

Ecclesiology as doing theology *in and with* local communities but *not of* the empire

Johan-Albrecht Meylahn
Department Practical theology,
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

The concept of *empire* has re-emerged as one useful to interpret and describe the joining of dominant global themes that together construct a global homogeneous totality. Some of the main themes of this totality are: global finance/capitalism which goes hand in hand with consumerism, global media and communication technologies, security (including personal, national and global), equity within a context of limited natural resources and postmodern multi-culturalism with so-called religious pluralism. These themes, together, have created a system of meaning – an imperial world-of-meaning, that is imperialistic in the sense that it takes on absolute proportions as it does not acknowledge or accommodate alternative worlds-of-meaning unless such worlds-of-meaning have consumer value in a so-called pluralistic society, thus allowing alternative voices to be assimilated into the Same. South Africa is not exempt from this imperialism as our political-economic reality and our culture – which is strongly determined by the global media and social life – is dependent on, and interpreted within, the context of empire. This article will ask the question: What role can the local church play in such an imperialistic context? In response to this question the article will unpack a hermeneutical way of doing theology *in and with* the local community that is *not of* the empire as a possible ecclesiological response to empire. In other words, a theology that is contextual and embedded within the local community, yet that is not determined by the empire, but critically engages with the empire as it challenges the local effects of empire, thereby creating a liberated space for alternative realities.

Why speak of empire in South Africa?

Why speak of *empire* in South Africa? There are so many local challenges that it seems irresponsible to focus on a global issue such as empire. This would indeed be a very valid argument if empire were to be interpreted in the traditional sense¹ of international power struggles where one nation or ethnic group dominates other nations or ethnic groups, often ending in one or other form of colonisation. Colonisation can take on different forms. It can either be the physical occupation of territories by a foreign power, or it can be a form of dominating and controlling, through financial and technological power, the social-cultural and information space of other nations.² The physical or judicial occupation of foreign countries is the classic interpretation of empire, but there are other interpretations which are very useful in interpreting and understanding the present global world order. The concept of *empire*, with a capital “E” as Hardt and Negri (Hardt & Negri 2000) write it, has emerged as a very helpful tool to interpret and understand the postmodern homogeneous totality that is woven together through global finance (capital), military power and the media/information conglomerates. As Hardt and Negri argue, there is a world order that is expressed as a juridical formation and this formation can best be explained in terms of empire. The word *empire* comes from the Latin word *imperium* meaning power or authority. Thus, in a sense, it is about who has the authority to determine what is right within a certain geographical area or, in other words, who has the right to make the laws (written or unwritten). Hardt and Negri believe that within the postmodern global world, an authority – or financial, military information power – has arisen, one that is global and thus globally determines and enforces its interpretation of what is right. Therefore they interpret empire as a juridical formation which determines what is right and acts as a global police force to enforce its interpretation of what is right, thereby protecting, sustaining and perpetuating the current global-world-order.

The factors that have created this juridical formation that exercises authoritative power on a global level (*imperium*) are a combination of economic, industrial, military (or an industrial-military

¹ An empire is a state with politico-military dominion of populations who are culturally and ethnically distinct from the imperial (ruling) ethnic group and its culture (*The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, Second Edition (2001), p.461)

² The impact of the media that is dominated by a certain culture needs to be taken into consideration and how this culture is colonizing other cultures by controlling and dominating their media space.

complex) and communication (information and media) factors. These factors have created a formation that is an authority on its own, without any reference to anything outside it, and in that sense it is an absolute immanent authority without any transcendence, which makes it absolute. It can be described as a machine – a technological machine that functions according to its own rules and regulations without recourse to any outside legitimisation. Hardt and Negri speak of an economic-industrial-communicative machine – in short, a globalised biopolitical machine (Hardt & Negri 2000: 40). One can also add military to this machine, thus an economic-industrial-military-communicative machine. It is not necessary to agree with all aspects of Hardt and Negri's analysis of empire – however, the idea that there is a singular world order that dominates the globe and dictates what is right cannot be denied.

There are those who are critical of the concept of empire as a biopolitical machine functioning on its own and would rather identify a subjective force (nation) behind it and that, in a sense, transcends it and thus legitimises it. In most such interpretations, the United States of America is interpreted as the subjective imperial force behind the global world order. These critical voices interpret the current world order as a form of US imperialism (Foster 2001; Ahmad 2004; Pieterse 2004; Ikenberry 2001; Laxer 2003). There are others who would argue that there is no empire or imperialism, but rather numerous forms of imperialisms in today's world such as various "nation-empires" or "quasi-imperial states" (Okur, 2007; Shaw, 2002). These different opinions are not mutually exclusive, but can be thought of together as they complement each other in an attempt to interpret and understand certain phenomena in the world today. This is the problem with a concept like "empire" or "imperialism": the very use of such strong terms with capital letters, which designate or name something as something, is always done at the exclusion of other voices and thus, in a sense, the use of such capitalised names is a form of *imperialism*. This imperialism of proper, and especially capitalised, names needs to be kept in mind in trying to understand the re-emergence of the concept of empire in today's world.

However, although there are these different opinions as to how empire and imperialism should be interpreted, most would agree that these terms have re-emerged in an attempt to interpret and understand socio-economic and political phenomena in a global world. In other words, these terms are linked to globalisation. Globalisation is another term that has numerous interpretations. In this article, globalisation will specifically refer to the economic, military and technological (media and information) expansion and the weakening of state sovereignty and state structures by this expansion (cf. Laxer 2003: 133).

It is in this context of globalisation that the return of the term empire, and its relevance to South Africa, will be interpreted and discussed.

If empire, as *imperium*, is understood as a world-of-meaning [authority that determines what is right] then it is not something external to South Africa, and thus it is not something that would fall into the province of foreign policy makers. However, it is something that has to do with the everyday reality in South Africa. When friends, colleagues and family talk about everyday things, such as financial prosperity, security, the latest drama in the local or foreign soap operas, or their struggle to find values with which to guide their daily actions, these conversations are inevitably embedded within the language (world-of-meaning) of empire. These conversations take place in the language [the mechanics/grammar] of the biopolitical machine which means that, although empire is certainly something global, it is also something as close to the local community and the individual as the language (world-of-meaning) that is used to interpret events and interpret oneself [identity], and as the tools (information/media/culture/society) in which and from which humans interpret themselves and the world. All these are part of empire.

