



The Aesthetics of Hunger: A Postcolonial Reading of Violence in Latin America

A estética da fome: uma leitura pós-colonial de violência na América Latina

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Abstract: This study addresses *Lope de Aguirre's Letter to the King* as one of the innumerable materials that relates to the aesthetics of hunger in Glauber Rocha's work. The writing of the letter itself is a document of resistance through Andean as well as Amazonian territories: against institutional power, religious values, justice, and corruption. In doing so, the letter shares the main characteristics present in the works of art produced by Glauber Rocha during Cinema Novo. This means that the aesthetics of hunger should be understood as an atemporal response to historical and structural violence, instead of an aesthetical phenomenon limited to the context of Cinema Novo in Brazil. In more practical terms, this investigation identifies the mechanisms of the aesthetics of hunger in *Lope de Aguirre's Letter to the King*. It demonstrates that such aesthetics is a collective recurrent phenomenon in Latin America's history since its colonization. The aesthetics of hunger, thus, contests not only the work of art in the 20th century through Cinema Novo, or the tradition of foundational documents (travel chronicles) in the late 1400s and early 1500s, but most importantly, it allows literary criticism to approach the matter of hunger as a counterpoint to – not a form of subjugation by – (post)colonial practices.

Keywords: hunger; Andean; Amazonian; violence; Latin America.

Resumo: Este estudo aborda a *Carta de Lope de Aguirre ao Rei* como um dos inúmeros materiais que dialogam com a estética da fome na obra de Glauber Rocha. A redação da carta em si mesma é um documento de resistência nos territórios andinos e amazônicos: contra o poder institucional, valores religiosos, justiça e corrupção. Portanto, a carta compartilha as principais características presentes nas obras de arte produzidas por Glauber Rocha durante o Cinema Novo. O que isto significa é que a estética da fome deve ser entendida como uma resposta atemporal à violência histórica e estrutural, em vez de um fenômeno estético limitado ao contexto do Cinema Novo no Brasil. Em termos mais práticos, esta investigação identificará os mecanismos da estética da fome na *Carta de Lope de Aguirre ao Rei*. A análise em questão demonstra que tal estética é um fenômeno recorrente e coletivo na história da América Latina desde sua colonização. A estética da fome, portanto, contesta não apenas a obra de arte do século XX através do Cinema Novo, ou a tradição de documentos fundacionais (crônicas de viagem) no final de 1400 e início de 1500, mas permite, para além disso, que a crítica literária aborde a questão da fome como um contraponto a – não uma forma de subjugação por – práticas (pós)coloniais.

Palavras-chave: fome; andinos; amazônicos; violência; América Latina.

The initial writing of travel diaries in the New World was decisive for the increase of European power, and its global dominance expansion. The crafting of such documents not only communicated the Eurocentric morals, and colonial visions, but also helped shaping what kind of political settlements would take place in the new discovered lands. In such diaries, the marginalization of the *other* was a necessary artifice that justified the imposition of Catholicism, exploitation of Nature, and human labor. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that such marginalization (of the Amerindian, in the case of colonial Latin America) took place according to textual mechanisms that resulted in their voice disappearance. In other words, European travelers, and conquistadors wrote the foundational texts of the new lands. The writing of those men conveyed information about the natives, Nature, and the potentiality for exploitation of goods.

The textual disappearance of voice and identity of the locals signified the repression of their artistic, technological, and religious visions. The disavowal of their collective values and beliefs established an important boundary between two definite spaces in the late 15th and early 16th centuries: of the crown, and of the colony. This geographical

and imaginary division sets forth a tradition of injustice, economic inequalities, corruption, and political disparities in what is nowadays called Latin America.

In 1965, the cinematographer Glauber Rocha wrote a manifesto called “The Aesthetics of Hunger”, which addressed the horrendous consequences of such disparities in the Latin American countryside. His manifesto declared the independence of Latin American work of art from those European, and North American ones. What the aesthetics of hunger aimed to do, as an ongoing sociopolitical and philosophical process, was to create a space where the voice or the experience of the marginalized other could be validated. For Rocha, the mark of this aesthetics was to establish an in-between space that took advantage of hunger, instead of suffering from it. Rocha’s aesthetics of hunger was the cornerstone of the Brazilian Cinema Novo, but it also fostered a space for discussing (post)colonialism in Latin American history.

1 What is cultural hunger?

The introduction of Glauber Rocha’s “aesthetics of hunger” is written through a very direct justification on the situation of hunger in Latin America. The first part of the text does not focus on the conditions from which hunger originates in Latin American lands, but rather, it is centered on two decisive positions: that of the hungry, and that of the foreign interlocutor. Therefore, when Rocha mentions that he is going to approach hunger in “*termos menos reduzidos*” than those adopted by the European observer, he is establishing a discursive field closer to the reality of those who suffer from it in Latin America. First, because he is Brazilian, knowledgeable of the socioeconomic and political context of the Northeastern region, and secondly because, as creator of Cinema Novo, he understands the market demand of Hollywood cinema – and, therefore, its failure in understanding socio-political issues in the Latin American confines, for example.

