

## FIGURATIONS OF VIOLENCE AND GENDER IN ANAHY DE LAS MISIONES



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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the figurations of violence and gender from the analysis and interpretation of the film *Anahy de las Misiones* (1997), by Sérgio Silva. The setting of the feature film is the Pampa of Rio Grande do Sul during the period of the Farroupilha Revolution (1835-1845). The plot contrasts with the official history of Rio Grande do Sul – captivated by the celebration of gaudéria masculinity through narratives of bravery and virility – by introducing us to Anahy, a wandering woman, former prostitute, single and old woman who takes the lead in her family and survives from the collection and sale of remains found in the remains of the war killings. Anahy's wanderings and her way of facing the violence of war subvert the traditional gaucho representation that attributes to women an identity marked by subordination. Reading the film allows us to discuss, on the one hand, the figurations of violence and gender; and on the other hand, to question the absences of official history and think about other protagonists.

**Keywords:** Figurations-of-violence. Gender. Resistance.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is winter, in the years 1839. Anahy, her daughter and their three sons eat hominy and jerky in a camp set up under a tree. They drink mate, sleep on the ground in the open, sometimes sing and dance. All this occurs on the flat horizon with the characteristic undergrowth of the pampa gaúcho, which, soon after, is cut by these same five people, pushing a cart at dusk. This wagon can be understood as the sixth character in the plot and constitutes a point of reference in a landscape whose borders are marked by war. The wagon is present at all times of the plot, serving to transport and store all the family's assets. The cart is pulled by oxen, but most of the time it is the people who pull it. On this path, without beginning or end, the monotony of the scenario is interrupted by the traces of a combat, whose bodies are examined by Anahy and his family looking for objects with some value: weapons, clothes, coins, boots, etc., anything that can earn them a penny. It is the film "Anahy de las Misiones" (1997), by Sérgio Silva. The setting of the feature film is the Pampa of Rio Grande do Sul during the period of the Farroupilha Revolution (1835-1845). The purpose of this paper is to discuss the figurations of violence and gender based on the analysis and interpretation of this film. The plot contrasts with the official history of Rio Grande do Sul – captivated by the celebration of gaudéria masculinity through narratives of bravery and virility – by introducing us to Anahy, a wandering woman, former prostitute, single and old woman who takes the lead in her family and survives from the collection and sale of remains found in the remains of the war killings. Anahy's wanderings and her way of facing the violence of war subvert the traditional gaúcho representation that attributes to women an identity marked by subordination. Reading the film allows us to discuss, on the one hand, the figurations of violence and gender; and on the other hand, to question the absences of official history and think about other protagonists.

Perhaps poverty is dramatized through the romantic depiction of nomadic life, which is far from a choice for women like Anahy in her time. Throughout the plot, Anahy sells what she has – starting with her own body, when it is no longer useful for the work of prostitution, she starts working with the leftovers of other bodies. When referring to her children, she says that only one, Leon, was the result of a satisfactory sexual relationship. As for the others, says Anahy, "they are children of who knows what, of my not wanting". Anahy's first offspring, Solano, is lame in childhood when he is kicked by a cow – however, he is the only one of his children who does not die young. After him, came his son Teo, who went to

war in favor of the Farrapos, alongside his recent friend Manuel Soares.<sup>3</sup> Then Luna was born, Anahy's only daughter, who wears bandages, pretending to have a contagious disease. It is a disguise to protect oneself from probable sexual abuse, a practice reported in times of war, as shown, for example, in the books of Belarusian writer and journalist Svetlana Alexievich. Luna expresses a desire to marry and live under one roof, with a certain whereabouts. Finally, León, Anahy's youngest son and the first to die due to his untimely situation in the face of a confrontation situation with a ragged soldier.

During the course of the plot, Anahy demonstrates a constant reflection on his condition in the face of the disastrous and aggressive events he has been going through since he was young – from china to the nursery.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, she experiences the demands of thought, questioning this condition and forging alternatives, as can be seen in the dialogue established, in the middle of the film, between Anahy and one of her former lovers, Joca Ramires. Anahy says:

Oh! Today I defend myself (laughs). I even know how to take advantage of war and life. But it wasn't like that one day. These tits, little more than two *butiás*, and there was already a man riding on me, snorting a stinky and hot *canha* air with their mouths open in my face. Then, one day, I meditated like this: To live in this big world you have to be bad like him. Wickedness is paid for with wickedness.