The classic idea of empire tries to force the world into categories such as the coloniser and the colonised, or the oppressor and the oppressed, or the factory or mine owners [bourgeoisie] and the working class [proletariat]. These are still useful terms for highly emotional political rhetorical speeches and such rhetoric will gather tremendous support as people desire a clearly defined enemy that they can blame for all their local challenges, but such rhetoric does not hit the mark concerning the issue/s that is/are at stake. The clear lines of separation are not that clear any more. The world or nation can no longer be divided into the rich imperial bourgeoisie against the poor working class [proletariat], as in this global world-order one can speak of everyone being a proletariat (Meylahn 2010b:3). Such a statement can be interpreted in different ways. It can either be interpreted as there being no winners, only losers, in this global-world-order and that the order [the machine] itself is the only winner. This would be only half the truth as clearly there are not necessarily winners. Certainly, though, there are those who, financially, benefit tremendously from the global-world-order, and likewise there are those who struggle to make a living on the margins of this global-world-order and thus reap very few benefits from the order. It is, therefore, perhaps more useful to use the metaphor of villagers (those who benefit from the global-world-order) and marginalised (those who scrape together a living on the margins of

the global-world-order) (cf. Meylahn, 2010a), yet both remain part of the global-world-order and try and make a living and find meaning within this machine.

Thus, everyone being proletariat means that the machine (global-world-order) is so complex and all encompassing that one is simultaneously victim and perpetrator of the machine. One's identity and interpretation of the world is constructed on the basis of information and information is produced and consumed according to the dictates of the market and thus one is caught in the mechanics of this production and consumption. Any attempt to escape this cycle results in the production of different information and meaning which is immediately transformed into something that can be consumed. In the desire to seek alternative meaning and identity beyond what the market offers, and in an attempt to escape the auto-production of the machine, one creates (produces) new information which becomes something to be consumed and thus the very attempt to escape becomes the basis of the perpetuation of the machine. As consumerables and information continually change (are produced) this becomes a never ending cycle of production.³ As one continually seeks one's identity in the consumption of material goods as well as the consumption of information one sustains and perpetuates the machine. There is no way beyond as any new "territory" that could act as an alternative to the machine is immediately incorporated into the cycle of production and consumption. In fact, the machine needs such new "territory" to colonise – that is to include within its mechanics. As Badiou says, referring to Deleuze, capitalist deterritorialisation requires a constant reterritorialisation.

Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle movement to homogenise its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market (Badiou 2003:10-11).

For example, if one would decide that one is not going to reduce one's identity to the things one consumes, but tries to find something truly authentic, the moment "that" is found it is transformed into a fad and thus becomes exactly what it wanted to counter, and the market thrives on this new "territory". Any bookstore will bear testimony to the numerous so-called authentic self-help and identity-finding books that have made a lot of money. Yet, also on an international level, the so-called local imperialism (nation-empires or quasi-imperial states) are exactly what the biopolitical machine needs as these offer new "territory" to be colonised and they justify the continuous state of exception within the world order.

Empire is a comprehensive world-of-meaning that dominates and creates the biopolitical machine by assimilating alternative worlds-of-meaning into the same by transforming them into consumerable products within the mechanics of the endless re-production of the machine itself.

If one does not recognise this universalisation of the biopolitical machine and still continues to argue along the traditional lines of division the real issues will not be addressed. It is easy to point fingers at possible nations or groups of nations (for example the United States of America or the G8) as being imperialistic and, thereby, to not recognise the empire right on one's doorstep or in one's home.

Thus empire has to do with global macro political-economic realities, but it also has to do with the individual struggling to find meaning in his or her world. It is thus both abstract and removed in international relations as much as it is intimate, personal and local.

In the following section, both these aspects of empire will be unpacked.

The rise of empire

Before the concept of empire as world-of-meaning is further unpacked, a short reflection on the rise and development of empire as a biopolitical machine, functioning as an economic-industrial-military-communicative machine, will be offered.

The first step will be to tell the story of the rise of "empire" or neo-liberal sovereignty in the global village and the central role that the United States of America played in the rise of neo-liberal global capital and the USA's hegemony in this world order. In this section, Hardt and Negri's concept of empire will be used as a useful description of the world order that has been created. In the following section, various responses to this world order will be unpacked, but it will be argued that these responses are not alternatives, but are logical consequences of empire.

Empire refers to the economic-industrial-military-communicative machine or, as Hardt and Negri refer to it, the biopolitical machine (Hardt & Negri 2000: 40). They believe that there has been a radical shift that brings together economic power and political power to realise a properly capitalist

³ Refer to the Lacan's discourse of the hysteric within the capitalist discourse (Meylahn 2010b).

order. “In constitutional terms, the processes of globalisation are no longer merely a fact but also a source of juridical definitions that tends to project a single supranational figure of political power” (Hardt & Negri 2000:9). In other words, as already mentioned above, a single judicial formation determines what is right globally and that was formed by a combination of numerous factors, such as:

- The development of capitalism through various phases towards transnational corporations and global finance markets with the subsequent demise of the nation state (cf. Meylahn 2010a:284-332)
- The world military order and the securing of limited natural resources (cf. Meylahn 2010a:336-340)
- The divisions of labour and the transformations with regards to the global labour market (cf. Meylahn 2010a:332-336)
- The role of postmodernity (cf. Meylahn 2010a:385-400)
- The role of global media conglomerates (cf. Meylahn 2010a:340-350)

These various factors are woven together into what I have elsewhere called the *postmodern global village*⁴ or, as Hardt and Negri call it, the biopolitical machine. This section will focus on the role the United States of America played in the weaving together of this sphere.

This sketch of the development is not intended to suggest that there has been an evil or benign (depending on one’s political-economic views) US mastermind behind the rise of empire which would translate into a conspiracy theory of globalisation, nor can one argue that empire arose spontaneously out of the interactions of radically heterogeneous global forces, together forming a harmonious concert orchestrated by the so-called natural and neutral hidden hand of the market. What one can say is that the US certainly played, and is playing, a central role in the rise and maintenance of empire, but one can at best argue that this role came to the US and was then further subjectively exploited through a combination of various geographical and historical factors. One could say that the geographical and historical situatedness of the US made it the ideal channel for the development of empire, and certain sections of the US population have certainly benefited tremendously and promoted and constructively worked towards this development. What is argued is that the biopolitical global machine is fully immanent and thus there is no transcendental subject (specific nation) behind it as some kind of mastermind, yet certain nations benefit tremendously and thus purposefully pursue the continuation and protection of the machine and others try to direct the mechanics to their advantage, and they have the necessary global power to do that within the mechanics of the machine.

