Predatory Power

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Might manhunting—from helots to undocumented immigrants—be the paradigm of all power? This is the hypothesis that Grégoire Chamayou puts to the test in an ambitious and devastating essay that strides boldly across the centuries.

Reviewed: Grégoire Chamayou, *Les chasses à l'homme*, La Fabrique, 2010, 246 p., 13 €.

Les chasses à l'homme (Manhunts) is an unusual and stimulating essay whose ambition is to write the history and philosophy of "predatory power." It is both a narrative history, which ranges across the ages from slavery in the ancient world to undocumented immigrants today, and a reflection on the relations among manhunting, the transformation of state power, the functioning of the capitalist economy, and the hopes and failures of resistance to various forms of predation. The strength of the book lies in its refusal to treat manhunting as a metaphor. Chamayou instead focuses on the concrete violence of predation, tracking, banishment, captivity, confinement, and the murderousness that goes along with them. He gives a "fragment of the long history of dominant groups" and shows us the "technologies of predation [that are] indispensable to establishing and reproducing relations of domination" (p. 7). Manhunting requires justification of the exorbitant power of the hunter over the hunted and thus calls for a "theory of prey." Such a theory repeatedly confronts the same problem: "The implicit recognition of the humanity of the prey, which is nevertheless simultaneously contested" (p. 9). Chamayou traces the history of this basic contradiction, in each instance pointing out the inconsistencies of the pseudo-arguments on the basis of which "interhuman predation" is justified.

Forms of Predatory Power

As a first model of manhunting, he examines the way in which Greeks obtained slaves. They did not consider slaves to be animals, because the distance between master and slave was not *the same* as the distance between man and animal. It was *analogous*, however, so that men were classified as "beings-for-domination" (p. 16). If they refused to accept this classification, they could be hunted down: "The response to the theoretical problem of manhunting was therefore ultimately the practice of the hunt itself, with the paradox that the hunt was justified in terms of a supposedly natural distinction which it showed to be non-natural even as it institutionalized it" (p. 17). Chamayou tells us that young Spartan citizens were subjected to an initiation rite: a hunt for helots that ended in a murder reenacting the primitive scene of conquest. The hunt was a form of "ontological police" (p. 19) whose purpose was to remind slaves of the "absolute difference" between themselves and their masters, but it had no relation to the politics of the city-state.

This was not the case with another symbol of predatory power: Nimrod, the first king of Babylon, whose sovereignty stemmed from hunting in the sense that he captured his own subjects. The Bible contrasts this model tyranny with the rule of Abraham, the benevolent shepherd-king. The wicked king is not only a failed shepherd, he is in fact a hunter, whose power does not come from God but is rather seized from men (pp. 26-27). Christianity perpetuated this distinction by contrasting the violence of the hunt with persuasion as "fisher of men." Instead of predatory acquisition, Christian power favors "pastoral hunting" based on the need to banish "black sheep" from the flock. Its hunt is exclusionary: the banished individual is returned to a state of nature and denied the protection of the law, so that his "life can be taken without committing a crime" (p. 50). This shows that the specter of "man as wolf" refers not to a time prior to the emergence from the state of nature but rather to the omnipresent possibility of banishment from society, that is, to the state of nature to which a subject may be returned. Indeed, it points to a relative weakness of pre-modern state power, which lacked the power to kill certain individuals and therefore designated them as people whom anyone might kill with impunity.

A new type of predation was associated with the "phase of primitive accumulation of capital" (p. 215) and the global expansion of capitalism. The Indians of America were hunted

down, enslaved, and slaughtered. Theorists sought to justify this in ways that would be compatible with Christian universalism, by assigning Indians to a "lesser humanity" still awaiting conversion. This led to a new concept of human prey, in which Christian universalism allowed for the universalization of certain forms of proscription. Violence accompanied a "vast and brutal wave of economic appropriation" (p. 64), while "men with black skin" were hunted down in Africa. These African manhunts were soon assigned to intermediaries, giving rise to the common imperialist idea of "African guilt" in the enslavement of Africans. This went along with what Chamayou calls "a bizarre epistemological shift" in the justification of such predation: "zoologists and natural historians" developed racial theories of inequality, which paved the way for "the great theoretical innovation of imperialist racism," namely, "the zoologization of social relations" (p. 72).

