

HOW TO BLESS CHILDREN¹: GEOGRAPHIES OF CARE AND CHILDHOOD TERRITORIES

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ABSTRACT. In this text, our attention is focused on understanding how the care relationships between parents, sons and daughters materialize in spaces. The objective is to understand how care relationships become spatial, to understand how a geography of care generated by parents constitutes a geography of parenting. We submit to the discussion Aitken's research (2019a, 2019b) on the Slovenian families that were erased by history, by the official instruments of citizenship and by the Foreigners' Law and how this affected care relationships between parents and their children. Further on, a recurrent topic is addressed in our research, now in Brazilian territory: the practices of healers and blessers. The works of Pereira and Gomes (2018) and Lopes (1998) help us to better understand these subjects who perform healing rituals—which can be considered care practices—in which the blesser raises around them a web of protection. Relating the figure of the father to that of the blesser, we analyze the character Zeca Chapéu Grande, from the novel *Torto arado*, by Itamar Vieira Junior (2020), as a possible representation of this subject who takes care of his own children while expanding paternity beyond his home, embracing all those who seek care and protection from him. Thus, throughout the text, the intention is to highlight the relationships between parents and children that occur in their living spaces and how parents are creating a geography of care in their surroundings.

Keywords: Childhood; paternity; territoriality.

ASSIM SE BENZEM CRIANÇAS: GEOGRAFIAS DOS CUIDADOS E TERRITÓRIOS DE INFÂNCIAS

RESUMO. Neste texto, nossa atenção está voltada para entender como as relações de cuidado entre pais, filhos e filhas se materializam nos espaços. A intenção é compreender como as relações de cuidar se espacializam e como uma geografia dos cuidados engendrada pelos pais constitui uma geografia das parentalidades. Trazemos para o debate as pesquisas de Aitken (2019a, 2019b) sobre as famílias eslovenas que foram apagadas pela história, pelos instrumentos oficiais de cidadania e pela Lei de Estrangeiros e como isso afetou as relações de cuidado dos pais com seus filhos e suas filhas. Dando continuidade ao texto, apresentamos um tema que tem sido recorrente em nossas investigações, agora em território brasileiro: as práticas das benzedeiras e benzedores. Os trabalhos de Pereira e Gomes (2018) e Lopes (1998) nos ajudam a compreender melhor esses sujeitos que exercem os rituais de cura – que podem ser considerados práticas de

¹ The title of this manuscript draws inspiration from the book *Assim se benze em Minas Gerais: um estudo sobre a cura através da palavra*, by Edmilson de Almeida Pereira and Núbia Pereira de Magalhães Gomes. This manuscript was selected as it deals with topics addressed by this study.

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cuidado – em que o benzedor vai forjando ao seu redor uma teia de proteção. Relacionando a figura do pai com a do benzedor, analisamos o personagem Zeca Chapéu Grande, do romance *Torto arado*, de Itamar Vieira Junior (2020), como uma representação possível desse sujeito que cuida de seus próprios filhos e filhas, ao mesmo tempo em que exerce uma paternidade que se expande para além de sua casa, abarcando todos aqueles que o procuram em busca de cuidado e proteção. Assim, ao longo do texto, a intenção foi evidenciar as relações entre pais e filhos e filhas que se dão nos espaços de suas vidas e como os pais vão criando uma geografia de cuidado em seu entorno.

Palavras-chave: Infância; parentalidade; territorialidade.

CÓMO BENDECIR A LOS NIÑOS: GEOGRAFÍAS DE CUIDADO INFANTIL Y TERRITORIOS DE LA INFANCIA

RESUMEN. En este texto nuestra atención se centra en comprender cómo se materializan en los espacios las relaciones de cuidado entre padres, hijos e hijas. La intención es comprender cómo las relaciones de cuidado se vuelven espaciales, comprender cómo una geografía del cuidado engendrada por los padres constituye una geografía de la paternidad. Traemos al debate la investigación de Aitken (2019a, 2019b) sobre las familias eslovenas que fueron borradas por la historia, los instrumentos oficiales de ciudadanía y la Ley de Extranjería y cómo afectó las relaciones de cuidado de los padres con sus hijos e hijas. Continuando con el texto, presentamos un tema que ha venido siendo recurrente en nuestras investigaciones, ahora en territorio brasileño: las prácticas de los curanderos y bendectores. Los trabajos de Pereira y Gomes (2018) y Lopes (1998) nos ayudan a comprender mejor a estos sujetos que ejercen rituales curativos, que pueden considerarse prácticas de cuidado, en las que el bendector forja a su alrededor una red de protección. Relacionando la figura del padre con la de lo bendector, analizamos al personaje Zeca Chapéu Grande, de la novela *Torto arado*, de Itamar Vieira Junior (2020), como una posible representación de este sujeto que cuida a sus propios hijos e hijas al mismo tiempo que tiene una paternidad en expansión más allá de hogar, abrazando a todos aquellos que buscan cuidado y protección. Así, a lo largo del texto, la intención fue resaltar las relaciones entre padres e hijos e hijas que se dan en los espacios de sus vidas y cómo los padres están creando una geografía del cuidado en su entorno.