Ikenberry (2001) unpacks this unique situatedness (historical and geographical circumstance) of the USA within history that ideally placed the USA to play a decisive role in the rise of the “empire of capitalist democracy”, as he put it. He argues that the USA hegemony is rooted in geography, history, ideology, democracy, institutional structures, and modernisation itself, and that this makes it different from other past great powers (Ikenberry 2001:211-212). The fact of the matter is that the United States is a global superpower without historical precedent as it stands at the centre of an expanding democratic-capitalist world order. The US dominates not only on the military level as it is the only nation state that has military bases throughout the world, but also on the economic level, monetary level, technological level and even the cultural level. But what makes the United States so powerful is not that it is a powerful nation state that can throw its military and economic weight around, which at times it does, but mainly and primarily because it provides the language, symbolism, ideas and institutional frameworks around which the world turns (Ikenberry 2001:192). The United States has become the central hub through which the world’s important military, political, economic, scientific, and cultural connection pass. A small example of the power of this hub – continental philosophy remains continental and only read and discussed in the countries of origin and maybe in one or two neighbouring countries, but once translated and published in the US they become part of the global dialogue. Where would Derrida and Žižek be today if not translated and published in the US?

The European Union certainly has the same economic weight, but it does not have the same military, security, media and information reach as the US. This position of power and reach within the world order could easily lead to calling the US an empire, but one needs to be careful of the use of such words. If imperialism is understood as a coercive system of domination, then the American-centred world is not an empire, Ikenberry argues (Ikenberry 2001). There are those that would disagree and argue that the US is coercive and does indeed dominate, and yes it certainly does, and there are numerous examples of this in recent history, but not in the classic sense of empire as the US does not form physical colonies. The classic sense of an empire is to colonise and occupy territories, which the

⁴ (Meylahn 2010a: 279-474)

US does not. Yet Ikenberry argues that if empires are understood as “inclusive systems of order organised around a dominant state – and its laws, economy, military, and political institutions – then the United States has indeed constructed a world democratic-capitalist empire” (Ikenberry 2001:192). He argues that there are three different kinds of hegemonic orders. The first is based on coercive domination and, in such situations, the weaker or dominated states will always seek at some time to overthrow the hegemonic power. The second type of hegemonic order is held together by a minimal convergence of interests. The dominant state will provide some kind of services to the subordinated state that these states find useful – sufficiently useful so as to prevent them from rising up against the dominant state. The role of the US in Western Europe after World War II, as well as in East Asia and the Middle East, can be seen as this second type of hegemonic power as the US provides security and access to the market. The third type of hegemonic order is thoroughly “institutionalized and infused with reciprocal processes of political interaction so that the hierarchy of the order is all but obscured. This is a quasi-rule-based and open hegemony” (Ikenberry 2001:197). This third type can be compared to what Hardt and Negri (Hardt & Negri 2000:1-21) call empire – empire as an intricate system of military, economic, media “dominion” that has created the global biopolitical machine we inhabit.

This is exactly why one can indeed speak of empire, because no matter what, one is always already involved as both beneficiary and victim of the world order as this world order encompasses everything and every aspect of life, which makes it very difficult to resist. Thus many so-called forms of resistance to empire, such as globalisation from below, etcetera are not really a form of resistance as they are totally entwined in empire – whilst challenging certain aspects, they promote others.⁵

It is difficult to critique that from which one also benefits as such a criticism would be detrimental to the self. For example, a nation that seeks to rise up against the world order will be isolated (via international sanctions, etcetera) from that order. One can critique the US role in the world order, but as one also survives and benefits by being connected to this world order, this “life-line” weakens the incentive to try to overrule the hegemonic dominion. If the financial world is controlled by a global economy, which is largely determined and certainly dominated by the US and the G8, it does not make sense to too critically engage these dominant powers as this would weaken the global economy of which individual states are part and would thus be detrimental to a particular nation. In a global economy it is very difficult to isolate oneself so as to be able to critique the system, as such isolation would translate into tremendous suffering and poverty for the citizens, so much so that eventually the citizens would revolt against such isolation. Such a revolt could be suppressed by the national government, but the global media and information networks would globally condemn such suppression based on the global-world-order’s [machine’s] interpretation of what is right and thereby sanction and legitimise the global police force to forcefully intervene (if it makes financial sense to intervene, that is).

The development of the US into this role of the hegemonic power of the third type is the result of numerous geographical and historical factors.

The US is isolated geographically and could develop economically without the other potential superpowers really taking notice, unlike, for example, Germany or Japan who – once they developed economically and militarily – found that their neighbours immediately noticed.

Historically the US emerged from World War II as the leading global power and, as the leading global power, proceeded to organise the world according to its interests. Part of this organising of the world was to make sure that the world developed towards an open economic system. Capitalism needs continuous new markets (the reason the nations of Europe developed colonies), but the US decided against the idea of colonies and instead adopted an open order that would allow multilateral trade and resource access – especially resource access – and markets for the US. This was a wise decision as, in the 1930s, the world was carved up into insular economic blocs. These blocs were antagonistic and partly responsible for the rise of the World War. The US never followed the route of colonies, but rather the route of open access and mutually beneficial agreements that indeed always favoured the more powerful partner.

The US realised that to remain a great power it had to seek openness and access in both Europe and Asia. Therefore, after World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, there was enough incentive for both the US as well as the other leading nations to develop relationships that were mutually beneficial. The US realised that it needed open access to resources and markets in Europe and Asia if the US economy was going to continue to grow and thus the US needed to keep these countries from falling under Soviet control. As these nations had no desire to fall under Soviet control they invited and welcomed US security stations within their borders and, in exchange, offered the US access to resources and markets. The offer to the US of access to resources and markets was also welcomed as

⁵ For further reflection on this see (Meylahn 2009: 152)

this opened the door to world trade and world finance. These security and economic ties that glued the Western world together were based on mutually beneficial terms in which the US role was dominant. “Access to resources and markets, socioeconomic stability, political pluralism, and the American security interests were all tied together” (Ikenberry 2001:199).

The second source of US power was the role of the dollar within the Western world.

The dollar’s special status gave the United States the rights of “seigniorage”: it could print extra money to fight foreign wars, increase domestic spending, and go deeply into debt without fearing the pain that other states would experience. Other countries would have to adjust their currencies, which were linked to the dollar, when Washington pursued an inflationary course to meet its foreign and domestic policy agendas (Ikenberry 2001:200).

The dollar as an international reserve currency is part of the hegemonic power of the US. Countries can threaten to sell their dollar reserves and thereby destabilise the dollar, but they would never do that as a collapse in the US economy would result in the US withdrawing its overseas forces and thus opening a security threat for these nations. Thus the economic power and the military power of the US together form a formidable unit that is mutually beneficial to the countries that are under its protection – which is what Ikenberry described as the third type of hegemony. Thus in the Western world, at least in Europe and Asia, one can speak of a US empire by invitation (Ikenberry 2001:203). This relationship reinforces the image of the US as a relatively non-coercive and non-imperial hegemonic power.

