NAFTA: Capitalismo Gore and the Femicide Machine

In a poor country everything seems less real. What difference does another atrocity make?
—Ángelica Liddell, El año de Ricardo, 2007

Below I attempt to articulate a brief reflection upon the relationship between Capitalismo Gore and the “Femicide Machine,” taking into account NAFTA as a medullary historical moment in which intense labour and market de-regulation, as well as deterritorialization processes, reconfigured the concept of labour. That is to say, with Capitalismo Gore, the concept of labour has been resignified with a strong dystopic meaning, leading to a situation where being an expert on techniques of exerting violence is not only a normal job, but such an expert on violence is a desired worker, as this position offers an “opportunity for betterment” in the face of the global precaritization of labour. The reconfiguration of labour brought about by NAFTA—which has resulted in the massive destruction of employment, economic precarity, and the “feminization of labour”—has also reaffirmed the axiology of the hetero-patriarchal system, metabolizing through Capitalismo Gore a fear of emasculation that men, and society at large, are currently experiencing.

By the “feminization of labour,” I mean, first, the emergence of the worst working conditions possible: wages below the minimum, extreme schedule flexibility and volatility, constant shifting within the job market, uncertainty regarding access to economic goods, exclusion from social rights, and a limited capacity for self-determination that determines all of which are aspects of our everyday reality. The advent of globalization and market liberation rapidly transformed into Capitalismo Gore, which has changed our geographies at multiple levels, creating a dystopic landscape where a semiotics of economic, social, symbolic, and existential violence is legible even within architecture as it offers itself to my gaze. The proliferation of desolate images of cities such as Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez, where the maquiladoras industry—embodied in assembly factories—has become the cruel emblem of a state of exception resulting from the ferocity of corporations lured here by the de-regulation of labour, testing the human and environmental limits of greed.

The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 marked the “kick-off toward a vertiginous and uneven trip toward the unknown,” a sinuous road that led to Mexico’s descent into Capitalismo Gore. Twenty years later, this has given rise to a particular geopolitical and economic arrangement that determines all of which are aspects of our everyday reality. The advent of globalization and market liberation rapidly transformed into Capitalismo Gore, which has changed our geographies at multiple levels, creating a dystopic landscape where a semiotics of economic, social, symbolic, and existential violence is legible even within architecture as it offers itself to my gaze. The proliferation of desolate images of cities such as Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez, where the maquiladoras industry—embodied in assembly factories—has become the cruel emblem of a state of exception resulting from the ferocity of corporations lured here by the de-regulation of labour, testing the human and environmental limits of greed.
The concept of Capitalismo Gore designates the embodiment of hegemonic and global economic processes in specific (geographical) border spaces, where death is visibly the source of surplus value. In this case, I refer to the border located between Mexico and the United States. Borrowing the term gore from a cinematographic genre that refers to extreme violence, Capitalismo Gore refers to the explicit and unjustified bloodletting that occurs along the Mexican border, the price that this developing country has to pay for aligning itself with a capitalist logic that encourages and demands hyper-consumption—inextricable from actual cases of human disembowelment and gut-spilling. This is frequently tied to organized crime, the binary division of gender, and predatory and exploitative uses of bodies, although this explicit violence can also be considered as a tool for “necro-empowering,” which connects actual assemblage of bodies and which affects processes of structuration of gender as a political, symbolic, and cultural landscape of Mexico, as it has been affected and re-written both by drug trafficking and related crimes, as well as neo-politics as a political, symbolic, and economic mechanism that produces codes, grammars, narratives, and social interactions through the administration of death.

