

BOOK

Violence in Capitalism: Devaluing Life in an Age of Responsibility

By James A. Tyner

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James Tyner, in his book *Violence in Capitalism: Devaluing Life in an Age of Responsibility*, provides an alternative perspective on how violence can be understood. He asserts that people may have taken for granted that violence is self-evident, manifested in phenomena that happen and occur naturally in any society. There is also the assumption that violence is the product of an action, one with a clear perpetrator and victim or the indirect outcome of structural inequalities. In this regard, studies on violence usually focus on defining, categorizing, and analyzing its accepted and legible forms as identifiable phenomena. It is also being understood as a condition that is stable and unchanging, irrespective of historical or geographical context.

Tyner seeks to revise such ideas about violence and its nature by approaching the subject matter from a more theoretical perspective. He asserts that while there are certain acts that clearly injure, harm, and kill, violence is, in reality, an abstraction that cannot exist in a vacuum since it is culled from actual, conditioned, and accepted practices engendered by society's modes of production. More important, violence in capitalism is imagined and understood based on a specific valuation of individuals that extols profit and productivity, while being indifferent to life itself.

By providing an exhaustive literature review of how violence has been studied along with alternative interpretations of Karl Marx's works on capitalism, Tyner deftly explains how dominant members and institutions in capitalist society use their authority and control over vital resources in order to promote certain societal values and concepts. As such, capitalism's elite has a hand in defining what constitutes productive work, the family's role in society, the rationale behind dispensing punishments, and how populations become more productive through state intervention and management. Such is the case that when workers are increasingly dependent on peddling their labor in order to survive, the dominant classes may utilize their assets as resources in committing violent acts and crimes.

These acts are then legitimized through the criminal justice system, which conditions individuals to recognize particular actions as criminal and/or violent. Such occurrences may transpire even if inequalities between the haves and have-nots will lead to individuals' differential exposure to being harmed. Thus, a hungry person's efforts to obtain food in order to survive is classified as theft; and any attempt to access common resources will be deemed a violent act. In like manner, women's reproductive work, which holds no exchange value, is deemed

unproductive, thus women can be prone to being poor and vulnerable to abuse. Those dispossessed of their lands and are unemployed are also labelled as unproductive, a condition akin to a criminal offense. Thus, any activity that affects profits becomes the object of violent state action.

Tyner demonstrates how capitalism's ability to modify culture and modes of production results to the appraisal of individuals wherein those deemed productive and not considered a burden are the only ones considered valuable. Given capital's adherence to efficiency, "profit over welfare", and indifference to an individual's situation, the violent exploitation of labor becomes normalized and accepted as a natural and legal part of the production process. Those who are infirm, disabled, old, and poor are considered costly and redundant individuals who are violently disposed of, not provided help, or are simply allowed through institutionalized practices to "let die". Much worse is how such neoconservative thinking promotes the belief that unproductive individuals or people are also responsible for their lot in life due to bad decision-making, innate limitations, or simply bad luck and, thus, do not deserve any assistance.

Tyner illustrates how violence is institutionalized by citing how science and politics in American society in the late 1800s promoted "scientific" and legally upheld beliefs (i.e., eugenics) and activities (i.e., sterilizations)—structured forms of violence—supposedly to protect society from a perceived threat. Such activities had disastrous consequences on specific marginalized groups. Specifically, American society's policy to lessen healthcare costs has led to the development of pseudo-scientific cost metrics that favors groups whose treatment would lead to the "most gain" at the expense of those whose ascription as "disabled", "old", or "redundant" can be likened to a death sentence. This commodification of every aspect of our social lives, unfortunately, also limits, simplifies, and conditions what we consider as violence.