Chamayou's third topic is manhunting within the territorial limits of the modern sovereign state. Two principles govern the "hunt for the poor": "confine the locals, expel the foreigners" (p. 117). "Manhunts by the police" are aimed at forcing people to submit to wage labor. Police power is thus seen "as a class instrument" (p. 123), in which the police serve "the state as armed hunters" (p. 128) with a monopoly on "the legitimate power of pursuit." The symbols of opposition to this power are the fugitive, who becomes "public enemy number 1," and the workers' rebellion, the repression of which may take the form of a hunt, as in the "bloody week" that ended the reign of the Paris Commune (p. 141). Lynching is another modern form of manhunting, which harks back to older forms of predation outside the purview of the state. For instance, "Claude Neal was lynched in Marianna, Florida, on October 26, 1934," after being arrested as a suspect in the murder of a white girl. The lynching was a mutiny against the legal order and institutionalized forms of punishment (p. 151), as well as a form of racial violence. The intent of lynching was to restore patriarchal and local power. Unlike massacre and expulsion, it was also meant to maintain the existing state of racial domination.

"The hunt for Jews" obeyed a different logic, one of "diversion of political conflict" (p. 216). For Chamayou, there were, "broadly speaking, three major transformations: riotous predation became state predation; religious predation became racist predation; and murderous predation became genocidal predation" (p. 177). Despite these transformations, Chamayou

argues, the "diversionary function" of anti-Semitic predation remained: "To dampen class conflict by introducing race war, even at the price of destroying old forms of state power" (p. 183). Race war attained its ultimate form in the Nazi state, when "the zoological model of natural predation was linked to the biopolitical mechanisms of state racism to provide a matrix of legitimation for the genocidal project" (p. 216).

The "hunting of foreigners" was directly linked to the labor market. The book recounts the violent attacks on Italian workers in Aigues-Mortes in 1893. In contrast to lynching, this was a "xenophobic exclusionary hunt" (p. 158). The author distinguishes it from the last model he considers, "the hunt for illegal individuals" in today's societies, which is intended not to banish all foreigners but to keep them in an anxious state of illegality, constantly threatened by police identity checks. The author refers to these hunts as "sweeps," because quotas imposed on the police by the government mean that random identity checks no longer suffice, and "proactive search-and-seizure techniques" have to be employed instead. He notes that "the power to legally expel workers without papers makes it possible to employ them in conditions of extreme vulnerability" (p. 201), subject to "predatory" labor-market practices. Hence "market predation and sovereign exclusion are strongly complementary."

A Critique of "Predatory Theory"

The foregoing overview does not do justice to the book, which incorporates numerous narratives and is richly illustrated and written in a lively style. For instance, the section on manhunts for illegal immigrants ends with a statement by the former French Minister of Immigration and National Identity, Eric Besson: "I hate manhunts on principle." But Besson made this statement not about the manhunts for which he was responsible as minister but rather about attacks on Jean Sarkozy, the son of the French president, after he was nominated to head a large urban redevelopment agency. This will suffice to give an idea of the dizzying array of subjects covered in the work, which ranges over centuries and continents and a vast number of historical, iconographic, literary, and philosophical sources. In just 250 pages it covers slavery, the exclusion of black sheep, judicial banishment, attacks on Indians and blacks, the confinement of the poor, riotous assaults, and the persecution of Jews and foreigners.