In this context, the hungry, according to Rocha, laments “general miseries”, which are not understood by the foreign interlocutor. The Latino, that is, the hungry, precisely for being incapable of transmitting the root of these general miseries, allows the foreigner – the “civilized man” – to appropriate such inferior condition as a way to exercise his colonialist practices. In this sense, it is important to note what Rocha

discusses about colonial transpositions (new forms of colonialism), which is very important to understand why Latin America never completely disassociates itself from colonialist practices. In the third paragraph, the author deals with this theme. For him, “uma libertação possível estará ainda por muito tempo em função de uma nova dependência”. However, shortly before that he mentions: “e além dos colonizadores de fato, as formas sutis daqueles que também sobre nós armam futuros botes” affirmation alludes to the other difficulty of the Latin American question: national politics.

These cyclical phenomena (foreign and national colonialist forces), therefore, are key to understanding hunger in Latin America. Not only the aesthetics of hunger itself (as a written manifesto obeying a common syntax of the Portuguese language, for example), but also a whole cluster of ideological traces that mark the artistic production of Glauber Rocha (debatable through the critical and cinematographic analysis of his work) are capable of offering us an outlet to discuss other issues that surround hunger.

According to Nigam, structural violence is generally related to how social structures or institutions (he mentions patriarchy, class, race, etc.) operate in a given society. The structural violence that Nigam talks about is invisible: “it constitutes violence of a particular kind that destroys life chances of people at the receiving end” (NIGAM, 2016, p. 68). Some of the examples he brings up are hunger and poverty – both issues that have been indicated by Cristóbal Kay (2007) as a product of the shaping of Latin America over six centuries. In the case of these structural violence instances, Nigam signals that they need a different approach since both raise “complex theoretical issues of subject-formation and the consent of the oppressed in their own oppression” (NIGAM, 2016, p. 68). If hunger is, then, already a form of violence, where do we place violent acts that emanate from it? Is it possible to hierarchize, or categorize these types of violence? Both questions lead us to discuss the issue of sociopolitical resistance. Kay also points out that the distinct inequalities, and conflicts that arise in such scenario are due to the agrarian socioeconomic arrangement that take place in the outskirts of Latin American countries in general.

Because what interests me here is the matter of hunger, the letter of Lope de Aguirre, like the work of Rocha, functions as a way to approach it. On the one hand, it is a written acknowledgement of one who suffers

from structured violence, and also biological hunger, and on the other, an important textual tool that helps us navigate the language in what hunger writes itself.

The letter of Lope de Aguirre helps us understand how and in which circumstances the hungry ones communicate the structural violence of hunger. One would argue that each experience of biological hunger would be unique, meaning that each individual experiences it in a different way – some become more irritable, physically violent, or even quiet, and sleepy. However, it is important to bear in mind that the document at stake represents a discourse of resistance in the context it is written. We cannot establish that Aguirre's words are exclusively the vital signs of his own hunger.

My argument does not revolve around the fact of hunger as a pure biological condition. There is, indeed, a connection to less favored classes, or geographical regions that undergo a reality marked by lack of food, and access to better conditions of life. This is where the aesthetics of hunger departs from: a collective suffering that is capable of making people aware of its perpetrators.

It is imperative for us to pay close attention to how Aguirre describes the societal dynamics of those days. His manifesto is not a mere repudiation about the king's relationship with the colonies; it conveys a discourse of someone who has become a sufferer of what Nigam mentioned before. Aguirre is able to speak about the catastrophic arrangement of the Spanish colonization in the Andean, and Amazonian regions as he is not solely in the position of a colonizer anymore. Because he suffers of biological hunger, and of the corrupt political system in the colony, he is able to enter a space of clarity that is collective – for those who also experience it.

Consequently, sociopolitical marginalization brings, with its very existence, the dissociation of certain societal codes, or values – be they honor, human rights, justice, dignity, and even cultural identity. Hunger, as a biological phenomenon, exists intermittently between two conditions of one's digestive system: of it being full, and then empty (or vice-versa). Leon Kass (1999) postulates that the role of food respects two different moments that are present in the hungry phase: the apprehension of food, and its digestion. For him, the second phase is when the form (of what the food used to be before digestion) becomes part of the eater himself – when the food particles are broken down and entered the blood system.

This biological singularity is crucial for us to approach the subject of hunger as a metaphorical, cultural, experience for the colonized countries in Latin America.

Aesthetically speaking, the devaluation of certain societal codes and values, that were once part of a common “diet” in the eyes of the transplanted Europeans (or taught to the natives by them), triggers a behavior that seeks the consumption, or retrieval of them. This is the heart of a “dietary crisis” that will denounce the conditions in which colonialism failed as a project, and that will frame the Latin American experience.

2 The Letter

Written in 1561, *Lope de Aguirre’s Letter to the King* is an important document that testifies the failure of the search for El Dorado. The Gold Museum in Bogotá is a well-known existing archive that tells the story of the myth of El Dorado. It is notorious that the golden artifacts crafted by the Muisca were sacred offerings to the goddess Guatavita. The pre-Hispanic tradition consisted in a ceremony in which the zipa (the tribe’s chief) would cover his body in gold dust, and deposit gold treasures in the middle of the Lake Guatavita. The name “El Dorado” (the golden one) derived from this religious ritual. As of today, the Gold Museum of Bogotá holds many of the artifacts offered to the goddess as proof of the Muisca tradition.

