THE INTERNATIONAL: THE EFFECTS OF EMPIRE AND DEBT-TRAP

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ABSTRACT

In parallel to their rising economic power, global financial institutions challenge state-centric concept of international relations. This article aims at analyzing *the International* (2009) directed by Tom Tykwer that raises questions about the role of global finance over world politics. *The International* narrates the endeavors of a bank to gain the control of a country through financial ways instead of an imperialist agenda of a nation-state. This article uses *Empire* written by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to analyze the newly emerging phenomena that *the International* has touched upon. Another concept that this article mentions will be debt-trap diplomacy, which means using debts to gain political leverage against economically fragile countries. The bank in *the International* employs it as a main tool in exercising control. The result suggests that the actors in *Empire* may change, but the system where wealth and power are combined continues to function.

Keywords: *The International* (movie), Empire, Debt-trap, Finance, Transnational

ULUSLARARASI: İMPARATORLUK'UN ETKİLERİ VE BORÇ-TUZAĞI

ÖZET

Artan ekonomik güçlerine paralel olarak, küresel finans kurumları uluslararası ilişkilerin devlet merkezli özelliğine meydan okumaktadır. Bu makale Tom Tykwer tarafından yönetilen global finansın dünya politikasındaki etkileri hakkında sorular soran *Uluslararası* (2009) filmi analiz etme amacındadır. *Uluslararası* bir ulus devletin emperyalist ajandasından ziyade, bir bankanın bir devlet üzerinde finansal yöntemleri kullanarak kontrol sağlama girişimlerini anlatmaktadır. Bu makale, Michael Hardt ve Antonio Negri'nin yazdığı *İmparatorluk*'u kullanarak *Uluslararası*'nda değinilen bu yeni gelişen olguyu analiz etmektedir. Bu makalenin değineceği diğer bir kavram da borçları ekonomisi kırılgan ülkelere karşı siyasal bir baskı gücü olarak kullanma anlamına gelen borç-tuzağı diplomasisi olacaktır. *Uluslararası*'ndaki banka bunu kontrol sağlamak için ana araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Sonuç *İmparatorluk*'taki aktörlerin değişebileceğini fakat zenginlik ve gücün bir arada olduğu sistemin işlemeye devam edeceğini önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Uluslararası* (film), İmparatorluk, Borç-tuzağı, Finans, Ulusötesi

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INTRODUCTION

The International is a political thriller movie, which deals with the role of global finance in world politics. Luxembourg based the International Bank of Business and Credit (IBBC) engages in arms deals with China and arms smugglers in Italy and Turkey to stage a coup in an African country (Tom Tykwer, 2009). While pursuing this goal, it commits murders of police officers, assassinations of businessmen and politicians, and illegal surveillance. Instead of an agent of a bigger state, the bank conducts these affairs to increase its own interests and profits. The IBBC is a political player as much as a nation-state in world politics.

The volume of money processed by global financial institutions has increased after the 1970s when the restrictions over the movement of money has decreased. For instance, London Eurodollar Market, which is a major market for global financial institutions, was its infancy stage in 1970s. Its volume increased from \$59 billion in 1970 to \$300 billion in the mid-1980s (Allen, 2016: 2). This free flow of money helped global banks to accumulate enormous wealth. As of 31 December, 2020, the 15 largest banks held \$12,54 trillion assets (Goldberg, 2021). Global financial institutions are operating in international system through cross-border flows and participation in local banking systems. (*Banking Without Borders*, 2018: 7). The penetration into local economy offers involvement of political affairs of these countries. Thus, the material power translates into political power in international arena by using global finance's pervasiveness across the world.

In this respect, the absolute sovereignty of nation-states is questioned with increasing activities of global financial institutions. World politics cannot be categorized as exclusive affairs among nation-states. *Empire* written by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri illuminates this new construct in world politics in which nation-states, global banks, international organizations, and civil society organizations participate. *Empire* is different from imperialism, which means extension of sovereignty of powerful European states over weak states. The term Empire used by Hardt and Negri suggests the establishment of deterritorialized and decentralized form of rule, which penetrates into the whole global realm. It includes hybrid identities and flexible hierarchies through setting up networks (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 12).