Although Chamayou points out that the type of manhunt varies from case to case, the broad use of the term in so many different historical contexts is in my view a deficiency. In particular, there is a confusion of two different ideas: first, that the manhunt is *one technology of power* among others, and second, that it is *the original and still fundamental form of political and economic domination*. It is worth distinguishing situations of three types: those in which the manhunt is the central mode of exercising power, as in the story of Nimrod; those in which the manhunt is a "prerequisite" of domination, in the sense that it explains the origin of power and is directed against those who would free themselves from it, as in the case of slavery; and finally, that manhunts are a police method employed by states to control fringe elements (the poor, delinquents, foreigners, etc.). The manhunt can thus be either a permanent basis of sovereignty, a historical source of subjugation revived to deal with resistance, or a "fragmentary form" of power. In the contemporary context, the use of the idea strikes me as ambiguous: sometimes it refers to certain forms of power, especially police power, while at other times the capitalist economy as a whole is described as a form of predation. In the latter case, the idea is not very different from that of exploitation, but it takes little account of the many forms of domination (symbolic, ideological, scholastic, income, etc.). Each of these implies some power differential, but none involves the direct seizure of an individual's physical person implicit in the idea of manhunt.

Although the broad geographical and chronological scope of the work compels the author to deal with large historical issues in very few pages, it does nevertheless allow him to develop the philosophical critique that accompanies his historical analyses. This critique examines "theories of prey" as well as the obstacles faced by those who resist the power of the "hunters." For instance, on the persecution of Indians, Chamayou notes the "contradiction in terms" involved in "invoking the basic tenets of humanism to accuse certain peoples of causing the degeneration of humanity and therefore summoning them to yield to military domination" (p. 56). Similarly, the author points out the tension that exists between the recognition by contemporary states of the universal human rights and their selective granting of such rights: "Because human rights are in practice identified with the rights of citizens and the rights of citizens are identified with the rights of nationals, states recognize them only for individuals admitted to the sphere of nationality" (p. 195). Above all, he denounces the following central

"sophism" in the understanding of the relation between hunter and hunted: "To recognize slaves as responsible for their own liberation, in the sense that the task of achieving it is left to them, in no way implies that they are responsible for their oppression, in the sense that they somehow willed it" (p. 77). In the chapter entitled "The Dialectic of Hunter and Hunted," which stands out from the rest of the book, in which each chapter is devoted to a distinct type of manhunt, the author shows that the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave does not work in a situation in only one of the two parties must choose between liberty and death: "The point of departure is not a confrontation between two equal consciousnesses in interchangeable positions. The rule of the slave master arises not from open conflict but from the initially asymmetric relation of the manhunt" (p. 86). That is why the alternative between subjugation and death is "a practical dilemma forged by the masters" (p. 88), all the more so because "in the hunt, the master rarely confronts his prey directly." Thus, the consciousness of the master is not one that has faced death but rather one that has "the power to put the lives of others at risk without ever having to risk his own life" (p. 98).

The book, as it proceeds, thus constitutes a philosophical exercise, which uncovers, behind religious, racial, legal, and economic sophistications, the same mechanism for the recognition of the universality of principles that are supposed to prohibit the transformation of men into prey, yet serve in certain instances as justifications of the manhunt. It lays bare the paradox of the manhunt, whose legitimacy rests on the idea that some men are not ready for autonomy, that they are responsible for their inferior condition, that they commit distinctly inhuman acts—in short, that for one reason or another they are not entirely human. Each chapter begins with a historical instance of manhunting, with an exploration of its forms and justifications, and then proceeds to point out the contradictions. This structure invites us to read the book as a work of applied political philosophy, which shows us a past that has seldom disappeared altogether: to cite one example of this, the author writes that "today as in the past, because it is impossible to eradicate poverty, the poor must be made invisible."[1] All the justifications of "interhuman predation" are laid out for us, and the author calls upon a "universal political collectivity" to abolish them (p. 220). Thus the difficulties faced by those who

[1] On this point, see for example Daniel Terrolle, "La ville dissuasive: l'envers de la solidarité avec les SDF," *Espaces et societies,* 2004, 1-2, pp. 143-157.

attempted to resist predation in the past are transformed into political questions for today. How can we grant autonomy to the dominated without making them responsible for their own condition? How can the dominated cease to be prey without becoming hunters in turn? How can we avoid the fragmentation of the dominated, and how can we prevent protected citizens from coming predators upon vulnerable foreigners?

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