Overtime, the aforementioned ritualistic offerings were believed to have a connection with a wealthy, untouched society. The Spaniards who inhabited those lands hoped to find not only a society that crafted sacred objects in gold, but that was also a powerful, prosperous empire. The existence of the El Dorado Empire, then, was believed for over two centuries, encouraging travelers and explorers from many parts of the world to search for an unimaginable, hidden amount of gold.

In 1560, Pedro de Ursúa initiated an expedition that intended to find the mythical golden empire. It is acknowledged that the whole expedition was a disaster from the beginning. The *Crónica de la expedición de Pedro de Ursúa y Lope de Aguirre (1562)*, by Francisco Vásquez, is a contextualizing document that allowed the crown to know about the details of the El Dorado’s enterprise. However, Vásquez’s text, beyond informing various aspects of the expedition, was also crafting

his own detachment from culpability – of corruption, murders, and disobedience to the crown in regards to the insurgent acts of Aguirre. Consequently, the depiction of Lope de Aguirre was conveyed in a rebellious, barbaric, ruthless way.

It is in this context that we can approach *Lope de Aguirre's Letter to the King*. Differently than Vásquez's text, with Aguirre we can identify the traces of the aesthetics of hunger, as I mentioned before. First of all, because Vásquez's writing follows a structure commonly seen in travel diaries: chapter, subchapters, the narration of deeds, strategies, nature, natives, etc. In Vásquez's we have a clear intention – in the form of a traditional travel diary – of the craft, and manipulation of information. Secondly, as I point out some passages of Aguirre's letter, we can observe that there is a flux of consciousness freed from form in the latter author. There is a telling of historic aspects in a chronological order, but among them, it is common to notice interventions made by Aguirre. They can be religious, anthropologic, political, biblical, to mention a few, as we go over the analysis of the infamous letter.

Before we go over the passages I have selected, I want to recall that when Walter Mignolo makes a distinction about colonialism and coloniality in *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), he is urging us to understand the difference between historical occurrences versus a way of exercising power. According to him, the forces of imperialism mark colonialism. Therefore (mainly in the 15th and 16th centuries), the presence of armies, and institutions such as the governments, and churches would indicate the phenomenon of colonialism. The latter (coloniality), follows “the logical structure of colonial domination” (MIGNOLO, 2005, p. 7); it is a way of thinking that tends to lead to world dominance.

These concepts, far from being discussed in the times of Lope de Aguirre, constitute important advances in the way we understand world history, and culture domination/appropriation. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these concepts come from non-Western thinkers, and that what originates them has to do with a collective development of political, and cultural consciousness. How could we connect the protests in Aguirre's letter to the awakening of a political consciousness if he was the colonizer? What elicits Aguirre's engagement with local, colonial struggles?

The failure of the El Dorado enterprise left behind innumerable aspects of the colonialist logics. It emblemized, for Aguirre, more than

an insatiable search for wealth, and Spanish expansionism. It, rather, resignified the sociopolitical and religious institutions as the heart of a broader issue – the failure of the royal system in Spain, and of its values such as honor.

The letter starts off with Aguirre's own profiling: "Rey Felipe, natural español hijo de Carlos invencible: Lope de Aguirre, tu mínimo vasallo, cristiano viejo, de medianos padres y en mi prosperidad hijodalgo, natural vascongado, en el reino de España, en la villa de Oñate vecino" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 291).

The adjectives used in this opening paragraph distance the narrator from his reader. Even before jumping into the text, we all know who the interlocutors are because the title of the document already makes it explicit. However, the way Aguirre opens the letter poses two decisive effects for the initial analysis of it: of delimiting boundaries of power, and of setting an ironic tone.

In the first case, he makes clear to mention king Felipe's father, the invincible, while juxtaposing his own descent "de medianos padres". At a political level, what this does is to determine a distance between both of them, undermining any possibility of a royal title to be related to prestige. This happens because Aguirre, as a rebel and the sender of the letter, is the one who is crafting history from the margins of the globe. Additionally, he is not a recognized writer for the crown. The accusations he makes are based on the failure of the royal system as the highest governing power to take charge on the appalling, political circumstances of the Andean colonies. Therefore, if the crown is not able to sustain its own development, and to remedy the issues of modernization, then, in other words, the hierarchical royal system is in crisis – hence, being defeated by itself.

The term "invincible", thus, is contesting its use even before we get to know the facts Aguirre presents. Aguirre's gesture (of sending the letter) already proves that invincibility is a metonymical failure. Metonymical in the sense that the characteristics apply to the whole – king Carlos V was only invincible due to the effort of many (soldiers, explorers, captains, etc.). The attachment of king Felipe to the characteristics of his father makes possible a certain lineage of heroic traces; he is included in that "invincibility". It connects king Felipe to king Carlos not only through their blood lineage, but also to the honorable characteristics present in their familial bonds. King Carlos V is only

“invincible” within the boundaries of a contextualized slice of history. When royal figures appear related to those traces (the Invincible, the Great, the Reckless, the Prudent, etc.), they impose such features to the empire as an institution. They automatically become qualities of the surrounding relatives too – “Rey Felipe, natural español hijo de Carlos invencible”. The metonymic occurrence does not exclusively limit Aguirre’s grievances to king Felipe whatsoever. It is an attack to the tradition and logics of nobility, and its correspondence to a collective construction of virtue. Such construction of titles, and noble virtues, also has to be thought as part of the manufacturing of the idea of honor, and its dependence to an “other”.