While the cases cited in the book would probably be more appealing to readers from the Global North, *Violence in Capitalism's* pages are a gold mine of ideas and arguments that resonate with present Philippine conditions. Tyner's contentions could also be related to the current killings associated with the "war on drugs", or the suggested lifting of non-exemptions of senior citizens and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from the value-added tax (VAT). As he notes, states can justify the disposal of individuals for as long as the latter are portrayed as "incorrigible monsters" and "hazards" whose killing the state has been obliged to undertake. This reality sits alongside the costly rehabilitation of drug users perceived to have caused their own problems—an impractical consequence, given the country's surplus in employable individuals. Such a mindset seems to reflect how the state has conducted the present drug war in its efforts to reclaim the public's safety. In this sense, both the neoliberal obsession with market efficiency

and the neoconservative assertion that the poor and marginalized are partly to blame for their difficult conditions, can be viewed by VAT-exemption advocates as the effects of how capitalist thinking can lead to structural and legalized violence being inflicted on the country's disadvantaged groups. Thus, capitalism supports structures that valorize the importance of a person's productivity, while fostering a seeming indifference to the lives of individuals without the ability to create value.

Tyner likewise provides a more nuanced understanding of violence that is not place and context-specific. He asserts that people's conditioned and simplistic understanding of what accounts as a violent act that is commonly understood as sensory in nature and done by a clear perpetrator leads to our failure to appreciate less evident actions and even non-actions that inflict harm on particular people. Moreover, the book also provides a thorough explanation of how institutions developed by capitalism (i.e., such as the criminal justice system) has produced societies that are overly concerned with and approve the prevention of negative actions towards others, but have no motivation to properly reward and encourage people to do good things—positive actions—for their fellowmen. As such, there are no repercussions for refusing to help others in need.

Beyond these points, the strength of Tyner's book is also seen in the explanation it offers on how certain non-actions by institutions and groups in society that allow people to die (or exposes them to harm) are entrenched over time by prevailing values and beliefs. Tyner cites how the American health care system withholds needed medical treatment, in some cases, to certain individuals and allow them to "let die". Such non-actions (i.e., interventions that are not cost effective, or the said individual is "too old anyway") are justified in terms of viewing non-action not as crimes but to consider them, in fact, as the right thing to do. Filipino readers might not be able to relate to such particularity, given the endemic lack of resources and services in the Philippines. Yet one would surely be encouraged to reflect as to which institutionalized practices in Philippine society, particularly those that are seemingly benign and whose effects are not readily manifest, expose marginalized groups to harm, death, or the diminution of their human potential.

This book is meaningful because it could compel readers to think critically of how the structure—institutions and people who hold the resources and make the rules—conditions what could be considered as criminal or violent acts, and how such simplified ways of portraying violence have obscured other forms of harm that are likely to go unnoticed. One may also be encouraged to ponder on whether the extent of the commodification of everyday life in Philippine society has already reached a point where it has affected how we value certain groups, such as the elderly and the disabled.

If the book has any weakness, it could be that Tyner's proposal on how to address the unequal exposure of social groups is more of a general call for social change where nuanced inquiries into the processes that generate such social inequalities would have effectively translated his ideas to context-specific examples. Yet this does not in any way diminish this remarkably well researched and skilfully written work that is a must-read for graduate students and academics in the social sciences, human rights advocates, as well as policy and decision-makers in government.

REVIEWER

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BOOK

Archipelago Tourism: Policies and Practices

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Island-hopping in tourism

Archipelago Tourism is a welcome addition to the Ashgate's series *New Directions in Tourism Analysis*. Like other volumes in the collection, it aims at filling a gap in tourism scholarship by proposing avenues for theorization while departing from the fields of hospitality management and business in tourism that have been emphasized in much of the literature up to this point. To support this effort, respected island specialist Godfrey Baldacchino gathers a group of interdisciplinary researchers and practitioners to take readers "around the world" in order to better understand island tourism development. It is not simply islands that are the focus of this book, however, but rather islands as they exist in relation to each other as parts of clusters of islands. Recognizing that "most islands are actually archipelagos" (13), this book aims at broadening the definition of what constitutes an archipelago, from a strictly geological classification to a socio-spatial entity facing specific challenges and distinct prospects for development. In effect, it not only expands the analytical reach of archipelagos, but also rescales the very notion of island.

The volume is organized like an oceanic map, with a separate section devoted to major bodies of water on the planet: the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Collectively, the chapters delve into archipelagic case studies by addressing island logistics, place-branding, and marketing for