocity of financial flows have created opportunities for predatory trading across the Pacific. For instance, in the largest ever American probe of insider trading, almost all the players and connections are of Asian origin. In early 2011, the Securities and Exchange Commission put on trial Raj Rajaratnam, the cofounder of the New York-based hedge fund Galleon Group. He was charged with using insider tips to make \$45 million in illicit profits from 2003 to 2008. A native of Sri Lanka, Rajaratnam allegedly supplied secret business information to associates in American corporations, including a former director at Goldman Sachs and a former partner at McKinsey, both of whom are also of South Asian ancestries. To supply tips to US-based portfolio managers, Rajaratnam drew on a network of ethnic Chinese consultants based in Asia. These are employees working for technology companies based in Taiwan such as American Micro Devices, Seagate Technology, Western Digital, Fairchild Semiconductor, and Marvell,

many of them clients of McKinsey. Information technology facilitates the gleaning of business secrets from Asia and the rapid conversion of tips into illicit superprofits. In one incident, Rajaratnam made a \$1 million profit from a very large trade conducted in seven minutes. This insider-trading scandal, alongside Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme, which preyed on thousands of victims, not only indexes the weakness of US authorities, but also demonstrates that the growth of corrupt trading networks can wreak havoc in financial markets and national economies.

The above cases contrast the assembling of money flows to build legal SWFs in emerging nations on the one hand, and illegal financial schemes that fly under the radar screen of sovereign powers on the other. These contrasting modes of financial accumulation—strengthening the economic power of legitimate sovereign nation-states versus the predatory power of illicit money managers—fragment and undermine the domination of American capitalism in the global arena in different ways. The reconfiguration of financial flows and centers has made Asian sovereignty even more robust at a time when American financial sovereignty has been dealt a blow by Wall Street.

Biosovereignty

It should be noted that in their zeal to envision the rise of a democratic counter-Empire, the exercise of sovereign state power anywhere has never been the focus of Hardt and Negri's interest. Rather, they choose to view sovereignty exclusively in terms of its philosophical character and underpinnings, in the interrelationship between the governing (capital) and the governed (multitude) stretched to the global scale. For the philosophers, financial capital is significant primarily for defining a "new intimate relationship between life and capital," especially in the expropriation of the "global commons," by which they mean all life-forms. Technologically innovative capital today, they claim, goes beyond the exploitation of the living labor of the multitude to include the harvesting of their living flesh.

However, Hardt and Negri poetically note, "The flesh of the multitude is an elemental power that continuously expands social being, producing in excess of every traditional political-economic measure of value" (2004: 192). They conjure up the always-potent image of a final confrontation between the oppressive machinery of capital and the ultimately ungovernable biology of the masses (ibid.: 141–146). In their scenario, the bare life of the multitude can be summoned and mobilized to defend diverse life-forms from being despoiled by high-tech capitalism. This apocalyptic model of irreducible opposition between technology and flesh, science and spirit, capital and democracy underpins their vision of global revolution.

The elemental power of nature, Hardt and Negri argue, is our answer to capital's overreach. They note that "[t]he elemental flesh of the multitude is maddeningly elusive, since it cannot be entirely corralled into the hierarchical organs of a political body" (2004: 192). I agree with this poetic remark about the elusiveness of nature and the impossibility of its total submission to social construction or political capture. Nevertheless, there is an alternative to Hardt and Negri's conceptual opposition between the tsunami of technocapitalism on the one hand, and the elusiveness of human flesh on the other.

With the rise of molecular biology, it has become fashionable in anthropology to claim that nature has become an artifact of human techniques and that biology is now modeled by culture. Meanwhile, nature in all its complexity remains fundamentally elusive to human interventions and transformation. Earthquakes, tsunamis, and unpredictable climate events, not to mention the potential failures of big technology projects (nuclear energy, space travel, communication grids, etc.), constantly remind us that elemental nature is always bigger than the technological capacities of modern *Homo sapiens*. As the immensity, complexity, and mystery of nature continue to overwhelm us, the dizzying speed of innovations in the life sciences since the 1980s has produced claims that the governance of human life is now extended to the molecular scale. But biomedical experiments

are still far from transforming “life itself” (Rose 2007), and many fatal diseases continue to evade effective treatment. In seeking to understand the articulation of culture and modern science, we need to set aside masculinist models that pit nature against culture on the one hand, and the notion of technology overcoming nature on the other.

Feminist scholars have pointed to the situated nature of scientific forms, and the ways human action and nature are coconstitutive of our futures (Haraway 1991; Jasanoff 2005; Lock 1995). When it comes to biocapitalism, it is instructive to examine how molecular biopolitics unfold in a specific environment of possibility. The marriage of capitalism and the life sciences engenders techniques that extend the powers of capital, whether in the plunder of living forms in bioprospecting ventures (Hayden 2003), or the exploitation of living flesh in clinical trials that employ poor people as experimental subjects (Sunder Rajan 2010). While the misuses of biomedical technology in poor countries would be sympathetic to Hardt and Negri’s argument, we cannot at the same time ignore the biopolitical contributions of modern genetics in more affluent circumstances, such as the availability of new drugs in freeing up choices for improving the quality of life (Rose 2007: 40). The illuminating difference is how biocapital articulates situated political regimes and ethical goals in novel settings.

For instance, we would be remiss to ignore the fact that modern governments, including Great Britain and the United States, established medical projects that relied on combinations of public and private investments to realize biopolitical goals (Jasanoff 2005), although recent budgetary cutbacks in both countries have resulted in the massive privatization and inequities in access to health care (see, e.g., Clark et al. 2010: 57–63). This in a period when some developing nations are just setting up their own national health systems, while learning to deal with the power of biomedical technologies that can both inflict great injustices and improve life for citizens. Emerging countries are especially vulnerable to technologies that can enhance

biocapitalist exploitations, but sovereign states can make political decisions to better control the national commons and protect their citizens.