The important role of democracy, at least in the ideology of the US, has brought about the creation of international democratic institutions and international organisations where the various role players have a say. This makes the US hegemonic power less threatening.

The open and decentralized character of the American political system provided opportunities for other states to exercise their voice in the operation of hegemonic order, thereby reassuring these states that their interest could be actively advanced and processes of conflict resolution would exist. In this sense, the American post war order was a “penetrate hegemony”, an extended system that blurred domestic and international politics as it created an elaborate transnational and transgovernmental political system with the United States at the centre (Ikenberry 2001:206).

The US commitment to democratic institutions makes the US a relatively predictable hegemon. Although the US has flouted international democratic processes with its refusal to sign international treaties, thus exempting itself from international democratic will and law, it still remains relatively predictable.

Lastly, the close “fit” between the US project and modernisation. “American power has been rendered more acceptable to the rest of the world because the United States ‘project’ is congruent with the deeper forces of modernization” (Ikenberry 2001:208).

This functional fit between the project of modernisation and the US project can be compared to what Heidegger described as the *Gestell* which he unpacked in *Beiträge (Vom Ereignis)* (Heidegger 1989) – ever-increasing technological ways of thinking and behaving as the climax of the modern project. One could argue that this climax of the modern project – *Gestell* – finds its completion in the US’s role in the global-world-order and the rise of a new kind of sovereignty that determines what is right without access to an external transcendent authority, but purely immanently according to the technical logic of the biopolitical machine. Modernity is seen as the site of *Machenschaft* translated as machination as everything is enframed within the *Gestell* which reproduces itself without any references to anything outside of itself. These ideas are very close to the concept of empire. Empire Hardt and Negri describe as follows:

Along with the global market and global circuits of production, a global order, a new logic and structure of rule, has emerged – in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world (Hardt & Negri 2000:xi).

This, at first, seems to be a paradox as the development of global capital went hand-in-hand with neo-liberal ideas and the whole ideology of small government. So there are those who would argue that the problem with globalisation is that there is no big government and that it is not controllable, and thus it is left totally to its own devices. Hardt and Negri argue that the decline in the sovereignty of the nation

states does not translate into the decline of sovereignty per se (Hardt & Negri 2000:xi), as this biopolitical machine is its own sovereignty, its own *imperium*, that is empire.

The relationship between empire and the US needs to be clarified. The US certainly played a central role in the rise of empire (capitalist global-world-order) as the new sovereignty but this easily leads to confusing the US as a new imperialist power similar to the previous imperialist powers. Depending on one's views, this imperialist power is either seen as the great evil or as the great benign superpower that is saving the world. Empire is not a US version of previous imperialisms. According to Hardt and Negri, imperialism is over land, thus no single nation state can don the mantle of imperialist power (Hardt & Negri 2000:xiv).

The US does indeed have a privileged position in this world order which can be seen from the role it has played in the development and growth thereof, but its position of privilege derives not from similarities to the old European imperialisms, but from important differences. Thus the concept empire is not used metaphorically by Hardt and Negri, but as a theoretical concept based on three assumptions concerning empire (Hardt & Negri 2000:xiv-xv). The first is that empire is characterised by a lack of boundaries, in other words, Empire is all encompassing. Secondly, empire "presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity" (Hardt & Negri, 2000:xiv). Empire is thus outside of history, or it can be interpreted as the end of history – which again links up with Heidegger's idea of the *Gestell* (Heidegger 1989). Thirdly, the rule of empire operates on all levels of social order extending to the depths of the social world. It "not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower" (Hardt & Negri 2000:xv).

Like all empires, empire is dedicated to peace, although its practice is continuously bathed in blood and in that sense not very different from the *Pax Romana*.

Pax Americana is not just a powerful country throwing its weight around. It is a political formation with its own logic and laws of motion. It is an order that was created and sustained by American power but it is also not simply a reflection of that power ... The United States remains at the core of this order but it is an order that now has a life of its own (Ikenberry 2001:212).

Empire and imperialism/s

As already mentioned, there are those who do not agree with Hardt and Negri's interpretation of empire and believe that the world order is still dominated by the imperialism of the United States or different forms of imperialism over and against Hardt and Negri's empire.

Aijaz Ahmad clearly argues for the imperialism of the United States of America, specifically after the end of the Cold War, and he offers very convincing arguments to substantiate his position. Although he would agree that the US imperialism is different from traditional imperialism where foreign territories are brought under direct control of the dominant nation, he speaks of the imperialism of democracy and human rights (Ahmad 2004:46). In the name of democracy and human rights wars have been fought by the US to increase its global dominion and to ensure the free flow of resources and to open new markets. The US has taken for itself the right to be the global police force to intervene where ever it sees fit and necessary to protect its own security interests and to ensure the continuous growth of its global empire. This is not so different to what Hardt and Negri are saying as they agree that the US plays a central role in empire, but empire is more than the imperialism of the US. It is something much more comprehensive and it needs to be understood as such otherwise alternatives cannot be found.

Another argument is that there is not one imperial power, but numerous nation empires (Okur 2007) or quasi-empires (Shaw 2002). The idea is that in order to counter the hegemonic power of the US there need to be other regionalisations such as the creation of the European Union or similar developments in Asia as well as in Latin America and the Southern African Development Community. This is an attempt to create alternative economic blocs that can counter the dominance of the US in the global market. These economic power blocs then also form little regional empires within their area and do locally what they criticise the US of doing globally, which is not really an alternative to empire, but a creation of various blocs in an attempt to redistribute resources, but it remains within the workings and logic of empire. The same is with the development of quasi-empires and local, ethnic dictatorships which seem to develop in contrast to the imperialism of the US, but are on the contrary exactly what

empire thrives on and what empire needs to justify the permanent state of exception and thus the permanent state of war (police action).

The problem is that empire is so inclusive and comprehensive that it is truly universal so that such regionalisation of power and localised empires are not a threat to empire, but opportunities for it to expand and display its hegemony. It is thus important to understand the universalism of empire and not interpret the global-world-order along traditional political and economic lines within the matrix of the modern nation states where certain nation states are interpreted as good and others as rogue states. Such an interpretation would not take the reach of empire seriously. As mentioned earlier, empire has to do with both the global political and economic, but also with the local and individual.