This article attempts to analyze *the International* according to main arguments of *Empire*. *The International* is examined in terms of the players involved in politics, the methods that the main player, the IBBC, employs, and the resistance that the protagonists demonstrated. *The International* exposes the new conglomeration of forces that affect world politics. Although primary antagonist of the film is killed at the end of the movie, the protagonists' efforts of resistance fell short in changing or reforming the system.

1. THE MAIN ACTORS

The movie *the International* takes place around the activities of the IBBC, which is a bank whose headquarters are located in Luxembourg (Tom Tykwer, 2009). The movie demonstrates it has several branches in different locations in the world and has several clients. This gives the IBBC a global bank character. A global bank is defined as "international bank with operations in multiple regions" (*Banking Without Borders*, 2018: 7). Besides official banking duties, the IBBC engages in funding transnational crime, terrorism, coup attempts, assassinations, and illegal arms deals (Tykwer, 2009). These activities cover almost the whole world. In this respect, the IBBC controls and manipulates security and political order in a transnational scale.

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The protagonists of the movie are also acting in transnational space. An Interpol inspector and a prosecutor from New York are conducting their investigation in Berlin, Luxembourg, Milan, New York, and Istanbul (Tykwer, 2009). Interpol is an inter-governmental organization, which enables sharing and access of crimes and criminals, connecting 194 member organization (*INTERPOL*). Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan prosecutes crimes or offenses related with New York state laws (*ManhattanAD*). All these main players represent a segment of *Empire*.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri associate the constitution of *Empire* with the constitution of the Roman Empire described by Polybius. According to Polybius, the Roman Empire combines three forms of government: Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy. Monarchy represents the unity and continuity. Aristocracy refers justice, measure, and virtue, contributing the extension of monarchical rule over society. Democracy guarantees representation and articulation of interests of people (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 314). This constitution is reflected on the conglomeration of different forces

in *Empire*. U.S. military and hegemony of dollar belong to monarchy. The multinational companies, nation-states, and international organizations comprise aristocracy, disseminating the monarch's power. Nation-states, media organizations, and NGOs articulate people's interest in global scale, demonstrating democratic side of the regime (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 314).

The protagonists in *the International* resemble the layers of the constitution of *Empire*. The prosecutor represents U.S. monarchical power. Although she is responsible for prosecuting crimes committed in New York area, her prosecutorial power extends to the global world. She conducts investigations various global cities in the world. The Interpol inspector represents aristocracy. The endeavors of the Interpol inspector character extend the prosecutor's investigation into the global scale as international organizations helps the USA to extend its influence across the globe.

On the other hand, according to Hardt and Negri, the aristocratic level witnesses the most intra-level competition among three layers. Aristocratic power is exercised through nation-states, international organizations, and the multinational governments. These three powers are in competition in this same level (Hardt & Negri, 2019: 74). The main conflict of the movie takes place among the aristocratic level. The antagonists of the movie counter the attempts of Interpol and local law enforcements of nation-states. The primary antagonist, the IBBC, lays out its own network through its agents e.g. the arms dealers, revolutionary general, and corrupt nation-state officials. Besides the conflict between the IBBC and the protagonists, the antagonists have conflict with each other. The IBBC is surpassing Swiss banks to have an influence over African countries. There are two main arms dealers who the IBBC is trying to make a deal. The final resolution occurs not between the protagonist but the sons of the assassinated arms dealer and the CEO of the IBBC (Tykwer, 2009). Although these conflicts occur, their influence over the system is minimal. According to Hardt and Negri, aristocratic forces do not want to change the system, but they are competing for a same score (Hardt & Negri, 2019: 74).