Secondly, in the case of the ironic tone, the self-description constructed by Aguirre presents significant words: “mínimo vasallo”, “cristiano viejo”, “medianos padres”. Every single one of these adjectives puts Aguirre in a level of irrelevance when compared to the high status of a royal figure. This is only ironic because the adjectives applied are not intentionally used as a way of humility. After reading the whole letter, one could look back at the same adjectives and contest their use. “Mínimo vasallo” would not be the veracious characteristic of Lope de Aguirre. After leaving Spain, he became an alderman in Peru, and by the time the letter was written, Aguirre was a recognized conquistador. Therefore, we could not argue that the exercise of humility happens when he disregards his sociopolitical status.

As such, irony can only take place in this text because, from first to last paragraph, Aguirre will prove to be more knowledgeable, more just, and braver than king Felipe. Someone who is a “mínimo vasallo” would not be related to the acquisition/development of such capabilities. This is precisely where irony resides. How dare a “mínimo vasallo” be questioning what a king should or should not do?

The second adjective, “cristiano *viejo*”, works in a two-fold strategy: “old Christian” as in a long-term participant of the catholic church, and “old Christian” as in emphasizing Aguirre’s age. The former functions as an opposition to Aguirre’s own criminal, and unjust acts (before we read his justifications). Being an old Christian would only indicate the embracing of the catholic values, and morals¹ – which, at

¹ Ingrid Galster and Oscar Sola (2011, p. 43): or in relation to the absence of Jewish or Moorish blood in the family.

first, is not the case for Aguirre. The later, would suggest the discrepancy between both interlocutors' ages. In this case, the word "viejo" may even sound comical due to the brutal facts (Aguirre's use of violence) one would not relate to an old person.

Thirdly, the "medianos padres (y en mi prosperidad hijodalgo)" expression evokes the configuration of class in the Spanish society. At the same time Aguirre places his origins in the "medianos padres" social status, he is establishing a discourse that arises from such social experience. Furthermore, the addition of "y en mi prosperidad hijodalgo" only reinforces his presence to a less privileged social stratum, since he is not prosperous anymore. What becomes ironic here is the fact of Aguirre, representing the lower classes, to be delivering a discourse that puts the sociopolitical Spanish arrangement upside down. The euphemistic strategy favors his protest.

When Nigam talks about structural violence, we should be aware that the less privileged classes suffer as a collective corpus. The markers of time ascertain a very interesting aspect of the aesthetics of hunger: the suffering of the body. The "cristiano viejo" passage is also an evidence of this. In the second paragraph, Aguirre says: "En mi mocedad [...] en veinte y cuatro años te he hecho muchos servicios en el Perú [...] siempre conforme a mis fuerzas y posibilidad". The reader is not only presented to the heavy amount of years Aguirre had served the Spanish crown, but also to the disparity of ages between him and his interlocutor. King Felipe was thirty-four years old and Aguirre sixty-one when the letter was sent.

As the analysis of the letter unfolds, it is possible to notice the constant deprecation of the figure of the crown. The more Aguirre protests, the more convincing his initial allusions to the decadency of the imperial power are. Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera affirm that "Both church and state taught that God had created the colonial social order and that social justice was the maintenance of divine intentions" (JOHNSON; LIPSETT-RIVERA, 1998, p. 13). According to them, this way of thinking had severe impacts on the way honor was configured in the Iberian imaginary. The authors also point out the work of fiction with regards to the tradition of honor: "*Don Juan Tenorio*, *Don Quixote*, or the works of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón" (p. 7). Throughout his letter, Aguirre will denounce the corrupt catholic system, showing how pervasive dishonesty is among religious figures:

Pues los frailes a ningún indio pobre quieren enterrar y están aposentados en los mejores repartimientos del Pirú. La vida que llevan es áspera y trabajosa, porque cada uno dellos tiene por penitencia en sus cocinas una docena de mozas y no mu viejas, y otros tantos muchachos que les van a pescar, a matar perdices y a traer frutas. Todo el repartimiento tiene que hacer con ellos. En fe de cristianos te juro, rey y señor, que si no pones remedio en las maldades desta tierra, que te ha de venir castigo del cielo. Y esto dígolo por avisarte de la verdad, aunque yo y mis no esperamos ni queremos de ti misericordia. (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 291).

It is clear that Aguirre's emphasis on the exploitation of natives by the church seems more aberrant than the crimes committed by him. What we have in this specific paragraph is the rupture between two significant things: the church, and the sacred. Aguirre points out the sins committed by the church in the colonial lands, suggests the king to act, but, remarkably, refuses the king's mercy. He can only do that because he is laying out his opponent's weaknesses. He adds: "Por cierto tengo que van muy pocos reyes al infierno porque son pocos, que si muchos fuéades, ninguno pudiera ir al cielo, porque aun allá seríades peores que Lucifer, según tenéis ambición y hambre de hartaros de sangre humana [...]" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 292).