Empire as a world-of-meaning that assimilates all differences into the same

In the previous section the rise of the biopolitical machine or global-world-order [empire] was unpacked as an interaction between economic, security (military), media information technology and postmodernity under the dominion of the finance market.

It was mentioned that this biopolitical machine has to do with the everyday reality of people and this becomes clear in the dominant stories that people talk about or are concerned about. It is difficult to identify a single story as every story will be different, but there certainly are dominant themes. One theme that dominates in conversations is money. Financial prosperity and financial security comes up so often as theme or underlying theme in conversations. For some it is about becoming more prosperous and for others it is a question of survival. In such a machine, survival is dependent on money and this means human survival has to do with access to money. This first dominant theme links up with the first factor that, together with the others, weaves together the biopolitical machine, namely the transformation and development of capitalism into a global financial market with transnational corporations. For example, one cannot speak of financial security only on a national and local level as developments in other parts of the world have a direct impact on the local currency. In the time of the writing of this chapter, the political crisis in Egypt directly impacted the exchange value of the South African Rand.

Another dominant theme that can be identified is security. Specifically in South Africa with the high crime rates it is certainly a question of personal security. Whether one lives in a security village or in an informal settlement there is a common concern for one's security. The theme of security includes personal and material security as well as health security and it ties up with national security interests and therefore with global security interests. The security industry is, in turn, linked to the financial market either through insurance companies, pension funds, medical health schemes or through the military-industrial complex and the securing of natural resources or securing the borders of the nation. It is amazing how often conversations concerning crime [security] are linked to questions of border control and the question of migration.

The third dominant theme is employment and the tremendous transformations and globalisation in the global labour market. This theme will have slightly different emphasis depending on where in the global world order one is situated – as a villager or as one marginalised. As villager, the theme will probably be concerning the high global competitiveness and that one not only competes with the local competitors, but is in continuous competition with global contenders and thus experiences a lot of pressure to continually perform in order to keep one's job. This theme is closely linked to the global mobility of labour as people can shift between nations as the transnational corporations shift their employees from one continent to another. As marginalised, the theme will be similar, as the struggle to enter into the global labour market becomes more and more complex. Transnational corporations seek out the best labour conditions for maximum profit and thus countries that try to protect their labour forces with certain labour laws might in the end actually "force" their labour forces into unemployment as the transnational corporations move elsewhere for cheaper labour. Job insecurity is a global phenomenon, irrespective of one's position within the machine. Even CEO's of large corporations are not secure in their employment as the financial markets [share value] dictate and, if there is a drop in the share value of a specific company this can be the incentive for an aggressive takeover by another company and thus the CEO, together with the board of directors, will be without employment. What unites the top management in the village with those struggling on the margins is that they are both dependent on the global financial market and neither of them have much control over that market – it works according to its own legitimisation. So the market, together with the other factors that make up this machine, has taken on a life of its own with its own laws – a judicial formation as Hardt and Negri refer to it. It is no longer seen as a human political economic construction, but it is seen as "natural" and inevitable: "This is the way things are – we cannot do anything about it!"

The very recent financial crisis has certainly woken politicians up and political parties are attempting to find ways in which this machine can be brought under control.

The media and information technologies play a vital role in weaving together this world into a single world order and a singular world-of-meaning. The world is already woven together into a singular economic, labour and security complex and, through the media and information technology, it develops a singular language – singular world-of meaning.

Although a family might be poor, they share in the global dream of a prosperous life thanks to the media that glorifies prosperity through glossy magazines, billboards and various soap operas. Martin and Schumann say it so poignantly: “If the nearly 6 billion inhabitants of the planet could really decide by referendum how they wanted to live, there would be an overwhelming majority for the kind of middle class existence lived in a suburb of San Francisco” (Martin & Schumann 1998:14). This universal dream or universal language (world-of-meaning) is thanks to the more than 500 active satellites that are sweeping around the globe with a uniform visual code of a new homogeneous global culture of consumption.

The last theme that unites with the above is the theme of postmodern relativism, which is a certain interpretation of postmodernity, but an interpretation that suits the market perfectly, as this relativism continuously produces new relative information and thus sustains the market that has reached the boundaries of global physical expansion and therefore it can only expand further by producing information and exploiting information for commercial gain (cf. Meylahn 2010b). It becomes a matter of production of production, in other words the reproduction of production. For example, if somebody (like many have) would write a book criticising and analysing this world order, this book (information) would immediately enter into the market where it might become a best seller and thus become part of the very thing it wishes to criticise. In this way, critical or alternative voices are celebrated and, in the celebration, they are commodified and thereby assimilated into the same world-of-meaning.

To understand the rise of empire, Hardt and Negri reflect on the work of Michel Foucault and his arguments concerning the passage from a *disciplinary society* to a *society of control* (Hardt & Negri, 2000:22). There are certain similarities between this society of control and the *Gestell* that Heidegger spoke of. The society of control is where the mechanism of command becomes ever more “democratic”, ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of citizens. The behaviours of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorised within the subjects themselves. Power is now exercised through machines that directly organise the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity (Hardt & Negri 2000:23).

Within such a system, control is exercised by controlling the language, ideas and symbols which are internalised. This idea of control cannot be thought separate from Foucault’s idea of biopower. Biopower is a technology of power with which to manage (administer) or control people as a group. “Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself” (Hardt & Negri 2000:24). What is at stake is the production of biopower, which is the “production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest in one another” (Hardt & Negri 2000:xiii).

Thus, empire is not only about global macro political-economic factors, but it is about the world-of-meaning that one lives in and the language one uses to try to interpret and understand this world-of-meaning. A world-of-meaning that is founded on the myth that this is the way things are and that it will never change, as if the market was the natural given unquestionable space for human existence. This myth is propagated and maintained through the media, information and advertising and thus determines the language of the biopolitical machine. It is within this language that humans seek to make sense of their world, but it is the language of the machine used to understand the machine, and thus it truly is an empire that has no boundaries as it includes everything.

The church called to do theology *in* and *with* local communities but *not of* the empire

How can the church respond to empire by being a church *in* the empire (as she has no choice), but not *of* the empire? In other words, how can the church be a church *in* and *with* the local community, but not a form of sanction, blessing of or therapy for the empire? There are certainly churches that are a sanction of empire which becomes visible in the Christian Right, especially in conservative politics where the church sanctions wars on terrorism, sanctions stricter immigration laws, etcetera. The church has, for many years, performed the function of blessing of the state or empire and similarly it can

become the institution that blesses empire in that it blesses the ideology of prosperity and financial success as the God-ordained world order.