Nation-states, which are representatives of democratic segment of the constitution of *Empire*, however, have passive roles in this movie. Syria and Iran are recipients of the missiles, which will lead to the increase of their debts to the IBBC while the renegade general tries to stage a coup in a third-world African country, which will make this

country dependent on the IBBC's whims. On the other hand, the protagonists of the movie, one is representative of Interpol and the other one is representative of the USA, can conduct operations by interfering the affairs of other states' security organs. In *the International*, the nation-state is place where the operations of monarchy and aristocracy are being carried out.

This aspect requires the investigation about sovereignty of nation-states in world politics, which is often thought to be static and granted. The institutionalization of territorial form of modern nation-state sovereignty can be traced back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, set up by the Treaty of Münster and the Treaty of Osnabruck. These treaties offered territorial entities to "*exercise free right of territorial right in both spiritual and political affairs*" (Elden, 2013: 313). Two tenets of sovereignty are touched as internal sovereignty, which refers the states' ability to govern internally, and external sovereignty, which refers the states' independence from the pressure of foreign authority (Obermeier, 2016: 5). However, treating state sovereignty as timeless and ahistorical is wrong. The state sovereignty emerges as a result of production of connection between territory, authority, and population (Biersteker & Weber, 1996: 3).

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The pressure upon territory from this sub- and supra- forces, therefore, needs to be investigated to understand changes in sovereignty. Deterritorialization, firstly, put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, suggests abandoning rigid hierarchy to a form of organization characterized by multiplicity and fluctuation (1983: 195). McGrew offers a more definition of deterritorialization related with international relations: "*—social, political, and economic activities are increasingly stretched across the globe, they become a significant sense no longer organized solely according to strictly territorial logic*" (McGrew, 2010: 19). Deterritorialization is related with sovereignty. It is described as "the process of an external polity appropriating and exercising authority and over a land or bounded place previously part of a pre-existing spatial entity – most often another polity" (Isaacman & Isaacman, 2015: 542). While the concept of sovereignty is being equated with the sovereignty of nation-state, the desire of expansion of market economy to transcend nation-state boundaries challenge the nation-states' claim of holding absolute sovereignty claims. The activities of the forces in global economy weakened the primary functions of state sovereignty such as its ability to make and enforce laws, control territorial borders, and direct economic activities. The creation of

supra-national institutions and undertakings of sub-national forces further cripple state sovereignty (Bartelson, 2006: 466).

The erosion of distinction between outside and inside is visible in *Empire*. Modern sovereignty understood in international relations is rested on internal civil order and external natural order. Instead of confronting, *Empire* chooses to encompass and include. The era of internal conflicts shape the new order, turning every imperial war into a civil conflict (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 189). This transcendence does not predict the end of sovereignty. It is exercised in globalized international space exercised by different actors. *Empire* is a global state. The transnational networks create a new form of governance in filling the vacuum of sovereignty that nation-states left (Hardt & Negri, 2019: 69). Globalization entails the relative decline of sovereignty of nation-states. When sovereignty of nation-states declines, the sovereignty of other forces rises (Hardt, 2001).

Traditionally, NGOs or companies are tended to be viewed as agents of the country they are located to extend these states' territorial hegemony. The IBBC is neither a representative of Luxembourg where its headquarters are located or agent of U.S. hegemony. It is acting globally on its own. It seeks to increase its own profits by interfering other countries' internal politics. Its goal of providing financial assistance to a renegade general to initiate coup d'état is not to conquer territory. The IBBC wants to control that country's economic and political policies. Thus, the IBBC assumes sovereign powers of this national government. To accomplish this goal, the IBBC employs financial means rather than military invasion, which is a method of imperialist nation-states.

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2. DEBT-TRAP

The most striking talk of *the International* is made by Umberto Calvini, who is the primary arms dealer assassinated by the bank when he refused to participate. He explained *modus operandi* of the IBBC:

The IBBC is a bank. Their objective isn't to control the conflict, it's to control the debt that the conflict produces. You see, the real value of a conflict, the true value, is in the debt that it creates. You control the debt, you control everything. You find this upsetting, yes? But this is the very essence of the banking industry, to make us all, whether we be nations or individuals, slaves to debt (Tykwer, 2009).