These terms are part of a discursive taxonomy that seeks to visualize the complexity of the criminal framework which derives from the Mexican context, taking into account its links to neoliberalism, globalizacion, economic precarity, the binary construction of gender as a political performance, and the creation of capitalist subjectivities, now re-colonized by political economy and embodied by Mexican criminals and drug-dealers, the endriago subjects within the taxonomy of Capitalismo Gore. Endriago subjects are those who circumscribe a capitalist subjectivity built upon economic precarity and the hegemonic demands embodied in the construction of masculinity, which, according to Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsiváis, is based on the following traits: economic respectability, indifference towards danger, contempt for the feminine, and the affirmation of authority over anyone. These traits, along with the subjective appropriation of ultraviolent practices that incorporate self-referential “systems amongst big productive machines of social control and psychic instances that define ways of perceiving the world,” give rise to endriago subjects who form the ranks of the gore precariat. Capitalismo Gore, and the endriago subjects it produces, however, cannot be reduced to a question of masculinity framed within organized crime or drug-trafficking. It also involves the problem of structural machismo embedded in Mexican culture, in which the demands of hegemonic masculinity, diffused by the State and permeating Mexican society, constantly demand the verification of masculinity, which passes through the consecrated figure of the macho. The macho’s affirming traits overlap with those identified by Monsiváis, complemented by the uninhibited occupation of space, rampant virility, contempt for life (one’s own and others’), and high- and low-intensity violence (whichever is required).

The Femicide Machine

Sometimes I wonder... What would this country be like if I wasn’t sick?
—Angélica Liddell, El año de Ricardo, 2007

The notion of the “Femicide Machine” was coined by Mexican writer and journalist Sergio González Rodríguez in his 2001 book Huéspedes en el desierto, an inquiry into the murder of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez. The author defines the Femicide Machine as “an apparatus that not only created the conditions for the murders of dozens of women and girls, but also developed the institutions that guaranteed impunity for those crimes and even legalized them. A lawless city sponsored by a State in crisis.” In Rodríguez’s account, Ciudad Juárez is a border city traditionally linked to the presence of organized crime. For example, the prohibition of alcohol in the United States between 1920 and 1933 led to the proliferation of mafias in the Mexican northern border zone, which offered sex, alcohol, and drugs to Americans. The early presence of organized, violent crime in the area highlights the relevance of the economic changes the region underwent in the 1990s, when the Femicide Machine began to operate. In the Mexican context, Capitalismo Gore refers to the creation of surplus value through extreme violence—where, in effect, dead bodies are merchandise following a necro-political logic, the concrete and symbolic practice of governing over death—allows us to think of the Machista Machine as an apparatus of the extreme verification of masculinity within a context where machismo violence and labor precarity are structural. Distributed both by institutions and the social, economic, and cultural choreographies derived from them, the Femicide Machine furthers the misogynous and dichotomous construction of gender according to which male implies privilege and patriarchal dividends—to the detriment of the female. The axiological renegotiation that takes place every day in the Mexican northern border zone is the result of an economically open field that has realigned its ideological parameters to benefit it stops short of a possible renegotiation of the hegemonically imposed limits of gender, rejecting a peaceful renegotiation of the basic values of the hetero-patriarchate, threatened by those who work for the maquiladoras. The feminization of labour in this regard supposes a change in the biopolitical ideal of gender in the twenty-first century, which evidently clashes with traditional, nineteenth-century choreographies of sexuality and gender that continue to standardize behaviour in Mexico through the dominant values embodied in the heterosexual family and heroic masculinity; moreover, this corresponds to the reaffirmation of an industrial-era narrative based on the sexual division of labour. Therefore, the struggle to maintain this old biopolitical ideal, which implies the management and standardization of bodies and which affects processes of production/reproduction proper to traditional—catholic, machista, colonial—Mexico, is mixed with an “a-systemic culture, that is rudimentarily organized and contradictory.” This culture has characterized northern Mexico for some time; its capacity for symbolic assimilation, moreover, is facing “cultivated,” “official,” and “legitimate” cultural models that represent a binary vision of the world as two versions of Mexico: the one of structural, national machismo, representing the “southern” version of Western culture; and the other, the patrio-patriarchal, through concrete individuals whose meta-stable character is interpellated by the reigning order, demands a rechanneling of women’s behaviour, making use of the Femicide Machine if necessary. This legitimates the perceived threat to masculinity, which then justifies the use and abuse women with extreme violence as a tool to strengthen the hetero-patriarchal...
and capitalist Gore machinery. In this manner, the Femicide Machine, understood as an active arm of Capitalismo Gore, transforms extreme violence not only into an extermination tool but also into a spectacular apparatus that creates a gore market and consumers.