The church can easily also function as a kind of therapy for the empire – as the empire exhausts its subjects they come to church to be spiritually and pastorally sustained and nourished so as to be able to continue as “good citizens” of the empire. These different possibilities of being church of empire do not offer the kind of alternative that is described in the Gospel of John, chapter 17, with the call to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. The church is called to be an alternative community (cf. Bosch 1982; 1975).

The church is called to be an alternative community with a specific way of doing theology *in* and *with* the local community, but that is not *of* empire. This interpretation of the calling of the church will be unpacked in five movements that cannot be seen as successive linear movements, but more as the circular or spiral movements of a dance.

Listening

To be *in* the world is a calling to take the world seriously. To take the world seriously can be interpreted as to listen attentively and carefully to the stories of the local community to *hear the local story*. There is no single local story, but numerous stories as each individual will have his or her own interpretation of the history and events of the local community, but in listening to these stories certain dominant themes can be identified, so much so that one can speak of a common language or common grammar referring to the communal themes, stories, metaphors and history – symbols that are used by the local community to interpret and understand themselves, their history and events in the community.

This common language is picked up in the talk at the local grocer, outside the school gates as parents gather waiting for their children, at the after-service tea at church, or at the local shebeen. These stories, which are freely and easily shared, form the common language of the community and capture the norms, values, histories and dominant themes of that community. In the context of the above interpretation of empire, this common language will be embedded within the language of empire as empire influences all the various aspects of life.

One possible way of being *in* the world as church is to begin by listening to this common language of the community, yet it is not the only language in a community. Besides the common language that is easily shared in public gatherings there is also the unspoken language (stories not easily shared in public), namely the hidden stories that haunt the community. These are stories that do not fit into the common language, because in a sense they question the common language and, therefore, haunt it. These stories can be referred to as phantom stories or spectral stories⁶ – spectral, not in the sense that they are not real, but in the sense that they cannot be grouped or gathered together into an ideological whole (cf. Derrida 1994:2), because they continually disperse any kind of totalisation, as they appeal to their multiplicity or heterogeneity of not fitting into the common whole. It is the phantom cry of the excluded (murdered) other that haunts any human constructions (cf. Meylahn 2009b).

The danger of grouping and categorising these phantom stories into a category/community is just a reverse of the dominating and totalising tendencies of empire, namely the creation of a quasi-empire, nation-empire or empire from below, but functioning within the same mechanistic logic. Thus, as soon as these phantom stories are identifiable as X, they are incorporated into the mechanics of the machine and are no longer phantom stories.

Phantom stories are, for example, of the respected family man who lost his employment through retrenchment and now feels worthless, but he cannot share the story of his retrenchment as he feels judged and condemned by the common language. Therefore his story of retrenchment will not fit into the grammar of the common language.

This is just one example of the many phantom stories that haunt the dominant common language, like the ghost in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s Hamlet that “bodes some strange eruption to our state”. These are phantom stories, not in the sense that they are not real stories, but in the sense that they are untold and thus haunt the dominant language and threaten to erupt and thus disturb the dominant language.⁷

⁶ The idea of phantom stories was inspired by Derrida’s use of Specters and specifically his use in Specters of Marx (Derrida, 1994). In this book he organises the five chapters of the book around the idea of spectrality as that which is not identical with the present – that which does not fit into the dominant language, namely that which is other. It is a notion that calls into question the givenness and necessity of the present order of things (cf. Postone 1998: 371)

⁷ See Derrida’s reflection of deconstruction of the dominant interpretations of certain texts (Derrida 1990: 88-89). This is equally true of social and cultural texts. There are dominant interpretations, and the New Enlightenment as Derrida envisions it is called to an infinite responsibility toward the other of the dominant interpretations.

In the safe and trusting context of crisis and pastoral counselling of the church these stories are sometimes told. The church, called to be in the world, needs to listen to both the dominant common language as well as these phantom stories.

It happens that a community has as its dominant common language, language of failure and despair. In certain informal settlements that have been struggling for generations to lift the burden of poverty, often the common language is one of failure and apathy. Yet even within such a dominant language there are phantom stories which threaten to erupt and disturb this dominant language. Phantom stories in a context of such a dominant common language might be stories of “success”, but within the context of the dominant common language these success stories are suppressed because they are against the norm and thus would disturb the norm.

The church, called to be *in* the world, comes to the local community not as a *tabula rasa*, but laden with its own dominant language and phantom stories. Very often the church shares and perpetrates the dominant language of the community as the church is seen by many as the guardian of the common norms and values of the community. The church needs to be aware of her role in the construction and sustaining of the dominant common language.

Called to be *in* the world is a call to listen to:

- The dominant common language
- The phantom stories.

The danger is to group these phantom stories into an identifiable category which can then be ideologically laden – that is, given a specific identity. Once that happens they are integrated into the mechanics of the machine – as Badiou would say, the de-territorialisation becomes re-territorialisation (Badiou 2003:10). This is the classical Marxist approach to categorise into clearly identifiable camps – then the ghost that haunts Europe, to use a quote from Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto (Marx & Engels 1967:78), is no longer a ghost, but a clearly identifiable group that can be re-territorialised by the capitalist machinery. The church called to be *in* the world cannot become part of the mechanics of the machine and thus be *of* the empire.

Interpreting

The dominant common language, as well as the phantom stories, needs to be interpreted and this interpretation takes place by placing these stories into broader economic-social-cultural-political narrative settings. The church cannot do this on her own, but she needs the interpretative resources of the various other disciplines and thereby engages in an interdisciplinary conversation.

For example, the story of the local mall that opened not far from the informal settlement and thus destroyed the local spaza shop cannot be interpreted in isolation, but needs to be placed into a larger economic-political story of not only the specific community, but the economic trends and policies of the nation, which in turn can only be truly interpreted within the global economic trends and policies.

Likewise, the story of the retrenchment of Mr X from the local clothing factory is linked to the employment opportunities offered to Mrs Y in China or India, for example. These individual stories are always embedded in larger stories and it is within these larger stories that the individual stories of the local dominant common language need to be interpreted.

There are always multiple layers (narrative setting) to these stories, as well as common language, and eventually one comes to the layer that legitimises (explains) what happens. In the process of interpretation of stories and events one arrives at a layer of interpretation that offers reasons explaining the story or the event. It is the layer in the interpretative process that legitimises the action of the story or legitimises the cause of the event.

The search for this ‘ultimate legitimisation’ is not the search for a grand narrative that answers all questions, but it is the search for the founding “truth” of the story. Walter Benjamin argues that all laws, thus all legitimisations, are founded on some or other founding myth (mythological violence) (Benjamin 1996). It is the search for the founding myth that justifies/legitimises the dominant common language – one could say the ideology that founds the common language or the myth that sustains and legitimises this common language. Religion is often found at this level of interpretation as the ultimate reason given for why things happen.