The world, is indeed, built upon debt and credit. Mark Twain once remarked: “*Beautiful credit! The foundation of modern society*” (Riley, 1993: 1). When production increases, the value of money increases, leading to desire for capital formation. Banks emerge as places where accumulated money is kept and distributed through credits (Hoppe, 1990: 57). Credits enable businesses to invest. It also allows consumers to purchase services and goods regardless of their present-day income, contributing to rise in welfare (*Money and Debt*, 2019: 5).

The debt accumulation is a significant part of the global economy. The 1970s witnessed the climbing trend in debt, reaching the peak in recent years. In 2018, the debt level corresponded 230 percent of global GDP. The debts of Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDP) account 170 percent of their GDPs (Kose et al., 2020: 2). Advanced and developing countries are equally included in this process. Some of the countries’ debt percentage of GDP exemplifies this: Turkey 37 percent, Japan 256 percent, Canada 116 percent, Australia 72 percent, the USA 32 percent, Italy 157 percent, Germany 70 percent, Spain 118 percent, France 115 percent, the UK 107 percent (IMF, 2021). Due to COVID-19 epidemic, falling revenues combined with COVID-19 measures further increased global debt levels by \$20 trillion since the third quarter of 2019. Economists estimated that the global debt in 2020 reached \$277 trillion, corresponding 365 percent of world GDP (Lu, 2020).

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Besides these economically advanced countries, the amount of debt of developing countries is increasing. Because of low interest in the Western countries and high interest in developing countries, loan is provided under the guise of aid. Between 2007 and 2013 the debt level of developing countries increased threefold. Most of these countries are low-income countries rather than middle-income countries. Loans from the World Bank rose 70 percent between 2007 and 2013. The amount of loans of private lenders such as banks and financial corporation are considerable. Private lending increased 145 percent between 2007 and 2013 (Jones, 2015). The statistics demonstrate the scale of indebtedness level of nation-states. Some of the countries’ debt level exceeded the level of their total GDP. Developing countries are evolving into focal locations of lending process. The effects of COVID-19 further exacerbated the dire situation that these countries face. The cost of borrowing of lower income developing countries has increased. In these countries 30 percent of their debt is owed to private creditors. These

countries finance their debts by borrowing more. In countries such as Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal debt levels exceeded 12 percent of their GDP (Bonizzi et al., 2020: 7).

Although the transaction is apparently economic, it has strong political impact. John Adams, the second President of the USA states that: *"There are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation, one is by arms, the other is by debt"* (Pairault, 2020). Riley points out that *"debt is about power, its use and effects"* (1993: 7). Susan George considers debt as *"low intensity conflict"* (1989: 170). These analyzes imply a much more sophisticated methods than the crude force employed by the military intervention. Lacking an organized and formal military armies, financial banks and institutions employ debt policy to constrain the sovereignty of nation-states. Usually, debtor countries' ability to sustain borrowing depends on its ability to follow conditionality imposed by the funders. Due to these conditions, they have to sacrifice their internal and external sovereignty (Obermeier, 2016: 5). On the two sides, bankers are the party, which can break off their lending relationship more easily, threatening capital withdrawal. This constant threat compels the nation-states to follow economic conditions of lenders such as pursuing austerity and low inflation. These economic conditions also sever democracy due to policies, which favor global lenders instead of social groups in their territories (Kaplan & Thomsson, 2017: 606). Although advanced and emerging economies equally are indebted, the ability of advanced economies of paying their debts is higher than less-developed economies. Thus, the pressure upon nation-states, which have less-developed economies will be considerable since they have to compromise more of their sovereignty to satisfy the conditions of the loaners.

