

# Book Review: *Gore Capitalism* by Sayek Valencia

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## Decolonial Feminism

In *Gore Capitalism*, Sayak Valencia borrows the concept of gore from the genre of film to combine its excess in horror and extreme brutal violence to the need to consume and to generate profit- which is the heart of neoliberal capitalism. According to Valencia, “contemporary reality cannot be understood or described in all its complexity without considering violence and consumption as its central axes” (91). In ways similar to Jasbir Puar in *The Right to Maim*, who sees death and debility as productive for capitalism, Valencia argues that death and violence are commodities that are central to for capital expansion. Taking Tijuana Mexico as her unit of analysis, Valencia makes visible the social conditions that result in what she terms necro-empowerment, locating it in the context of racialization, gendered expectations, ideas of masculinity, shifting notions of “work” and the normalization of violence. She argues that while gore capitalism in the Third World is a significant cause for concern and action, there are several examples of such practices to be found in western societies including in the United States. She attributes the lack of visibility of these practices in the West to the hypervisibility of same in the global south which forecloses the impact of the world economic powers in creating and sustaining the global inequalities that ‘necessitates gore and also the fact the west is a beneficiary of such practices. She writes:

*We argue against positioning oneself in a benevolent hierarchy that would stereotype the Third World as a precarious and vulnerable reality exclusively found in the Global South; the vulnerability and precarity are real to a large extent but only insofar as they*

*are a result of the demands and requirements exported from the economic centers and major world powers and distributed by globalization through the media (10).*

Valencia carefully sets up her argument with “The Beginning,” in which she highlights the ‘possibilities’ that exist in Tijuana - the place where “ *you can have whatever you can buy* “ (17. emphasis her’s) even at the cost of death and extreme violence including against women and children. Moving into her introduction, Valencia makes her argument for the significance of such a project noting that “contemporary approaches are insufficient to theorize the gore practices that are now found in the world...in which there is no space outside of capitalism’s reach” (21). Thus, her work is labor toward “developing discourse with the explanatory power to help us interpret the reality produced by gore capitalism, founded in violence, (drug) trafficking and necropower, while at the same time presenting the dystopias of globalization and its imposition” (21).

Valencia stays true to her project by going at great length to explain gore capitalism and the “civil disobedience” (mistaken for resistance) that results in necroempowerment. Through the figure of the endrigo subject, she shows how western values penetrate the globe and creates the notion that to be a valid subject particularly as a man you must access social mobility and join the ranks of the hyper-consumer. Job insecurity that results from global inequalities creates frustration that leads to violence as people feel justified in killing as those bodies help to achieve power through capital and fearmongering. She argues that it is globalization- founded on predatory logics, that is the “hidden fist” that reorganizes the practices that result in gore.

Given the importance that Valencia places on language ( “the world of social relation is organized in language” (25)), throughout the book, she is attentive to providing well-articulated definitions and explanations of her key concepts including gore capitalism, necropower,

necro-empowerment, necropractices, and the endrigo subject. In short, gore capitalism is the extreme violence the third world (also applicable to third world-ese conditions in the west ) commits to adhere to the demands of capitalism. Gore capitalism requires the predatory use of bodies (necropractices) to transform situations of vulnerability and subalternity to self-empowerment (necro-empowerment) through “*seeking out modes of illegitimate action and self-affirmation in order to exorcise the image and condition of victimhood*” (84. emphasis her’s)

The violence that Valencia highlight is not new and has been overly consumed by the general public which is part of her point about the ways we have been desensitized to violence. The media’s complicity in the normalization of gore practices, therefore, form an essential part of her argument. Beyond the media’s role in naturalizing/normalizing the gore and widening the reach of cartels, is the fact that media houses also expand their capital by always having death and violence in circulation. Without disavowing the contribution of feminist theory to understanding capitalism and its link to visible and invisible violence, Valencia suggests that building theory and having a common vocabulary around, for example, the function of globalization in creating and maintaining violence is key to stemming its impact on minorities who become radical capitalist subjects. She writes: “one of the fundamental changes wrought by the contemporary economic order (that is, globalization) centers on the very understanding of the concept of work, and consequently its brutal deregulation” (76)

While Valencia does the work to create a greater understanding of the postcolonial processes that (1) establish the third world as abject and (2) structure the subjectivities of the endrigo subject, one of her main goals seem to be to rebuff modes of (necro)empowerment that are achieved through dystopian means. However, she warns that to analyze their action from a

moral perspective leads only to condemnation and prevents the construction of “alternatives to becoming gore” (121). Valencia writes:

*...the variety of players within gore capitalism illustrates the contradictions, reinterpretations, and anguish found in their own contexts. The endrigo subject who participates actively within gore capitalism likely emerges out of the context of real need. Yet, we argue that the dyad of poverty and violence is more complicated and this means that these violent actions are also a manifestation of a broader expression of social unrest, since crime, besides generating additional profit, is also a means to express discontent (159).*

Thus, Valencia proposes and pursues a non-binary analytical method that does not exclude capitalism, but that fights against entrenched ideas that hyperconsumerism as ideal, that criminality is extremely profitable and that “emphasizes the right not to be a victim of predatory violence in pursuit of economic enrichment” (253). Here she centers education, specifically the “performative nature of language which allows it to create the reality it articulates” (254) simultaneously. Valencia looks to feminism as the field of inquiry that can create this non-binary analytical method, especially as women have always had to deal with gore capitalism’s “fierce violence” (258). She argues that gore capitalism requires that new political subjects of feminism be created - a “becoming-woman” that breaks with status quo’ and decenters “heteropatriarchal capitalism’s worldview” (260). To employ a decolonial feminist frame is to rescue men from the hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy and the fear of loss of power and privilege that places them in precarious and conflicted spaces where they only see themselves as valid subjects through necropractices and necroempowerment. “it is simply not possible to build real resistance to the economic system in which we live-this system that bases its power on extreme violence-without questioning masculinity. This same masculinity also mutates into real violence enacted upon bodies of men themselves”. (269).

Gore Capitalism is an exciting read that extends our vocabulary and ability to think through the sustained impact of racialization and coloniality and the skill required in conceptualizing truly resistant frameworks- beyond the reach of capitalism. Her work also helped with clarifying concepts introduced by other critical theorists including of Agamben (though it can be judged for its failure to attend to race fully), Mmembe, Butler, Guattari and Deleuze and Spivak.