This passage demonstrates Aguirre's way of addressing the lack of honor among monarchs. It is curious how he diminishes his interlocutor by placing him, literally, in hell. If we think of hell as the least desired place to be in, then the insertion of a figure such as the king in that place would signify the disavowal of any virtues that come with his identity. It follows the same pattern of dishonor happened to Lucifer himself. From the highest, brightest angelical hierarchy, down to the darkest, and horrendous place, Christianity witnessed the extinction of Lucifer's honor. Textually, replicating such occurrence based on the most sacred text (the Bible) is what allows Aguirre to support his claim of regaining his honor precisely by dishonoring his opponent.

Whereas Aguirre's dispute of honor takes place throughout the letter, the word "hunger" is used for the first time on the seventh paragraph, right in the passage I just analyzed. Nevertheless, differently from the experience of one's suffering, it is directed to the suffering of the other. "Ambición y hambre de sangre humana" are, in this sense, related to the exploitative nature of the royal system. Accordingly, ambition

generates the abuse of humans, and the suffering and deaths of them is what metaphorically feeds the monarchy's hunger.

The second mention about hunger is found on page 294: “y gastaste tanta moneda llevada desta Indias descubiertas por nosotros, que no te dueles de nuestra vejez y cansancio siquiera para matarnos el hambre un día!” Here, hunger is not a metaphorical one. It is biological, and it is attached to adjectives that add a bad connotation to Aguirre and his companions. When “Vejez y cansancio” appear followed by the word hunger, they are, then, in the same sphere of suffering. One never not suffers from hunger. In this sense, the experience of hunger, accentuates the experience of being old, and tired. His remark even leads to the use of an exclamation mark, which indicates the textual use of emotion.

In the following paragraph, “nos hallamos acá mas contentos con maíz y agua solo” followed by “más en ningún tiempo ni por adversidad que nos venga, no dejaremos de ser sujetos a los preceptos de la Santa Madre Iglesia de Roma”, both on page 294, ascertains a relationship between lack of food and religious clarity. Another mention of food is on page 295: “y estos tus malos Oidores y Oficiales de tu real persona, por aprovecharse del pescado, como lo hacen para sus regalos y vicios, lo arriendan (el lago) en tu nombre.” In this case, Aguirre is denouncing the manipulation of biological nourishment by political members of the colonial institution.

As stated before, the matter of honor has a narrow relation with immaculacy. For Aguirre's case, we could argue that the stain on his honor would be the betrayal toward the crown, and not necessarily the deaths committed by him. However, the only way he can reclaim his honor, since he is fighting with an old tradition of honor, is to shed light on the corruption of colonialism as a project. *Oidores*, *frailes*, writing reporters, all represent the stains on the opponent's honor. The strategy of assembling all the stained aspects of the Spanish sociopolitical, and religious arrangement helps Aguirre define a body for his enemy. The text starts with the head of such body, the crown, and keeps adding other members that are vital for the existence of this metaphorical form. If we think of this body as being defined by a head (the monarchy), the members (*oidores*, soldiers, captains, etc.), and the heart (the Catholic church), then we have a full picture of how the matter of honor can be disputed.

On one side, we face Aguirre's incessant murders – even narrated by him: “y en nuestra compañía hubo un alemán llamado Monteverde y le

hice hacer pedazos” (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 293). On the other, we come to think that those same deaths resulted from the colonialist ambition, which, in turn, emanated from an endless desire for power. This leads us to contemplate that if all deaths come from a common desire – that of the crown – then Aguirre’s crimes follow a colonialist tradition inaugurated, and perpetuated by his superiors.

A stainless reputation, endorsed by fiction as revealed before, would signify one’s preservation of honor. Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera state that:

The societies of colonial Latin America had inherited from the founding Iberian cultures the belief that honor emanated from the top of the imperial order, a hierarchy that began with God and flowed through the monarch and the nobility to the commoners. (JOHNSON; LIPSETT-RIVERA, 1998, p. 13).

Nevertheless, how does one question honor in this intricate context if the church and the monarchy are compromised by their non-honorable conduct? The authors make a strong argument about the retrieval of honor in colonial Latin America. In the case of men, the transgression of certain invisible boundaries such as “wealth, age, skill, occupation, color, and physical strength” (JOHNSON & LIPSETT-RIVERA, 1998, p. 13) would lead to “explosions of violence”, as authors say. When not through physical violence, or the judicial system, the restitution of honor would happen according to humiliating manners: “[...] men sometimes effectively feminized an enemy or rival by forcing him to accept a passive or subordinate role” (JOHNSON; LIPSETT-RIVERA, 1998, p. 13). This is the case with Aguirre’s letter. His text is a resilient discourse that reclaims the restitution of his own honor.

If we look backwards, the Euthyphro dilemma, proposed by Aristotle, questioned if: 1) gods loved something because it was good (pious), or 2) something was good (pious) because gods loved it. The entire dilemma revolves around the basis of morality. If, in the case of 1, whatever gods loved was because it was good in its own nature, which automatically disavowed the importance of gods towards a thing’s piousness. In the case of 2, something would be good because it was a matter of gods’ taste – which would indicate an eventual change of taste, and thus, of piousness of a given thing.

Aguirre's gesture, beyond anything else, questions the grounds of morality and honor within the Iberian tradition during the Age of Discoveries. In other words, his honor could not be questioned by a society whose religious, and political conventions were permeated by dishonor. The Euthyphro dilemma posits a crucial distinction regarding the role of the religion institution. The same logics of the pious object are being applied to Aguirre's discussion of honor.