The recent literature in international relations also focuses on debt diplomacy or debt-trap diplomacy. The term of debt trap diplomacy has been coined by the Indian scholar Brahma Chellaney. He accuses China of over lending to countries, which are strategically important to China, in the name of infrastructure development. These infrastructure investments are not contributing to local economies, but they are extending China's reach to natural resources. When these countries could not pay their debts, China acquires the stakes of ports, roads, and buildings. China uses these debts as leverages against these countries. Although China sometimes writes off these debts, China does it in order to gain new contracts, which would benefit Chinese companies and workers, in the territories of these countries (Chellaney, 2017). China provides low-interest rate loan to support

infrastructure development across the route of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is an enormous infrastructure, financial, economic, and people-to-people connectivity project initiated by the President Xi Jinping in 2013. Countries on the route of Belt and Road has underdeveloped economies so they are less likely to pay back the loans borrowed (Shattuck, 2018: 8). This debt-trap narrative is used as one of the main arguments in the context of rising the U.S.-China competition. The then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson pointed out that China's infrastructure lending "encourages dependency using opaque contracts, predatory loan practices, and corrupt deals that mire nations in debt and undercut their sovereignty, denying them their long-term, self-sustaining growth" (Parker & Chefitz, 2018: 5).

The most visible event of Chinese encroachment of other countries' sovereignty was China's takeover of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port. The deal of acquiring the port of Hambantota occurred in exchange of writing off \$1 billion debt (Shattuck, 2018: 8). When the details of this project are examined, the relationship with the Chinese leadership and the then-President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Almost \$8 million was allocated for Rajapaksa's re-election campaign by China Harbor's bank. Since the port was not financially feasible and struggling to attract, some of government officials opposed to the project but they were ordered to continue the project (Abi-Habib, 2018). This episode also reflects the interaction between debts and corruption of high officials.

Some scholars also point out the consequences of debt-diplomacy implemented by China over the sovereignty of countries. Burdened by the Chinese debt, Laos and Cambodia almost act as proxies of China in ASEAN, blocking resolutions, which contradict China's interests. Rodrigo Duterte, the President of Philippines, stopped the military activities in a disputed region in the South China Sea due to China's financial clout over his country (Parker & Chefitz, 2018: 18). Eight Belt and Road recipient countries, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, the Maldives, Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, are at high-risk due to loans borrowed in the context of Belt and Road investments. Their debt levels exceed 50 percent of their GDPs and most of their external debt is owed to China (Gerstel, 2018). This accumulated debt is likely to create pressure over the sovereignty of the countries, which went under the debt obligation.

Although borrowing and lending activities suggest monetary transaction, money accumulation does not always mean hard cash such as banknotes or coins. In Netherlands, cash accounts for only seven percent of the money supply. The remainder consists of bank deposits, which meant debts owned by the bank. When banks make loan, this kind of money is created in that the loan granted become a new asset for the bank. The borrower party has to pay debt with interest. Simultaneously, a new deposit in the bank account which is same amount of the loan is created in the borrower's bank account (*Money and Debt*, 2019: 5). This feature of financial system is expressed by the CEO of the IBBC. When the renegade general states that his organization does have cash to repay arms that would be provided by the IBBC, the CEO replies cash is not the primary means of exchange of the IBBC (Tykwer, 2009). Developed monetary systems enable the system's perpetuity because accumulated capital offers bargaining power to those who are responsible for creating and using the money (Strange, 1994).

The International does not explicitly reveal the financial gains of the IBBC from the takeover of the targeted country. In order to illuminate these means of exchange, the example of Djibouti should be visited. The Djibouti government borrowed from Exim Bank located in China almost \$1 billion to finance various infrastructure projects. Due to change in LIBOR from 3.056 percent to 5.874 percent, the debt of Djibouti increased almost twofold (Pairault, 2020). In Djiboutian case, Djibouti also promises to call on the Chinese firms and the Chinese workers for its infrastructure development and upgrade of service sector (Pairault, 2020). This case indicates enormous powers held by the loaner bank. The loaned debt allowed Exim Bank to control not only financial sector of countries but also their fiscal policies.

This case helps us to speculate about the benefits that the IBBC gain in loaning debt to the targeted country. The IBBC could increase its profit almost twofold by just waiting for change in LIBOR, burdening the targeted country's economy. While the debt level of the targeted country rises, the leverage of the IBBC over this country also increases. As the IBBC controls the country's financial policies, it will also control its fiscal policies. That offers enormous political and economic clout to the IBBC in that it would be the IBBC that decides which country or company will enter into economic sectors of the country.