Inappropriate/Improper/Strange Bodies

[...] Sometimes I wonder...

What would this country be like if I did not have a body?

—Angélica Liddell, El año de Ricardo, 2007

Another function of the Femicide Machine is to demonstrate that women’s bodies do not belong to them, beyond their productive/reproductive functions or hyper-sexualization, always to the benefit of men. Within this machista logic, habeas corpus is a privilege exclusive to men. Therefore, the idea that women’s bodies are inappropriate, improper, and do not belong to them implies that female bodies must be governed and administered through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, and when appropriated by their “owners,” men can destroy or punish those bodies. Punishment ranges from injurious stigmatization (the labeling of “the whore”) to their country), the mass incorporation of women into the workforce in northern Mexico greatly intensified in the 1990s. According to data offered by the National Institute of Statistics and Geografía (INEGI, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía), the number of maquiladoras rose from 12 in 1965 to 3630 in 2001. The incorporation of women into the maquiladora workforce, thus defies this notion of the inappropriateness/impropriety/strangeness of their bodies—as it simultaneously intensifies it. This is because the feminization of labour creates a market of the female body to be exploited, as it blurs the boundary between liberalism and democratization. In that sense, as opposed to having been freed by factory work, women have been liberalized; that is to say, while their bodies have been subjected to the capitalist production machine, their bodies are rendered precarious (as they are the cheapest manual labour possible), they are still also subject to their traditionally assigned domestic (non-remunerated) labour.

Moreover, the feminization of work is perceived by men as an usurpation of privileges and authority. Thus, women’s bodies become once again improper, in the sense that they are occupying a position that does not belong to them. That is to say, from the male point of view, both spatially and in gender terms, the feminization of work is inappropriate. This perspective, however, fails to consider the deeper implications for the objective conditions of the feminization of work as such, where its consequences cannot be rendered visible as they really are: a life full of excess labour and misery, without the remote possibility for change.

The condition of women’s bodies being inappropriate, strange, or improper can also be observed as they traverse public spaces at night, territories “traditionally” codified as female. These bodies are also a symbolic embodiment of the social imaginary based on permanent threat. The representation of the femicide tragedy serves as a direct warning; as Roberto Saviano reminds us, “we all understand the message when it is written on flesh.”

Workers devoted to violence, that is, Capitalismo Gore’s armed wing, the Femicide Machine, conveys this message to women by tearing them apart and rendering vulnerable their bodies. This kind of violence is also a symbolic embodiment of the perpetuation of a devastating hetero-patriarchal axiology and of a homophobic social pact. In this context, justice for those improper bodies or the bodies they really are: a life full of excess labour and misery, without the remote possibility for change.

The condition of women’s bodies being inappropriate, strange, or improper can also be observed as they traverse public spaces at night, territories “traditionally” codified as masculine. When women appear in these spaces—specifically, women exiting their night shifts from the maquiladoras, forced to circulate this terrain that does not belong to them—they are radically penalized. Indeed, the democratization of public space is only possible if the bodies that traverse it are devoted to the production of surplus value, bodies marketed by parading themselves on public space to sex hyper-consumers. A third site where this impropriety/inappropriateness/strangeness of women’s bodies can be witnessed is in the spectacularization of the remains of women murdered by the Femicide Machine. As images of mutilated bodies are globally distributed in the mass media, empathy is slowly negated in a kind of “corpse-zapping” that assimilates the logic of the visual economy profiting from morbidity and suffering. This mediates the spectrality functions as a filter of the reality it renders uncomfortable, othering and decontextualizing what is familiar about the murdered women in order to create symbolic and emotional distanciation in the viewer. The image of strangeness of murdered women’s bodies can be conceived in this context as a cartography that seeks to establish a macabre social imaginary based on permanent threat. The representation of the femicide tragedy serves as a direct warning; as Roberto Saviano reminds us, “we all understand the message when it is written on flesh.”