In one way or another, the patriarchal logic insinuates itself, reveals itself and runs through the entire film, producing and reproducing violence that is potentiated by colonialism and capitalism. An example of the reproduction of the violence suffered is the relationship that Anahy begins to establish with Picumã, a young woman without a mother, without a father and without possessions. The only apparent difference between the two is the age difference and the children that Picumã does not have. The old china, Anahy, asks Picumã to chili with her children, with the support of Joca Ramires, who says: "Picumã, give the best of your services to the *gurizote*". Before that, Joca Ramires revealed the violations suffered by Picumã during the passage of the *caramurus*: "the poor Picumã, they helped themselves, they smeared themselves, until the poor thing couldn't take it anymore,

<sup>3</sup> In the film, there is no explicit reference to relationships contrary to heteronormativity, however a possible reading, from the perspective of LGBTQIA+ studies, can be made in the scene in which Teo takes care of Manuel's wounds (a rag fighter found along the way) and decides to go to war with him. At another time, both are found dead together – one in the arms of the other. Be that as it may, what moves us in making this relationship are the interpretative and analytical possibilities that the film produces.

<sup>4</sup> The term *china* is used in the film to designate women for the enjoyment of men, especially as prostitutes. In the Gaúcho dialect, the term has a broader meaning, and can be used as a synonym for woman. The term *vivandeira* will be addressed in the next section of this text.

she was all trampled on, she was bleeding there for about five days, she walked around the corners *alone*, crying, I even thought she was dying". But he did not die. And once again without being consulted, Picumã had her destiny mapped out when she was handed over to Anahy's possessions to be used as a servant and for sexual abuse by men.

By joining the wanderers, Picumã starts to push the cart and also becomes a nursery. In the first scene in which Picumã rummages through the corpses in search of some valuable object, she cries, complains about the bad smell, says that she doesn't like to do that, when León approaches and says: "and do you have any wants?" Luna tries to defend Picumã, but is also attacked when León echoes: "Mare that male does not cover, ends up swelling". Solano, in turn, reiterates the violence in his attempt to appease the discussion by saying: "intervening with women is of little use".

The film ends in order to materialize the paradox of resistance that runs through the entire feature film. Anahy walks with Luna, pregnant with a rag, and explains to her daughter what the moment of delivery will be like with her unavoidable pain. Anahy is excited about the life to come and says: "now we just go forward. No going back and forth." Luna listens. Picumã and Solano push the cart. The "forward" path to which Anahy referred goes towards an abyss that is only revealed when the camera moves away from the scene, ending the film.

The paradox also inhabits the path taken by the landscape of Rio Grande do Sul. The plot begins in the pampas, crosses the hills of the stones of the Dorsal das Encantadas and ends in the canyons of the Cambará mountain range. As Anahy climbs this reveal, half of her children are finished and her own end is tragically announced when she reaches the highest point. Pushing a cart up a hill with the reward of falling off a cliff not only alludes to the myth of Sisyphus (a character from Greek mythology condemned to eternal fall for defying death), but also performs a metaphor for the fleeting hope of escaping poverty – a hope like the transitory glow of the boitatá, the will-o'-the-wisp.<sup>5</sup>

## THE FILM AS A CULTURAL PRODUCT

The analysis of a cultural product, such as the one chosen in this text, requires considering some aspects concerning the social spaces and hegemonic representations occupied by men and women, in given historical conditions. They are of central importance, and can greatly contribute to this end, especially in the face of a broader demand, namely,

<sup>5</sup> Boitatá is a Tupi-Guarani term that refers to a fire snake, whose symbology is used in the film.

to develop an understanding of the theme of violence, its multifaceted forms, its articulations with gender issues and how they are perceived in Latin America today. In this text, the intention is to discuss the figurations of violence and gender from the analysis and interpretation of the film *Anahy de las Misiones* (1997), by Sérgio Silva, whose setting is the Pampa of Rio Grande do Sul, during the period of the War of the Farrapos and/or Farroupilha Revolution (1835-1845). The justification for this analysis lies in the understanding that different figurations (literary, cinematographic), although they do not announce political objectives or fidelity to a kind of faithful portrayal of reality, are not detached from the contexts narrated in what they confer on the cultural meanings shared there. Above all, the assertion is that its effects are of another order, of another amplitude, perhaps, they enable the emergence of other lives, of other realities than those portrayed in the official historiography.