The dominant common language captures and sustains the common values, common themes and common norms of the local community, founded on some or other legitimising myth. In the context of empire, empire as the world-of-meaning, is the ultimate narrative setting. It is within the context of empire that this language needs to be interpreted.

The dominant common language of a community is shaped and formed by various factors. It is formed by the financial situation (finance) of a community, it is shaped by the fears of the community (security), it is further shaped by the media, news agencies and information (media and information) that is disseminated within the community, it is shaped by the mobility of its inhabitants (global labour market), and lastly it is shaped and formed by the religion, culture and history of the community. Within the global village there are very few communities that live in absolute isolation and thus the local religion, culture and history is relativised by the community's exposure and contact with other, culturally different, communities. This contact with other cultural/religious communities happens through the high mobility in the labour market, or through men from rural communities working in the mines in urban complexes, but also through the media as well as migration. Even the most isolated rural community has been exposed to fashion labels and Coca-Cola and thus the relativisation process begins on a smaller or greater scale.⁸ Each one of these factors, shaping and forming the local community's dominant common language, relates to the factors that created the global-world-order, the biopolitical machine mentioned above.

Discerning

These ultimate myth/s need to be discerned and not judged. In order to be able to judge, one needs to have an outside perspective and, as the church is called to be *in* the world she does not have an outside perspective, but only the perspective of being *in* the world. The church is *in* empire and tries to survive within the logic and mechanics of empire. The question is, to what degree is she *of* empire? Listening to the phantom stories is listening to the cracks in the dominant story of empire, but if these phantom stories are grouped and collected into an ideological whole they no longer function as a phantom waiting to erupt, but they offer the empire new territory and thus play into the mechanics of the machine. Thus, to idealise the phantom stories into, for example, the story of the proletariat might seem like an outside perspective with which to criticise, but in truth it plays into the mechanics of the machine.

Nor does the church have access to a higher authority or a higher myth by which to judge and thus condemn the prevailing myth of empire – at least not an authority that would be accepted by empire, as nothing transcends empire. It is called to discern this myth from within, with a special bias for the phantom stories, exposing the cracks and nothing more, in the dominant story of empire.

These founding myths, by the very fact that they are totalising myths, have many victims, namely the others who were excluded in the construction of the myth.

Derrida refers to a responsibility to the past, a responsibility toward the dead who were the victims of war, violence and oppression in the construction of totalising myths, but also a responsibility to the others of the future, namely the not yet born (cf. Derrida 1994:xviii-xix, xxix, 25-27, 70-75). These others haunt the present and thus are crucial in the discerning of the present world order [empire]. This responsibility toward the spectral others is integral to Derrida's interpretation of justice and thus discerning the dominant myth. Derrida's justice, like Heidegger's *Dikē*, is beyond the question of right or good and evil, and thus it is not a justice of vengeance, but it is a justice that requires disjuncture or anachrony and therefore it is related to the spectrality (cf. Derrida 1994:25-27). The moment the stories of the other rise up in revenge they themselves become present and have their own phantoms haunting them.

Yet it cannot be thought only in terms of the phantom stories, which can so easily be transformed from phantoms into idols and ideology, but also in terms of the messianic always still to come. As soon as phantom stories are grouped, one can be sure there are new phantoms waiting to disrupt this grouping. Thus, this discernment needs to take into account that which is to come without ever being fully realised, and it is this messianic position without content that Derrida contrasts with concrete ideological positions of seeking justice (cf. Derrida 1994:28).

The other haunts the dominating totalising imperial myth and calls towards a messianic justice. The other, like the ghost in Hamlet, haunts the empire and thus, in the phantom stories, the excluded or marginalised other of the empire is revealed. It is these phantom stories [the other as well as the messianic promise without specific content] that help discern and reveal the myth of empire and thus deconstruct empire. This kind of discernment is critical without being judgmental as it deconstructs the dominant language embedded in empire that holds individuals and communities captive, but without judging it from an outside perspective. An outside perspective would only end in comparing one ideology with another and thus bringing various ideologies (founding myths) into competition with

⁸ For further reflection on the relativisation processes within the global narrative field, see Meylahn 2010a:388-400.

each other. Such comparison and competition, trying to argue which myth/ideology/religion is better, can only lead to violence and conflict – de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of the machine.

Discernment does not seek to judge, but seeks to hear the excluded other in the dominant language and thus allow this other to speak and thereby deconstruct the dominant myth, not by creating an alternative myth.

Such discernment will include discerning the extent to which the church is involved in sustaining the dominant myth.

Re-authoring (poetry)

Discernment cannot be done in a vacuum, but is necessarily done from within certain frames of reference of narrative settings. These settings play an important role in determining the identity and point of view of the discerning individual or community, but it is not cast in stone – it remains fluid as new experiences continually influence the interpretation of the narrative setting. For the church, a dominant narrative setting is the story of the Triune God as revealed in the story of Christ.

Obviously, like any narrative, this narrative is open to interpretation and there are numerous interpretations of the story. That there are different interpretations becomes clear in the differences in the four Gospels as each has a unique interpretation of the story. Yet, within these various interpretations a common thread can be identified so that most will agree and accept this basic thread, even though there are different interpretations.

The basic thread can be described in three movements:

Incarnation

The incarnation is God's entry into the world and history through God's son. From the various narratives that were accepted into the Canon a certain bias can be identified, namely an identification with the marginalised, the least of the brothers and sisters (Matthew 25). Jesus identified with the marginal phantom stories of the community, those stories that were other to the dominant common language of purity and righteousness interpreted within the context of Pharisaic legalism. He identified with tax-collectors (sinner), the fishermen (unworthy), the woman caught in adultery (unholy) and the foreigners (impure). He chose to make his identification with these *other* stories the site for the event of kingdom proclamation. He proclaimed that the kingdom had already come as the blind could see, the deaf could hear and the lame could walk. The kingdom had already come as the impossible possible – the impure, unholy, sinners and unworthy; in short, the other of the pharisaic dominated world had been welcomed to the table of the kingdom. Yet, these others that Jesus associated with cannot be grouped into an identifiable (ideological) whole. The group is too diverse and beyond classifications, as in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, free nor slave, man nor woman (Galatians 3:28).