The conditions of the lenders over the debtor states compromise democratic processes in domestic politics. Foreign debt commitment is a significant part of budgetary calculations. The constraints on debt repayment compel the governments to pursue a balanced budget and austerity measures, encouraging adopting sticking to low inflation. For instance, Latin American countries, which is highly indebted, pursue austerity measures that sometimes caused low inflation and growth (Kaplan & Thomsson, 2017: 606). These austerity measures are likely to lead the incumbent government to perform badly in the elections as they have to prioritize the needs of the lenders over the needs of voters.

Bankers are the lenders, which are consistently willing to provide loans to the nation-states, which are considered high-risky by the financial institutions such as IMF and the World Bank. While lending to high-risky countries, these lenders increase their stakes concerning repayment of the debts. As these lenders have responsibilities to their shareholders, they are likely to exert more pressure over debtor governments. In that case, they impose austerity demands on the governments, which are indebted (Kaplan & Thomsson, 2017: 607).

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While the Swiss banks are shying away from establishing financial relations with the renegade general, the IBBC is engaging in a highly risky relations to help him to gain the control of the country by providing weapons, intelligence, logistical support as well as financial support. In exchange, it expects a friendly and thankful government, which will not be hesitant to meet its expectations. These expectations will be easier to be accommodated because the new regime will be authoritarian government based on military rule. The austerity policies and tax collection will be helpful in compensating the financial demands of the IBBC as the authoritarian military dictatorship does not have to consider the demands of people. Thus, an authoritarian government is preferable to the IBBC rather than a democratic government. The IBBC's missile deals with Syria and Iran also demonstrate this tendency.

It is ironic that the reason of the military coup, which increases debt, which in turn extends the transnational control of the IBBC, is nationalism. The broadcast shows that the renegade general, who concluded deal with the CEO of the IBBC, justifies the coup by stating that he is building national liberation and restoring nationhood (Tykwer, 2009).

Thus, nationalism serves as legitimizing tool for the coup plotters, which condemned their country to the dependence on the IBBC. The IBBC also takes advantage of the conflict of national interests among the Middle Eastern countries to make them purchase more weapons, surging their national debt. The Turkish arms dealer sales missiles to Syria and Iran simultaneously providing countermeasures to Israel (Tykwer, 2009). As nation-states experience conflict with each other and within themselves, the resistance to the activities of global capital is compromised.

3. RESISTANCE

The current stage of world economy signifies the transition from industrial to information economy, characterized by decentralized system of production. The hierarchical mode of production has been replaced by production modes based on networks. Networks do not need physical or territorial center (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 295). In this new form of economy, the relationship between multinational corporations and nation-states have been gradually changing. In the past, the nation-states managed restrain and control the activities of the capital. For instance, the crisis that the East India Company caused in India led to the promulgation of 1857 Indian act by the British parliament, ending the sovereignty of the East India Company over the territory of India. However, the increasingly deterritorialized capital after 1970s eclipsed the jurisdiction and power of the nation-states, integrating government and politics into a transnational arena (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 307).

The network economy is materialized by the participation of “*segments of firms, segments of governments and segments of the public sector*” (Castells, 2000: 154). Castell’s conceptualization of network economy resembles the constitution of *Empire* drawn by Hardt and Negri. When network is established with the participation of all segments of constitution, all layers of the constitution, the monarchy represented by the USA, aristocratic powers such as international institutions, multinational corporations, and democratic representatives, nation-states or NGOs, become partners in the system. As they all have a stake in the continuation of the system, the effective resistance is prevented.

