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Sujo

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Sujo

Abstract

This is a film review of *Sujo* (2024), directed by Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez.

Keywords

Gangs, Violence, Vengeance

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Author Notes

Chris Deacy is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies and former Head of Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. His PhD (University of Wales, 1999) was in the area of redemption and film, and Chris has published monographs which include *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred* (Oxford University Press, 2016); *Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film* (Routledge, 2012); and *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (University of Wales Press, 2001). Chris also writes regular film reviews, is writing a book about nostalgia and religion and has been hosting a podcast since 2018 called *Nostalgia Interviews with Chris Deacy* - <https://audioboom.com/channels/4956567>



Sujo (2024), dir. Astrid Rondero and Fernanda Valadez

Sujo is a rewarding but slow Mexican coming-of-age narrative which charts the impact of a killing on the life of a young boy who is rendered an orphan, and exiled, by the experience. The drug cartels loom while a young boy, Sujo (Kevin Arguilar), named after a rodeo stallion, sees his father massacred for being an alleged traitor, and Sujo is now himself marked in case when he is older he seeks vengeance on those who took away his father's life.

Sujo goes into hiding and, played as an older boy by Juan Jesús Varela, ekes out a more respectable existence, including achieving the kind of rudimentary education in Mexico City his thwarted young life was missing. Inevitably, however, the past catches up with him and he is forced to (re-)act. Sujo is a *persona non grata* who already from the age of four is a marked man-to-be, and the film paints a searing picture of the sort of structures that ensure some lives are never able to recover from brutality and cruelty—which means some people never get a chance to grow into adulthood, emotionally and physically.

An otherworldly element hangs in the background as the ghost of Sujo's father re-appears and speaks to him, and there is the irony that it is the voices of the deceased who exercise a greater degree of authority and guardianship than their living counterparts who, not least in the form of the drug peddlers, are soulless and inhuman figures, more tainted by death than the departed ghosts—who at least have a message of hope to impart.

Sujo is a film which has much to say about the way the hand of destiny, in this case the paternal lineage, exerts itself throughout a life and shapes it in ways mostly deleterious. Sujo even has a gang tattoo embedded on his chest, showing the extent to which he is a marked man who cannot escape not so much his own as his father's history. Free will is non-existent in this landscape, and death hangs over these truncated lives in perpetuity. The ending is abrupt, but this is a sombre and moving film, though one that takes its time to tell a not unfamiliar story.