

Review – Capital Hates Everyone

Written by Cristóbal Ortiz Würth

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Capital Hates Everyone: Fascism and Revolution

By Maurizio Lazzarato

MIT Press, 2021

Maurizio Lazzarato, in his agile, direct, and, above all, provocative style, tackles contemporary political issues without hesitation in expressing his political stance. He is a radical leftist intellectual and, therefore, a staunch critic of capitalism. However, that does not preclude him from being equally scathing in reproaching the mistakes he identifies within the left. He also criticizes feminism, Marxism, and post-structuralism, among others, for their perceived inability to create a truly revolutionary alternative to capitalism.

In his book, Lazzarato fearlessly addresses various topics, such as feminism, civil war, revolution, post-structuralism, social movements, globalization, the financial market, and work under capitalism. He adeptly connects these issues to construct a cohesive explanation of the world. While his multifaceted analysis may confound inexperienced readers, his central argument is clear: The world is entering a phase where capitalism increasingly and irreversibly adopts a fascist character, leaving revolution as the sole alternative to avoid a fascist future.

The book's central thesis unfolds across three chapters: "When Capital Goes to War," "Technical Machine and War Machine," and "Becoming Revolutionary and Revolution." In the first two chapters, Lazzarato critiques the influential role of Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics' in shaping understandings of contemporary capitalist power dynamics. He specifically challenges the idea that direct state violence retreats as biopolitical power advances in societies.

Biopolitical power and the capitalist 'war machine'

According to Foucault, biopolitical power focuses on managing life at the population level while increasingly relying less on direct violence to control people. Lazzarato agrees that modern capitalism wields biopolitical power—a subtle form of control that individuals internalize, shaping their perceptions of what is possible, moral, and normal, an idea resembling Joseph Nye's soft power concept. However, Lazzarato argues that biopolitical power does not preclude the use of direct violence or 'hard power.' Unlike Foucault, Lazzarato asserts that direct violence remains a tool of control even within biopolitical regimes like neoliberal capitalism.

Following Lazzarato, neoliberal capitalism exercises a 'positive' form of control that seduces and convinces people of capitalism's superiority over any other model. It reaches a point where capitalism is perceived as the only viable system. Simultaneously, as Lazzarato asserts, neoliberal capitalism does not hesitate to repress and even kill those proposing alternatives that negatively impact the interests of financial capital. At this juncture, the fascist character of contemporary neoliberalism becomes explicit, partially explaining the persistence of direct "class, racial, and sexual violence" (p.72) against marginalized populations.

Lazzarato affirms that racial and sexual violence fit 'within neoliberal governmentality without too many problems because marginalized communities participate in the same capitalist war machine' (p.52). This capitalist 'war machine' comprises the dominant and the dominated, implying "relations of force from which norms, habits and laws are produced" (p.107), as well as forms of violence stemming from state power. The concept of a 'war machine',

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then, assumes a top-down confrontation, where capital's insatiable drive for accumulation seeks satisfaction.

Lazzarato argues that capitalist societies operate as a "war machine," involving an inherent conflict between the dominant capitalist class and the subjugated working class. This 'war machine' relies on establishing oppositional power relations, where norms, laws, and societal structures are produced to reinforce the ruling class's dominance over the exploited masses. For the capitalist class to perpetuate its hegemony and insatiable drive for capital accumulation, direct violence and repression against the working class become necessary tools despite capitalism's rhetoric of 'soft power' seduction. The ruling class will not hesitate to overtly crush any threats to the established order that challenge their economic interests.

Regarding capital's political power, Lazzarato argues that capital retains governmental authority through multinational corporations providing resources to governments in exchange for political and economic advantages, even when these outcomes are detrimental to most of the population. Consequently, governments become dependent on large conglomerates to fulfil responsibilities and tasks, whether due to corruption or practical necessity. A recent example is the billion-dollar subsidies and tax breaks offered by various countries to lure companies like Amazon and Tesla to build new facilities, despite criticisms that this corporate welfare undermines public services.

Lazzarato's argument is especially relevant to countries in the Global South. As posited by Latin American structuralist theory in international relations, these nations face unequal development conditions compared to the Global North, leaving them beholden to transnational corporations and more developed, industrialized countries. A consequence of these inequalities is that in the Global South, working conditions deteriorate, violence and insecurity escalate, state corruption intensifies, and political power is exercised in an increasingly discretionary manner at the expense of democracy and equality.

Revolution and the left's missteps

In the third chapter, Lazzarato argues for the necessity of revolution to catalyze transformative change in neoliberal capitalist societies. He points out that Soviet communism mistakenly prioritized productivity over questioning existing social roles and hierarchies. For instance, the USSR perpetuated women's subordinate roles relative to men. According to Lazzarato, the Soviet project's historical failure stemmed from its inability to recognize that domination operates both objectively and subjectively. Therefore, any genuine transformation must account for this subjective dimension of domination.

In addition, Lazzarato criticizes the May 1968 movement for opposite reasons: unlike the USSR, the May 1968 protesters were unable to establish revolutionary strategies aimed at an objective transformation of reality. However, they were able to understand the subjective situation of domination. In other words, they sought emancipation without revolution. More specifically, they pursued "the liberation of any minority (sexual, racial, ethnic, etc.) from the state of inferiority, exclusion, and domination in which capitalism has confined them" (p.193), but they did not seek the overcoming of capitalism.

However, emancipation alone does not lead to true transformations. Lazzarato illustrates this with the example of the abolition of slavery in the U.S. Although Americans succeeded in 'emancipating' the African-descendant population over a century ago, racial segregation has persisted. According to Lazzarato, a similar situation exists with contemporary feminism. While contemporary feminism creates policies and practices that benefit women, it fails to transform the heteropatriarchal system that oppresses them. Non-revolutionary emancipation only results in formal changes that, regardless of how radical they seem, are ultimately incapable of overcoming relations of domination.

Unfortunately, Lazzarato does not provide a solution to these shortcomings in leftist movements. His work remains a critique that fails to offer a viable alternative to capitalism. He commits the same error he attributes to the left: the inability to envision a path toward political and social transformation. He acknowledges this by stating that his proposal is characteristic of a revolutionary theory rather than a theory of revolution. In other words, "it represents society in terms of its potential transformation, revealing the relations of domination (...) without offering concrete

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strategic principles” (p.195).

In conclusion, this book remains highly relevant for understanding the contemporary world. IR Dependency Theory and Latin American structuralism support the argument that colonialism persists in new forms. Modern colonialism manifests through dependency patterns, where countries in the Global South are limited to exporting commodities, trapping them in a cycle of underdevelopment. States that defy global capitalist guidelines risk isolation, sanctions, subversion, or intervention, as seen in the 1973 Chilean coup d'état and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

About the author:

Cristóbal Ortiz Würth is an Adjunct Professor of Political Theory and State, Institutions, and Civil Society at UAH and a Human Rights and Political Theory Lecturer at the Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano (UAHC). He has published works on State Violence and Human Rights, Democracy, and Sunni Jihad and Islamic Fundamentalism in Latin America.