The advisor of the IBBC, former Stasi member, told the Interpol inspector in the interrogation the futility of his endeavors in persecuting the IBBC:

Understand that the very system that you serve to protect will never allow anything to happen to Skarssen or the bank. On the contrary, the system guarantees the IBBC's safety because everyone is involved...Hezbollah, CIA, the Columbian drug cartels, Russian organized crime, Governments of Iran, Germany, China, your government. Every multinational corporation, every one. They all need banks like the IBBC so that they can operate within the black and gray latitudes. And this is why your investigative efforts have either been ignored or undermined and why you and I will be quietly disposed of before any case against the bank ever reaches a court of law (Tykwer, 2009).

Hardt and Negri identified *Empire* as an inclusive and incorporating entity, administering hybrid identities and conflicted exchanges (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 12). The character played by Armin-Mueller Stahl demonstrates inclusive character of *Empire*. A former communist, once served in Stasi, after the end of the Cold War, is advising a global bank in security and intelligence matters. *Empire* is also capable of managing the colliding interest of nation-states and global capital without incurring a substantial resistance. Although the IBBC infringes the sovereignty of the nation-states, the nation-states have also an interest in maintaining its opaque activities by participating in the networks. Since they involve themselves in the system where the IBBC operates, exposing the IBBC's illegal methods of making nations slaves of debt means the exposition of the nation states' own shady deals.

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The alternative method of resistance is offered as: *"You understand, if you really want to stop the IBBC you won't be able to do it within the boundaries of system of justice. You will have to go outside. Once you do, there will always be collateral damage"* (Tykwer, 2009). Hardt and Negri also contend that the forms of resistance to *Empire* can be divided inside and outside the law. Labor strikes, civil disobedience within the rules of law aims at ameliorating the oppression of the law. In a vague area, where the line between inside and outside is blurred, parties and trade unions operate. Outside the law, organized resistance movements and guerilla forces struggle to subvert and overthrow the existing order (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 88). Thus, the resistance attempts described by Hardt and Negri had organized structure. However, the resistance in *the International* is

individualistic. The Interpol inspector pursues a personalized goal of retribution despite the fact that he states he demands justice. Instead of targeting the IBBC, the inspector simply wants to kill the CEO of the bank. The CEO of the IBBC points out this naked truth and the fruitlessness of the inspector's goal: *"Executing me won't change anything. There will be 100 other bankers to take my place. Everything will continue. The only thing you'll succeeding in doing is to satisfy your own blood lust."* (Tykwer, 2009). The death of the CEO does not signify justice, but it implies satisfaction of personal vendetta.

Although the CEO was killed by the assassin sent by the sons of the murdered Italian arms dealer, his final words proved to be true. The closing credits demonstrates despite the fluctuations emanated from the deaths of leadership of the bank, the IBBC quickly recovered itself. Another CEO replaced the deceased one. The IBBC even succeeded its operations in the third world countries. This demonstrates the power of the networks in overwhelming its opponents. When an organized network attacks, it swarms its enemy, striking from all directions and fall back into its environment. The movement of the networks appears formless and spontaneous as traditional thinking is characterized on hierarchical structure. However, a network is organized, rational, and creative, possessing the intelligence of swarm (Hardt & Negri, 2004: 91). *The International* shows the operation of the network that the IBBC created and administered. Despite it encountered several adversities on the way, it managed to overcome these difficulties tactfully.

The last fragment of the movie mentions a Senate investigation led by former Manhattan District Attorney is being conducted regarding the role of the IBBC in proliferation of global conflicts (Tykwer, 2009). This news offers silver lining in this bleak outlook. However, the investigation is opened to inquire the role of just one bank, the IBBC. As one individual is replaced by another individual as the head of the IBBC, the possible criminal fine for the IBBC does not change the system. Even if the IBBC is closed, another bank will replace the IBBC. The system will remain even though its players change. Furthermore, the IBBC or another bank will avoid replicating the mistakes, which led to the exposure. Thus, the system is going to be stronger because these investigations, which do not change the system but eliminating incapable players would serve as inoculator for the system.