As I argued before, another factor that is present in the aesthetics of hunger is the one of the body. Rocha mentions that "a mais nobre manifestação cultural da fome é a violência", but this is not only limited to physical occurrences of violence. In the case of Cinema Novo, Rocha offers "personagens comendo terra, personagens matando para comer, [...] fugindo para comer" to the audience. There is a relevant manipulation of the body in regards to the construction of the aesthetics of hunger. In a lot of cinematographic productions of Cinema Novo, we face the aging of characters, the weakness of their bodies, the dirt on their faces, clothes; their bony physiques. Therefore, all of this constant suffering of the body is a form of aesthetic violence. This evidence is also found in Aguirre's letter. He mentions: "[...] siempre conforme a mis fuerzas y posibilidad, sin importunar a tus oficiales por paga mi socorro, como parescerá por tus reales libros" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 291). This passage is a clear recognition of the passage of time. The question of the aging of the body has a valiant, though desperate tone: valiant due to the years of loyal service, and desperate in the sense that one becomes aware of age, and the fragility of their life.

The heart of Aguirre's letter will be on the same page, when he mentions:

[...] el no poder sufrir los grandes pechos, premios y castigos injustos que nos dan tus ministros, que por remediar a sus hijos y criados han usurpado y robado nuestra fama, vida honra, que es lástima Rey el mal tratamiento que se nos ha hecho. (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 292).

The lack of honor and dignity is pointed out by Aguirre as a result of a corrupt, and nepotistic government. Notwithstanding, the claim about honor and dignity appears right in between Aguirre's comments about his body. The disappearance of physical abilities during the twenty-four years of service, as mentioned in paragraph two, plus

“estoy cojo de una pierna derecha de dos arcabuzazos que me dieron [...]” in paragraph five corroborate to that indissolubility. The physical constituents of the body are also evoked by Aguirre: “[...] te han dado tus vasallos a costa de su sangre y hacienda [...] que en ello han trabajado y sudado [...]” (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 292). Again, “sangre” and “sudado” (sudar) indicate the constant negotiation of honor. Aguirre focus on the accomplishments he and his companions have made in the name of the crown – which is not acknowledged by Vásquez’s diary.

There is no doubt that the relationship between honor and body is inseparable. On the one hand, we could relate Aguirre’s physical aging to the long-lasting colonial enterprises in Peru – which would provide him recognition (fame, honor, loyalty, etc.). On the other hand, as Aguirre is depicted as a rebel, and leader of insurgent forces, the loss of the same physical abilities could be seen as a punishment. The fact that his body was later on torn in pieces is proof of this. Aguirre’s strategy, however, is to relate the decadency of his own physical forces as a way to recuperate his honor. The letter itself is a categorical way of destroying the Spanish government as a metaphoric body. Dishonor, as I have discussed, is achieved through the denigration of physical traits. Same logics would apply to the attack Aguirre makes towards the political body of Spain (both the colony, and the crown).

Another fragment is: “[...] siguiendo tu voz y apellido contra Francisco Hernández Girón, rebelde a tu servicio como yo y mis compañeros al presente somos y seremos hasta la muerte [...]” (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 292). What we see in this case is death as a marker of time for the retrieval of honor. The traditional Christian logic of the closer one gets to death, the more inclined they feel to repent on their sins does not apply here. The more Aguirre approaches death, the closer he gets to the repossession of his honor. This is a gesture of denial: of the traditional catholic values since there is no regret, God’s mercy, and of the societal arrangement that defines what honor is, and how it is construed. He even mentions: “En fe de cristianos, te juro, rey y señor, que si no pones remedio en las maldades desta tierra, que te ha de venir castigo del cielo. Y eso dígolo por avisarte de la verdad, aunque yo y mis no esperamos ni queremos de ti misericordia” (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 294).

The importance of the body for the aesthetics of hunger relies on the self-consciousness one (the sufferer, the audience, or the reader) develops. Throughout Aguirre’s letter, we are able to identify the presence

of such consciousness. The physical degradation of one's body here is a product of a failing project of colonization. In this case, it is not only the physical destruction of indigenous people, and nature. It is, more importantly, the degradation of the colonizer's body. Perhaps this is where *otherness* – the distinct way the colonizer, in the case of Aguirre, sees the natives, and the new lands – begins to fail as a sociopolitical, anthropological phenomenon.

Speaking of seeing, or looking at, there is an important textual device in the letter that is also related to my discussion about the body. On page 292, Aguirre says “Mira, mira, Rey español, que no seas cruel a tus vasallos ni ingrato [...]” and “Mira, mira Rey, que no creas lo que te dijeren [...]” on page 293. In both instances, the repetition of the word *mira* is decisive for Aguirre to indicate the lack of political clarity regarding king Felipe. In the first instance, he points out the cruelty exercised by hierarchical forces; it is a matter of class, indeed. In the second excerpt, the verb “mirar” is related to the crafting of narratives. Aguirre is signaling the danger of believing in everything one is told, or offered to read (in the case of travel diaries). At first, we could argue that the repetition of the verb *mirar* would be an artifice for adding a comical tone to the text. However, it plays an important role in the establishment of a metaphorical body I have been discussing.

