



Book Reviews

Maurizio Lazzarato, *Capital Hates Everyone: Fascism or Revolution*, Robert Hurley, trans. (Semiotext(e), 2021), 248 pages.

Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz famously stated that “*der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln*” (“War is a mere continuation of politics by other means”). The aphorism can arguably be flipped around: politics is also a continuation of war by other means. That, at least, is the position of sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato, who foregrounds this variation on Clausewitz as the very essence of the neoliberal era. And it is this essence, Lazzarato claims, that scholars who understand neoliberalism as governmentality or ideology miss. Neoliberalism was implemented by force. Neoliberalism is civil war waged by capital—and if it looks like peace, that only means that capital has won.

Lazzarato never lets readers forget that, as his title has it, capital hates everyone and it represses by objective violence. Contrary to other theorists, he claims that violence is more important in the consolidation of neoliberalism than the production of subjectivity or the manufacturing of consent. This claim is made in an apodictic style, which signals little patience for objections and renders the text a polemic essay more than a rigorous academic endeavor.

The introduction and Part I of the book—succinctly titled “When Capital Goes to War”—propose a “radical incompatibility of reformism with neoliberalism” (34). Capital does not need to negotiate anymore, as “the best way to describe our situation is this: a ‘triumph’ of the capitalist forces, a defeat of the anticapitalist critique and practice” (139). One result is that capital “has transformed the welfare state into an apparatus of assistance to the corporations and the wealthy” (130). Now that capital has subdued its “worker-slaves,” reforms are impossible, for the simple reason that reformism “is not an alternative to revolution for it depends on the latter’s reality or threat” (46). That threat has long disappeared, and electoral politics is no way out of the impasse; it is the impasse. For Lazzarato, “Capital’s machine is literally swallowing up ‘democratic representation’” and parliament can only function as capital’s “authorized signatory,” since “Parliament hold(s) no power, the latter being entirely concentrated in the executive” (14). What is more, populism (including the left variant presenting itself as more radical than social-democratic class traitors) “opens up and prepares the new fascisms’ access to power” (295).

Lazzarato claims that anti-capitalist social movements are no alternative, for when “social revolution splits off from political revolution, it can easily be integrated into the capitalist machine as a new resource for the accumulation of capital” (19). Capital always wins; at least, it has always won. Right-wing populism is not only not a threat *to* capital, according to Lazzarato; it is also actually part *of* the threat of capital, as fascism is a “mass organization of counter-revolution” and the “new fascism is the other face of neoliberalism” (7). Fascism does not in any way oppose capital; instead, it opposes (as the subtitle states) revolution. The extreme right presents itself as a challenger, but in fact it constitutes the storm troopers of civil war against the population.

At this point, some readers might want examples and cases illustrating Lazzarato’s absolute statements. *Empirical* cases might illuminate how the dominance of capital evolved (were social-democratic strategies rendered obsolete by the end of the Cold War?), how it depends on institutions (how did banks, the ECB, and the European Commission beat the radical Syriza party in Greece into submission?), and how citizens are made to accept it (how was the outrage about bankers redirected towards racism?). Most pressing, *methodological* points explain the operationalization of capital-as-political-actor and what counts as violence. Lazzarato, however,

does not devote many words to either empirics or methodology. He only loosely refers to Chile, and does not provide any other examples. Lazzarato will thus not be appreciated by hard-boiled empiricists or methodologists. The author simply presents his conclusions as self-evident in a take-it-or-leave-it style, which is continued in Parts II and III.

The second half of the book takes on the question of whether technical machines (the internet, robots, artificial intelligence, etc.) are post-capitalist signposts, potentially revolutionary instruments, or simply integral parts of capital's war machine. Of course, that is no question for Lazzarato, as capitalism "is not just 'production,' but also power . . . the production and reproduction of power relations requires techniques" (237). The digital economy is just one such technique, which is ultimately produced by and on behalf of the "war machine." He claims it is a misleading illusion to try to wage revolution by working inside capitalist relations and by overtaking capital's artillery. Instead, "revolutionary action is *destruction* of the capitalist power relationship" (46). Destruction is both refusal—as "without a refusal of work" workers "are nothing but an element of capital"—and creative construction, for "the main objective of a revolutionary war machine" is "creating new possibilities of action" (211).

It's up to readers to think about what these possibilities might be, just as it is up to them to think about examples of the military-digital complex working for capital. Lazzarato simply tells it like it is. He refuses to succumb to the rules of engagement of public debate and academic deliberation, under which one needs to be reasonable and willing to compromise while Rome is burning. Indeed, the author would probably feel that the permanent suspension of organized confrontation in and via public debate is one of capital's strategies. As such, the style is consistent with the content. Lazzarato is definitely eloquent, but eloquence is not a substitute for analysis. Readers are left to decide for themselves whether Lazzarato's claim that we are amidst a civil war is on point, fallacious, or exaggerated.

Ultimately, the book does assert a truth that is indeed missed by many politicians, academics, and journalists—even in the rare cases that they mention it. It is a truth that activists know everything about. At the end of the day, capital and the state resort to violence. Greece was financially shut down in June 2015; Extinction Rebellion and alter-globalization movements have been infiltrated by secret agencies; Snowden, Manning, and Assange have been hunted down; Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are the rich countries' torture cells; and US-led extra-judicial killings are rampant. These are neither the only, nor necessarily the best, examples of neoliberalism's violence, and they leave open the issue whether these are acts of war or police actions. They illustrate that the capacity to ignore violence and torture is a privilege. Ignoring it in theoretical analysis is predicated on the assumption that the violence applied to others will never be levied against oneself. Hoping so is at best naïve, and at worst it helps capital. The popularity of Lazzarato's manifesto speaks to how many feel outraged by this silence, either by being subject to it or by observing its consistent application. Capital might not hate everyone, but it has always contemplated the fate of people with complete indifference.

David Hollanders
University of Amsterdam
d.a.hollanders@uva.nl