CONCLUSION

The International differs itself from the rest of the political thrillers in that it paints a realistic picture in detailing the operations of global finance. Especially after the end of the Bretton Woods system, which fixates U.S. dollar to gold, in 1971, the dollar has become a fiat currency and the restrictions on capital has been gradually being lifted. Instead of strong imperialist countries, the banks and financial institutions are becoming political actors in the international arena. *The International* narrates how a multinational bank, whose headquarters located in Luxembourg, manipulates international politics by engaging in illicit activities such as dealing with illegal arms deals, funding renegade generals, and providing missiles to countries, considered as rogue by the international community.

To understand the position of the multinational banks in the international system, this paper used *Empire* written by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The main argument of Hardt and Negri is that the imperialism of the powerful countries is an outdated notion in the international arena. Currently, the postmodern *Empire* dominates the global political and economic life. It encompasses three forms of government: the monarchy, embodied by the USA, the aristocracy, manifested in international institutions, multinational corporations, global banks, nation-states, and the democracy, represented by the NGOs and nation-states. Hardt and Negri argue that the intense competition takes place in the level of aristocracy. The components which comprise the aristocracy engage in a fierce clash to increase their shares of power such as nation-states versus international institutional or multinational corporations versus nation-states (Hardt & Negri, 2019: 74). This paper evaluates the main conflict in *the International* takes place in the aristocratic layer. The prosecutor in the movie acts as an agent of the monarchy, the USA. Her involvement in the events is limited. The main aristocratic powers in *the International* are the Interpol inspector and the global bank, the IBBC. Other minor actors such as arms dealers involve in the conflict between these two main aristocratic powers. Democratic elements in *the International* are weak as in the reality. The nation-states in the movie are either passive or corrupt. There are no NGOs to affect the events.

The main tool that the IBBC uses to subdue nations or individuals is debt, which forms the very essence of the banking industry. Private businesses or nation-states need credits

to flourish and invest. The banks and credit institutions provide this needed credit. This transaction appears purely economic, but it also has the political dimension. As the credits are provided in exchange of conditions, which might entail from implementing austerity measures in the country's budget to deciding which firms invest in the indebted country. Although the international relations literature investigates debt diplomacy between economically advanced countries and developing countries, *the International* reminds us that the primary organs that deal with debts are banks. Independent of strong states, these banks exert political sovereignty over the indebted countries. They are active players of the international politics. As long as economic inequality gap is so unevenly growing, this relationship will not change.

What makes *the International* fresh is the IBBC itself is not a rogue player in the system. It operates in the grey area where the legal international institutions, the nation-states, and other groups operate. The serious political conspiracy movies such as *the Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 1962), *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollack, 1977), *The Package* (Andrew Davis, 1989), *Conspiracy Theory* (Richard Donner, 1997) either deal with the conspiracies perpetrated by rival states or the attempts of an evil group within state structure to seize control. In the end, the antagonists are neutralized by the protagonists, leading to catharsis for the viewers. This narrative in these movies exculpate the system, putting the blame on the players. *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974) approaches to the narrative of *the International*, centering on the activities of the Parallax corporation instead of activities of evil government officials. However, it fails short in identifying the goals of the Parallax corporation; thus, the corporation is viewed as some sort of an occult organization. There are no evil men or corporations in *the International*. There are just rational political and economic players. The IBBC is presented as rational and calculative actor in the international arena, which tries to maximize its interests and profits. In this respect, the movie narrates and shows how the system is set up and operates realistically.

The final of *the International* is also compatible with the general narrative of the movie. In the end, the protagonist as one individual could not overthrow *Empire* miraculously. The IBBC's activities continue even though its CEO was killed. It succeeds in instigating the coup and concluding arms deal, which increase the debts of the countries. The power of capital offers the IBBC strength to deal with troubles that it encountered. The last

fragment of the movie shows that an investigation in U.S. Senate started regarding the role of the IBBC. However, the worst punishment that the IBBC might face will be a criminal fine which the IBBC could pay easily because the USA would not compromise the system of which it is also part. In future, the IBBC will be more careful in its operations not to repeat mistakes which exposed its activities. Thus, *Empire* continues to function smoothly.

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