A fundamental aspect related to gender representations and the theme under analysis is that the history told about the current State of Rio Grande do Sul (which has also been called the Province of São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul and the Rio-Grandense Republic), especially with regard to the period of the aforementioned war, It is a masculine story, so to speak, par excellence. Something clearly identifiable in different historiographical approaches (which does not depend on the respective theoretical-methodological approaches), as well as in other types of narratives available about this event. The patriarchy, the ranchers, the military, warlords, slave owners, as well as other men who followed them, would be the protagonists of the acts of courage, virility, heroism and bravery, indispensable for this struggle. They make up the scenario that is drawn in the eyes of the reader, coming from some history books available to institutional formations (whether basic or higher), in spite of certain emphases, according to the historiographical perspective adopted by the author, be it traditional, Marxist or cultural.

It is also the scenario mentioned above, that of literature, folk songs, commemorative dates. Currently, the cult of the so-called Farroupilha traditions is maintained in traditionalist gaúcho centers found in various places in the Brazilian territory.<sup>6</sup> Traditions that come fundamentally from the reading that was made of the War of the Ragamuffins, interpreting it as an event of revolutionaries, separatists, abolitionists and

<sup>6</sup> All cities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul have CTGs - Gaúcho Traditions Centers. Distributed throughout the Brazilian territory, there are approximately 3 thousand. Available at: <http://g1.globo.com/rs/rio-grande-do-sul/semana-farroupilha/2015/noticia/2015/08/quase-40-dos-ctgs-estao-fora-do-rs-confira-mapa-do-tradicionalismo.html>

rebels. Thus, the Farroupilha memory is exalted, names such as Bento Gonçalves, David Canabarro, José Gomes de Vasconcelos Jardim, Antônio Neto, Giuseppe Garibaldi, among others, are honored. Avenues, streets in several cities (and even in the name of some of them) in the current State of Rio Grande do Sul, have their deeds perpetuated. Lopez (1992, p.48) says: "As a framework for the southern conflagration, chroniclers, aulics of official historiography and literati spared no ink to exalt the bravery and courage of the Farrapos and their commanders". They are meanings, at first glance, shared and defined as markers, as references of what would be the gaúcho culture in its "essence and nature", a culture built by heroic men and the absence of women. The film *Anay de las Misiones* did not have the same national and international success as the feature film "Neto loses his soul" (2001), by Tabajara Ruas and Beto Souza. This last film tells the adventures of a young farrapo's misadventures, giving a foretaste of his success by enshrining the legitimacy of the male experience in war. On the other hand, *Anay de las Misiones* exposes rape as a weapon in a war scenario.

Although rereadings of historical facts have emerged, especially with regard to the real motivations for the unleashing of this War, as well as research on the participation of black peoples,<sup>7</sup> something of the myth, with regard to the effective presence of women in that decade of conflict, seems to remain. As Louro (p.22, 1987) points out, the men of the colonels, the peons of estancieros, the men of the people, in some way, were convinced to fight in the wars and revolutions of that period, as well as others that shaped the history of the State "(...) they fought and died so that their bosses would have more land; or for the maintenance or overthrow of some political leader", it should be added, in general terms, fought for the elites of the time, unhappy with taxes, as other researchers point out.<sup>8</sup> The author understands, also based on literary figurations of great importance, such as that of Érico Veríssimo,<sup>9</sup> that women are described as strong and responsible for the maintenance of daily life, farms and farms. Louro says about the way women were portrayed in Rio

<sup>7</sup> See: LEITMAN, Spencer L. Negros farrapos: hipocrisia racial no sul do Brasil no século XIX. In: DACANAL, José Hildebrando. The Farroupilha Revolution: history & interpretation. Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1997. and FLORES, Moacyr. Blacks in the Farroupilha Revolution: betrayal in Porongos and farce in Ponche Verde. Porto Alegre: EST, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Other conflicts occurred in that period, they were understood as regency rebellions, the motto of the disputes was the Federative system: Praieira Revolution, Cabanagem, Balaiada, Sabinada. See more details at: DANTAS, Monica Duarte Revolts, riots, revolutions: poor and freed free men of nineteenth-century Brazil. São Paulo: Alameda Editorial, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> *O tempo e o vento*, a work by Érico Veríssimo, narrates the formation of the people of Rio Grande do Sul in three volumes: *O Continente* (1949), *O Retrato* (1951) and *O Arquipélago* (1961). It is considered the work that best represents the State, its formation, wars and culture.



Grande do Sul literature: "And all this time, women took care of their children and waited; they kept their homes, fed theirs, and waited; they took responsibility and waited" (1987, p.22).