Conclusion

Femicide in Mexico can be read as the most atrocious consequence of recent social, political, and economic choreographies, that is, the relational movements and behaviours built upon hegemonic social structures—not only masculine supremacy, but also on its axiological decanting as Capitalismo Gore. As we have seen, Capitalismo Gore uses the Femicide Machine to maintain the homo-social pact as the metabolizing order, but in order to do so, it must be nourished by blood; at the same time, it feeds capitalism’s drive towards “creative destruction.” Finally, the Femicide Machine is the core apparatus that constitutes the extreme version of the neoliberal governmentality of gender in our country, in which two overlapping regimes of body management converge: the sovereign regime, corresponding to the moment of colonization, in which the body of populations (and especially of women) is a body for death (here patriarchal power is understood as a sovereign power that makes use of domination, possession, and extermination techniques as ways to deal with the other); and the contemporary regime, in which the body (mainly, but not exclusively, women’s bodies) is a body for capital (bodies conceived, above all, as a productive reproductive force, in which profitability is prioritized above all). This overlapping of regimes could be understood as a kind of epistemic, economic, and corporeal neo-feudalism that weaves strategic relationships with the Capitalismo Gore machinery into a matrix of contemporary social choreographies—the multiplication of relational movements through which technological apparatuses of global transmission distribute standardized corporeal choreographies through affect, consumption, and violence.
Miguel Ventura

An unemployed cultural engineer discovered the following anonymous manuscript in the year 2645 among the ruins of the Mexico City NILC Trans Corporate Library. The following is a fragment of:

Something About Coatlicue

The Museum Director and Her Board Members: A Novel in a Still Unknown Number of Chapters

Dedicated to the great Mexican cultural bureaucrats of our times.

NILC and NILC culture will be destroyed! NILC dispenses culture in order to rule. NILC promotes its own form of beauty which only enslaves. They have been very successful in creating a literate ignorance among their privileged classes. Everything is well conceptualized and designed; nothing is left to chance. Chains! Everything they do forgés chains and enslaves. But slaves always revolt!

The year is 2114, sixty years have passed since the existing balance of power on the planet Earth was destroyed during the NILC Wars of Appropriation; the result was the creation of a new world order dominated by NILC (The New Interterritorial Language Committee) and its corporate allies. NILC elites had consolidated their power base in the year 2054, creating a genuinely transformed society characterized by racial, linguistic, and social equality based on models of apartheid practiced in South Africa, Israel, and Guatemala before the revolutionary NILC Wars. NILC linguists created a special hierarchical language system based on a strict caste system like that employed in the Spanish American Colonies for three hundred years, and in Old India for thousands of years; each different caste was instructed in the specific dialect of its class; infringing linguistic regulations was a seriously castigated crime and, after many decades, became one of the main reasons for the existence of social tension within the NILC world. After the NILC Wars of Appropriation, Mexico, the principal setting of this narrative, becomes the central force of the NILC Empire. Successful revolutionary NILC economic, racial, and linguistic practices guaranteed well being and the continuation of a neo-colonial NILC form of life for the financial and cultural elites comprising .75% of the population of the great empire; the other 99.25% was predominately made up of dark-skinned workers, displaced peasants, unemployed migrants and other forms of lesser subject beings. In the great cities of the NILC emporium, the rich lived among their kind safely guarded in well-designed, bunker-like housing settlements on the periphery of every NILC urban centre, in oases of comfort and security within the city proper. These housing settlements, opulently graced with swimming pools, private schools, universities, museums, libraries, and their own exclusive shopping and entertainment districts, catered to the sophisticated whims and tastes of the rich oligarchy accustomed to centuries of privilege and pampered existence. In Mexico City, one of the great NILC urban centres of the NILC emporium, the upper-class neighbourhoods of La Condesa, La Roma, and Polanco survived the Wars of Appropriation intact; shortly afterwards, thick walls were built to allow in only residents and a few domestic workers: maids, gardeners, masseuses, sex workers, chauffeurs, cooks, and the like. On the other hand, displaced peasants from all over the country had joined the legions of poor workers living in massive tenements comprising most of the urban mass of Mexico City and other cities in the NILC Empire; even though NILC doctors had enforced the use of new contraceptive practices aimed at controlling...