Moreover, there is a third passage on page 295: “duélete señor, de alimentar los pobres cansados en los frutos y réditos desta tierra, y mira rey y señor, que hay Dios para todos e igual justicia, premio, paraíso, infierno.” Again, we stumble upon the verb *mirar* in the text. The presence of biological hunger is related to the ability of seeing. Here is where Aguirre's text conflates with Rocha's main argument on the *Estética da Fome*.

The consequences caused by both a biological, and metaphorical hunger, in the case of Aguirre, lead him to be able to look around and consider the “other”. Otherness here relates to the textual, social, cultural construction of the natives, and their nature throughout the foundational texts of Latin America. There is another interesting aspect of this act of “looking at” the “hungry” context of the colonial lands. In the moment Aguirre demands king Felipe to pay closer attention to their miseries, he is indirectly questioning the morals and values of his time – what is justice, recompense, paradise, hell? Aguirre inquires the meaning of such

values by voicing the struggles of the Andean region. Hunger enables Aguirre to see that “hay Dios para todos”.

Remarkably, the relationship between hunger and the act of looking at (*mirar*) is a very present characteristic of Glauber Rocha’s Cinema Novo. In innumerable shots, we, as the audience, are challenged by random images of eyes. Juxtaposed with the ongoing scene, they usually mark the tension, and delirious moments a character is going through. What is that they see? What is that the image of the eyes elicit in the audience? These questions are sternly related to the textual mechanism adopted by Aguirre in his letter.

It is not in vain that the repetition of the verb *mirar* questions king Felipe’s attitude towards the colony. What is it that Aguirre is able to see, and the king not? Regardless the way we approach the use of such textual device, be it for irony or not, there is the establishment of two definite spaces: that of the one who sees, and that of the one who is being shown. This is a very significant aspect of the writing of travel diaries as juxtaposed to Aguirre’s letter, for instance. At this point, king Felipe has evidence from different writers: Vásquez, and Lope de Aguirre. This gesture of “showing”, or making king Felipe “look at” himself and the other is not only limited to the reevaluation of Aguirre’s honor. It questions the veracity of travel diaries in general. Whatever Lope de Aguirre presents on his rebellious letter to king Felipe triggers the validity of information of Vásquez’s text.

Franz Fanon talks about the constant act of looking at, from the colonized perspective:

The look that the native turns on the settler’s town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well. (FANON, 1965, p. 39).

The matter here is not only of Aguirre’s recuperation of honor, but of how the text itself contains devices that, in its entirety, reveal Aguirre’s sensibility in understanding the struggles of his time. It is precisely here that the aesthetics of hunger take place because the letter is an indicative that “otherness” is not only limited to the boundaries of colonizer/colonized, imperialist/native. The letter introduces the perspective of a marginalized colonizer that speaks from these confines unknown to

the king. It is noteworthy for us to observe how the concept of envy in Fanon's view is surrounded, or surrounds the aesthetics of hunger.

On the last fourth paragraph of the letter, Aguirre presents evidence that justifies his rebellious acts: "en estas Indias a mi me nombraron su maestre de campo y porque no consentí en sus insultos y maldades, me quisieron matar y yo maté al Nuevo rey, y al capitán [...]" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 296). In this passage, Aguirre lists several people he has killed and at the end, he adds his desire to go on the war, even if it took his life away because of the cruelties employed by the king's ministers.

The letter ends with an enormous list of captains and official's names, and Aguirre's remark "que podamos alcanzar con nuestras armas el precio que se nos debe, pues nos ha negado lo que de derecho se nos debía" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 297). The word "derecho" is fundamental for the aesthetics of hunger. As for Aguirre's time, honor was crucial to the definition of one's character, as we have seen throughout the analysis of the letter. Notwithstanding, the use of the word "derecho" is related to a collective concern. If we agree that almost the whole crafting of the letter orbits around Aguirre's justification of his rebellious acts, and the recuperation of his honor, we must also agree that by documenting the names of his companions on the penultimate paragraph, he is collectivizing a concern that was up to then singular. The demand for "derechos" is strictly related to the characteristic he gave to the men mentioned in the letter: "como hombres lastimados" (VÁSQUEZ, 1987, p. 296).

Lastly, the signature of the letter is the ultimate rupture between the privileged space of king Felipe and the marginalized context of Aguirre. On *Pilgrimage: Roman Catholic Pilgrimage in Europe*, Pierre Sigal defines that

Pilgrimage is a process, a fluid and changing phenomenon, spontaneous, initially unstructured and outside the bounds of religion orthodoxy. It is primarily a popular rite of passage, a venture into religious experience rather than into a transition to higher status. A particular pilgrimage has considerable resilience over time and the power of revival. Pilgrims all over the world attest to the profundity of their experience, which often surpasses the power of words. (SIGAL, 2005, p. 712).

Sigal also mentions that there is a momentary release from social bonds when one goes on a pilgrimage with other pilgrims. For him, "the

middle stage of a pilgrimage is marked by an awareness of temporary release from social ties and by a strong sense of *communitas* ('community, fellowship') [...]" (SIGAL, 2005, p. 709).

The author adds that from the Medieval Ages onward

Pilgrimage, making one's way to holy places, is above all as ascetic practice that lets the Christian find salvation through the difficulties and dangers of a temporary exile. It is also a means of coming in contact with that which is divine and thereby obtaining grace because of the accumulation of supernatural power in the pilgrimage site. (SIGAL, 2005, p. 713).