Crucifixion

The story of the cross offers the frame of reference with which to interpret and understand the world, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:2 that he knows nothing except Christ and Him crucified. The historical accounts of the Gospels reveal to the readers the story of the crucifixion. It is a story of the ultimate criminal (Benjamin 1996), who was crucified, not because he contravened one or two laws and thus deserved the punishment of the law, but because he questioned the whole legal system, the whole world founded on the pharisaic and Roman law. One could argue and say that he questioned the founding myths of these systems and thus was truly a danger to the system. A criminal who breaks one or two laws can be easily dealt with, but someone who questions the very mythological foundations of a legal system is a real threat. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom to come as a site of welcome to the other (Matthew 21: 31; Matthew 22) questioned the whole system based on pure – impure, worthy – unworthy, holy – unholy, right – wrong, etcetera.

Resurrection

The story does not end with the crucifixion, but after three days he rose again, thus proclaiming a victory over the death of dominion. This victory proclaims the possibility of the impossible beyond the laws of the dominant myth.

The above description of the three movements of the basic thread is already an interpretation of the basic thread and thus there will be many other interpretations of this thread.

The church's discernment is not only guided by the story of the Triune God, but she is also, just like any community, part of narrative settings that shape her discernment and interpretation of the story of the Triune God, and thus influence her point of view. All this the church brings to the local community which is brought into conversation with the dominant common language of the community as well as the phantom stories. In this conversation, guided by the basic thread of the Christ event/story, traces of God's involvement – incarnation, cross, resurrection – are revealed and proclaimed in words of poetic prophecy and hope.

The basic storyline of Christ is proclaimed in the context of the cracks that erupt in the dominant common language where the phantom stories disturb the dominant common language. Prophetic poetry proclaims Christ and the cross in these cracks discerned.

The story of Christ's incarnation is proclaimed and lived through identification and solidarity with the phantom stories that haunt the dominant language – the phantom stories that haunt empire. This will inevitably lead to crucifixion by the dominant language (myth) – the law can only lead to death, as Paul says (Romans 7:5; Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 15:56).

The story does not end with the crucifixion, but with the resurrection and the proclamation of impossible possibilities in defiance of the law of death. The interpretation of the Christ event guides the reading of the dominant language together with the phantom stories and in this reading, guided by the Christ event, new meaning is found. This new meaning is prophetically and poetically proclaimed.

Embracing-listening: a dance without end in the time that remains

New life-giving words are poetically formed and inspired by the revelation of the Triune God (Christ event) within the stories of the community. These inspired proclaimed words through the Christ event (Cross) create a space (kingdom space) in the present and this space is filled with impossible possibilities of true transformation, true life, liberated from the dominion of death of the dominating myth of empire. This kingdom space with its creative possibilities needs to be embraced and lived to the full and celebrated. Once minds have been liberated from the dominant myth about what is and what is not possible new ideas will emerge about being community *with* and *in* the empire, but not *of* empire. It is a community embracing possibilities that are not *of* empire, but liberated from the dominant myths of empire. It can so easily happen that this new life, liberated from the dominion of empire, takes on a life-form very similar to that of empire, for example the different forms of totalitarian Marxism or other forms of dictatorships, all eschatologically inspired as the end and fulfilment of history (cf. Derrida 1994:68, 74-75). These onto-theologica-archeo-teleological concepts of history, that are influenced by the thinking of Hegel, Marx and the epochal thinking of Heidegger, need to be contrasted with a thinking of the Christ event, namely incarnation, as a return to the historicity of history and the messianism of the kingdom as an event outside of present-time yet within time (cf. Derrida 1994:74-75) – *in* the empire (time), but not *of* the empire. Emancipation in this sense can be understood as promise rather than as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological programme or design.

This new life liberated will inevitably translate into specific practices within the community and these practices will, over time, become “correct” practices and thus dominant practices which need to be deconstructed by the other [phantom stories] that these dominant practices exclude. They will be deconstructed by the phantom stories that are not part of these dominant practices. Thus the embracing is also a listening already to the new and other phantom stories, as being church *in* and *with* the local community, but not *of* empire remains open to the kingdom still to come.

Works consulted

- Ahmad, A 2004. Imperialism of our time. *Socialist Register* 40: 43-62.
- Badiou, Alain 2003. *Saint Paul: the foundation of universalism*. Translated Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Benjamin, W 1996. Critique of violence, in Bullock, M & Jennings, MW (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: selected writings, Vol 1 1913-1926*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 236-252.
- Bosch, D 1982. How my mind has changed: mission and the alternative community. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 41:6-10.
- Bosch, D 1975. The church as the “alternative community”. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 13:3-11.
- Derrida, J 1990. *Du droit a la philosophie*. Paris: Galilée.
- Derrida, J 1994. *Spectres of Marx: the state of debt, the work of mourning, and the new international*. (P. Kamuf, Trans.) London: Routledge.
- Foster, JB 2001. Imperialism and “Empire”. *Monthly Review* 53(7):1-9.
- Hardt, M & Negri, A 2000. *Empire*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Heidegger, M 1989. *Gesamtausgabe Vol 65: Beiträge (Vom Ereignis)*. Frankfurt am Main: Klosterman.
- Ikenberry, JG 2001. American power and the empire of capitalist democracy. *Review of International Studies* 27:191-212.
- Laxer, G 2003. Radical Transformative Nationalism Confront the US Empire. *Current Sociology* 51(2):133-152.
- Marx, K & Engels, F 1967. *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by AJP Taylor. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Martin, H-P & Schumann, H 1998. *The global trap: globalization and the assault on prosperity and democracy*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Meylahn, J-A 2009. Oikonomy: towards the impossible possibility of justice in the context of globalisation. *NGTT: Dutch Reformed Theological Journal/Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 50(1):148-159.
- Meylahn, J-A 2009b. Being thought from beyond our borders: towards ethical global citizenship. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30(2), Art. #56, 6 pages. DOI: 10.4102/ ve.v30i2.56
- Meylahn, J-A 2010a. *The church in the postmodern global village: towards pastoral redemptive communities* (Vol One). Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Meylahn, J-A 2010b. Holistic redemptive pastoral ministry in the fragmented transit hall of existence. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), Art. #426, 9 pages DOI: 10.4102/hts.v66i1.426 , 1-9.
- Okur, MA 2007. Rethinking Empire After 9/11: Towards a New Ontological Image of World Order. *Perceptions*, Winter 61-94.
- Pieterse, JN 2004. Neoliberal Empire. *Theory Culture Society* 21:119-140.
- Postone, M 1998. Deconstruction as Social Critique: Derrida on Marx and the New World Order. *History and Theory* 37(3), 370-387.
- Shaw, M 2002. Post-Imperial and Quasi-Imperial: State and Empire in the Global Era. *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 31:327-336.