The understanding of what we call culture can be related to human production endowed with senses and meanings shared collectively, it is something, in itself, endowed with complexity, given the singularities inherent to each of these concepts. It is possible to question, for example, how this sharing takes place. In this attempt at denomination, it is feasible to align oneself with the terms of Pesavento (2019, p.48), when she states that:

"Cultural traits move between groups, layers or social classes, allowing continuous reelaborations, which makes the analysis of the past more instigating, seeing the reuse and reappropriation of the same values, which permeate the fabric of the social, in new creations of meaning".

From the aforementioned meaning, it is possible to understand the wide range of efforts in the search for understanding, visibility and the emergence of new characters in the Farroupilha scene. Something remarkable, both in different historiographical perspectives and in literary figurations, considering them as approaches from different domains, but of fundamental importance in debates about culture. Thus, added to the female character who received greater prominence in the period, Anita Garibaldi,<sup>10</sup> academic works highlight the importance, for example, of the so-called estancieiras. A tone of exaltation of the virtues of these women is perceptible, as well as of the characters of Érico Veríssimo, mentioned above. The official historiography presents these distinguished women as endowed with firmness, courage, and strength, and justify these characteristics as determinants for the role they assumed in ensuring protection, care for the home, work and children on the ranches, given the absence of men.<sup>11</sup> This position of leadership and the attribution of a fearless personality raised these characters to a level similar to that of the men of war, being something undeniable in different narratives and which also contributes to a type of idealization of the gaucho culture. These are efforts that are perhaps possible in the present time, emerging from the contemporary in which "the others" are questioned, or rather, the other absences of hegemonic histories.

<sup>10</sup> The most remembered female character in the Farroupilha Revolution, Giuseppe Garibaldi's companion, considered a woman "ahead of her time", revolutionary, combatant, courageous. She is considered a heroine in Brazil and Italy. See: MARKUN, Paulo. Anita Garibaldi: a Brazilian heroine. São Paulo, Senac, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> See: ORTIZ, Airton. The role of women in the Farroupilha Revolution. In: FLORES, Hilda Agnes Hüber et al. The woman in the Farroupilha period. Porto Alegre: Tchê, 2003 and "The women of the Farroupilha elite: gender roles And family (RS, 1835-1845)". Available at: <<http://periodicos.uff.br/cantareira/article/view/27847>>

It is not enough to bring to history characters who have been forgotten. It is also necessary to question the type of visibility forged "when new characters enter the scene", to use Eder Sader's famous phrase. This is because the interests of those who narrate may come to serve the meta-narrative that sustains the recursion of official history. An example of this is the way *nurseries* are often mentioned. Before reaffirming this argument, it is worth trying to start at the beginning, or rather, with the dictionary. The dictionary *priberam* assigns two meanings to the term *vivandeira*: "woman who sold to soldiers, who accompanied on the march, edibles, drinks"; and the other meaning refers to "woman who sells groceries in the markets".<sup>12</sup> It is noted that both designations are devoid of adjectives. The qualities given to the nurseries transform these women sellers into a kind of second-rate heroine, whose purpose is to serve "without complaint" the men of war, as can be seen here: "The company of the nurseries for the soldiers was sometimes the only distraction they could have. These women who, despite the atmosphere of sadness due to the deaths, were committed to cheering up the men they served with parties and storytelling." (GONÇALVES, 2009, p.17).

The survival strategies of the nurses in a war scenario are highlighted as acts of kindness arising from a selfless character, reinforcing an ideal of feminine Christian virtue. Since the violations suffered by the *vivandeiras* are silenced or narrated as an almost voluntary servitude in favor of male hegemony, which reduces these women to support peddlers and objects of shameless pleasure and with a spirit of sacrifice.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Paraphrasing Svetlana Alexievich in a questioning tone: "Doesn't war have a woman's face?". In the tradition of hegemonic official historiography, it is observed that the narrative about space, the territory of wars, is maintained as exclusive to men. Anahy, however, not only walks through places where battles take place, but also sustains, in his own way, the war, through, for example, the decision about life and death. In the first scene of the film, a dying fighter begs her for the end of her pain, calling her "Mother", Anahy decides to answer him, slitting her throat.

Women, in historiographies and figurations referring to the period of the Farroupilha Revolution, are mentioned as virtuous and reclusive women who wait for their men, Anahy does not wait, she moves around the territory and makes a living from the war itself. Anahy

<sup>12</sup> Priberam Dictionary of the Portuguese Language. Available at: <https://dicionario.priberam.org/vivandeira>



can be seen as one of the many scattered experiences of resistance, of resistance to stay alive when everything goes the other way around.

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