Aguirre's gesture of signing the letter as "el Peregrino" indicates the final detachment from the Iberian social ties. It signified an internal travel (both personal and geographical) fueled by the lack of whatever fed the Spanish body and soul. It also configures the geographical space of the colony as his pilgrimage scenario. What later became Latin America is precisely the space that promoted his pilgrimage endeavor.

As by the body, I mean the material food, or sustenance, symbolized by gold itself. As by the soul, I mean the moral principles that nourished the Spanish society. Aguirre's pilgrimage conflates with the matter of hunger because both, in their very core, redefine the role of oneself in the brief, though conflicting, experience of life.

Aguirre's letter, in its entirety, inquires, among all the issues I have analyzed, the role of travel diaries in general. Ingrid Galster and Oscar Sola comment that in the El Tocuyo sentencing Aguirre was culpable of "crimen lesae magestatis", which led to his execution and body dismemberment (GALSTER; SOLA, 2011, p. 42). They also observe that "sus bienes pasan a la Corona, sus casas serán derribadas y los terrenos cubiertos con sal, sus hijos pierden el honor y no podrán por tanto llegar a ser caballeros ni a ocupar cargos públicos" (GALSTER; SOLA, 2011, p. 42).

What this indicates is the necessity of the total elimination of Aguirre's materiality. His physical disappearance, including what extended to his possessions, did not address the issues he signalized in his letter. In addition, the letter itself is found among the pages of Vásquez's narrative. At that time, Aguirre's words would be read through the context Vásquez offered. Galster and Sola add: "Fama y memoria de Aguirre deben borrarse así para siempre" (p. 42). Furthermore, Human

Ibrahim informs: “the native is angry, hungry, oppressed, and therefore cannot be trusted to act rationally towards the real enemy, the colonizer, the imperialist” (IBRAHIM, 2016, p. 60). Aguirre was not a native, but he shared the same struggles indicated by Ibrahim. What this tells us, after all, is the experience of hunger as a polarizing phenomenon. It is about one’s location in the marginal spaces of societal arrangements in relation to lack of basic needs, and values. The imperialist and (post) colonial powers seem to find it very problematic to deal with such claims – though the destruction of Aguirre’s body, and the imprisonment of his narrative within Vásquez’s diary.

The aesthetics of hunger, as I argue, ought to be understood as a phenomenon that captures the consciousness of Latin America with regards to its existence as a failing project of (post)colonialism. It transitions from early instincts – Aguirre’s letter – to contemporary interrogations – Rocha’s *Cinema Novo* – about the role of national and international forces that subjugate the less favored.

We transpose Aguirre’s claims, and revalidation of his honor to *Cinema Novo* in Brazil and we witness the same manifestation. The promises of governments to remedy, and satiate the socioeconomic, and political needs of the marginalized Sertão only deepen social inequalities, and physical suffering. Gold was food to the colonial body (in Aguirre’s days) as cattle were for the postcolonial one (in Rocha’s time). The structural violence implied in such scenario is not only the increase of poverty and hunger, but also of physical manifestations of violence.² Sebastian de Grazia explains that when it comes to the use of violence in societal arrangements, the Machiavelli’s logic indicates that the people need their ruler to be the source of power and strength. He adds: “How else could he protect and provide for them and punish evildoers?” (DE GRAZIA, 1963, p. 85). Aguirre’s letter is quite the example for this. In his view, the colonial representatives of king Felipe were the evildoers without punishment. Logically, all the heinous acts perpetrated by Aguirre himself were accomplished for the sake of an original plan – that of finding El Dorado. Gold was the food that never existed under the promise of El Dorado. The matter of justice here becomes blurred due to the disappearance or indifference of the royal figure towards those

² The dispute between Aguirre vs. the local institutions, the *cangaço* vs. the colonels, Antônio das Mortes vs. Lampião, and so forth.

who made incontestable efforts to satisfy the monarchy's hunger – and so happens in the confines of the Brazilian Sertão.

Since the *modus operandi* is very similar both in the colonial, and postcolonial contexts, it is vital to acknowledge the aesthetics of hunger as an indicator of a central issue in Latin America regardless the change in its dietary habits. John W. Warnock (1987) already made the case for it in 1987, when he acknowledged the endurance of neocolonialism through food trade and distribution politics around the globe. Part of his argument was to provide situations in which hunger still affects the dynamics of the contemporary world: Tunisia's constant riots against bread's price, Brazilian strikes under the late years of the dictatorial regime, and the common increase of food prices in Bolivia, for instance.

The importance of the aesthetics of hunger is that it contests the tradition in which Latin America has been written, painted, sung, filmed, and so on. The power behind such atemporal phenomenon is that it always arises as a specter of (post)colonial practices. In no way can the aesthetics of hunger be seen without its relationship to a political body that disregards the *other* as part of a collective organism. The violent acts perceptible within the aesthetics of hunger only indicate the unequal distribution of nutrients throughout a living organism that can be labeled as Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, or Latin America. Therefore, as long as such unequal distribution exists, the sickened, hungry portions of this organism will be continuously denouncing the suffering of areas unevenly nourished.

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