The new affluence harnessed by robust sovereignty has allowed a few Asian countries to launch a Sputnik moment by assembling capital, scientific expertise, and institutions to promote innovations in biotechnology and biomedicine (Ong and Chen 2010). The scientific renaissance in Asian countries has spurred various efforts to exert sovereign control over biological resources and global drug companies, and increase the biosecurity of citizens. Indeed, sophisticated biomedical tools foster a novel assemblage of politics, capital, science, and ethics that has reinforced national sovereignty (in unexpected ways) as governments struggle with biocapitalist ventures but also seek to capitalize on them for attaining a level of protected life (*bios*).

Asian governments have devised several strategies to build up a kind of scientific sovereignty that I can only mention in brief (see, e.g., Ong 2010). First, in many countries, the state has invested in building research institutions in order to develop new expertise that can intervene effectively in biological crises such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic. Second, biomedical ethics in Asia transcend concerns about individual medical consumer choice. Ethical discourses about Asian biomedical projects link different scales of scientific research, collaboration, and intervention to focus on diseases prevalent in the region. In laboratories, hospitals, and clinics, the elemental power of the flesh is valued not least for its potential to yield cellular secrets that can be customized for the treatment of patients with Asian ancestries. These practices link the power of biomedicine not to questions of individualized well-being, but to the well-being of ethnized ancestral populations.

Third, governments try to corral and define biodiversity as state property in order to limit biopiracy and regulate the power of drug companies. For instance, authorities in China and Vietnam have expressed a high degree of vigilance and paranoia about unauthorized foreign access to biomedical records and samples from

citizens; China and India have banned the export of genetic materials. Indonesia made international headlines when it withheld avian flu samples in a strategy (supported by other Southeast Asian countries) to compel the World Health Organization and drug companies to provide reimbursements in training and medicine. Thailand and India have imposed “compulsory licensing” on foreign corporations and asserted national rights to produce generic versions of life-saving drugs.

Meanwhile, in an ultimate form of bionationalism, Taiwan and China are in a competition to define the makeup of “Chinese DNA.” In short, the articulation of biomedical sciences and biocapital are met by Asian states as both threat and opportunity. By gaining mastery over scientific innovations and developing medicines for Asian populations, Asian states have gained the knowledge and tools to shape emerging “communities of fate” tied to the genetic makeup of Asian populations. There are undoubtedly ongoing appropriations of native resources by new profit-making technologies that harness the powers of human tissues and harvest body parts, and variously violate human rights of defenseless populations everywhere. At the same time, science and technology, especially when animated by state venture capital (as in Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) and postcolonial nationalism, can instantiate a particular form of vitalist politics for their citizens. Human flesh is elusive, not only to capital, but also to science, and the nation-state has a role to protect its autonomy and vitality, not least within their own territorial space. I also agree that the value of living human tissues exceeds any market value. For peoples who are potential recipients of regenerative medicine, molecular sciences promise the generation of an array of material and symbolic values, not least the mastery of conditions and new self-knowledge that can secure “flourishing life” for millions of people (Ong forthcoming). But as the human body becomes inserted into different modes of governing, we ask what kind of exchange of truth claims about sociality is in play, and what kinds of commitments are desirable or ethical?

Empire and *Multitude* are the double helix of a theoretical Marxism that claims to be the DNA of our political world. We are reminded that these are philosophical books, and that the view propounded in these texts about the coming global class confrontation and its revolutionary resolution is in the tradition of philosophical inquiry into human evolution. Compared to Hardt and Negri’s impressive erudition and self-assurance in the mold of grand theorists, any anthropological attempt to track practices and assemblages in the global contemporary must seem modest and tentative indeed. Anthropology at its best can provide an analytical understanding of unfolding situations linked to wider spirals of transformation but always particular in its momentum and motion. We can capture the at once global and distinctive dimensions of emerging assemblages that put the human at stake, but without the misplaced security of a universal logic or resolution. At the end of the twentieth century, political science and philosophy aspired to the global certainties of the hard sciences just as anthropology and molecular biology are taking an experimental approach to contingently unfolding realities fraught with uncertainty. In different ways, we try to understand human experiments that realign disparate relationships in contingent configurations that can engender unpredictable outcomes. Our analytical claims are situated, limited, and melancholic, but hopeful, as we learn from varied human attempts to reorient capital and knowledge to better futures by mediating uncertainties (see, e.g., Miyazaki 2006).

In contemporary Asia, experimental assemblages of sovereign powers, capital, *techné*, and ethics seem to produce circumstances that strengthen political sovereignty, nationalist sentiments, and collectivist ethos, not least in struggles to engage capitalism and to protect biological resources and life itself. Such authoritarian outcomes may not conform to the vision of global revolution, but they are political solutions forged in circumstances that mingle the global, the historical, and the situated. Instead of slipping under an American Empire, Asian aspirations are rearranging and reinventing capital-

ism and political sovereignty as we understand them in their historical emergence in the West. Indeed, my spirit of open and empirically based inquiry shows that the rise of Asia noted by Lawrence Summers is not teleological, but vindicates and introduces contingencies that are always present in any moment.

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Notes

1. Quoted in David Wessel and Paulo Prada (2011). The article notes that China has become the key trade partner to six of the world's biggest economies (Japan, South Korea, Australia, Russia, South Africa, and India), the number-two partner of another five (United States, Canada, Indonesia, Mexico, and Brazil), and accounts for over 10 percent of the total world exports.
2. Some critics observe a misapplication of Foucault's concept, which demands a historical or genealogical analysis of programs and techniques for intervening into life (see, e.g., Rabinow and Rose 2006).

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