Palabras clave: Infancia; paternidad; territorialidad.

Izbrisani. Slovenia. Central Europe

The Faroese community is very tight and family centered. Faroese children at beaches and mountains [...] are free, in many ways, and they are also known; it seems like everyone takes care of everyone. For many born and raised in the Faroes, there is certain comfort related to the strong family and social ties, and there, finally, we find a difficulty from young people. Not long ago, the major complaint of Faroese youngsters was the lack of privacy. It was difficult to take distance, have private moments, everyone seemed to know what they were doing (Aitken, 2019a, p. 29).

In this epigraph, Stuart Aitken³ addresses the parenting relationships that take place in the Faroes, an archipelago located in the North Atlantic and politically integrated as a territory of Denmark. These relationships established between people and places, which

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comprise parenting ties, have been a topic explored by this author, who seeks to understand how the relationships between parents, sons and daughters spatialize their lives. Over time, he has been concerned to include other contexts apart from Western society, where the subjects from his research on parenting lived. With that intention, he turned to the care relationships between parents and children of families living in Eastern Europe, specifically in countries that were migrating from a socialist to a neoliberal regime.

In these theoretical and empirical studies, the author observed that parenting—as well as family models—had a delicate balance. Political, ethnical and social issues—and the consequent violence from ruptures in those dimensions—directly affected the lives of parents and their families. The subjects studied by Aitken (2019a), who resided in Eastern Europe, more specifically in Slovenia, lived a constantly changing reality, felt unsafe, threatened and aggrieved by decisions made against their will but that affected their existences directly. In 1991, Slovenia declared its independence. From then on, people born in countries other than the Republic of Yugoslavia—but who had spent several years in that country, working and raising their children—started seeing their resident status questioned. This occurred because the Slovenian government enacted a constitution that contained a Foreigner's Law, which ruled that to become a Slovenian citizen, inhabitants born in other countries should request citizenship within six months. In 2009, despite this law being barely disseminated, 170.000 people obtained the status of permanent resident. However, due to unawareness of this obligation, almost 26.000 people did not make the request and lost their right to reside in the country.

In this context, Aitken (2019a) visited the country to talk to parents who had been stripped of their status of citizens of that country. Aitken attempted to listen to their accounts to understand how that situation extended to their families, depriving their children from free schools, subsidized houses and access to healthcare. The ethnic violence of the Slovenian government erased the official existence of those people, who stopped belonging to the place they lived in but also were not citizens of the lands from which their ancestors emigrated from. All of a sudden, they belonged officially to nowhere. The erasing of the human *topos* has been a common strategy in social conflicts, in economic and political interest strategies. Porteous (1988) coined the term 'topocide' to define the erasure of specific spaces that are part of people's life, creating scissions between subjective relationships and the territory of residence.

In these meetings, Aitken (2019a) researched how erasure influenced parenting, how not belonging affected the care relationships between fathers and children. If his previous studies were concerned with parenting in the everyday life of families, now by researching the Slovenian families that were erased, he raised other concerns. "Instead, I look at the external forces pulling family life out of any semblance of equanimity, pushing fathers further into half understood margins and obscure feelings of disassociation, disconnection and emasculation" (Aitken, 2019a, p. 3).

Interviews and other information from that study were collected between 2013 and 2014, when the author conducted fieldwork on the erased families from Slovenia, travelling over there to collect the spatial narratives of the erased subjects, allowing the own individuals to speak about and for themselves, so they could tell their life experience. Aitken (2019a) explains to us that the approach used in the study was based on post-qualitative methods⁴, in which the intention, as mentioned above, is that the own subjects of research

⁴ This movement, which seeks to bring about reflections that go beyond the proposals of classic qualitative research, is guided by the challenges of contemporaneity, such as the growth of techniques, the environmental crisis, the separation between human and nature, among others. In the characterizations of this movement, there is a strong return to realism,

compose and offer their spatial narrative. In this way, multiple stories are obtained since there are multiple subjects as well.

What this means is a push but also the use of traditional qualitative methods to reach a place where evidence gives way to feelings, and opinions fall in the face of emotions and affect. Facts, particularly in times of political insanity, can be equivocal, but an individual's emotions are incontrovertibly theirs (Aitken, 2019a, p. 4).

Subjects shared events of suffering, but the author believed that despite departing from that dark dimension of the history and geography of those countries, the narratives collected would show how those same stories and geographies also spoke about union, care and hope, as well as demonstrating that transformations were possible.

Throughout the study, Aitken (2019a) progressively understood that all that erased families faced in order to survive, made them develop and deepen bonds of trust with one another. The violence experienced, both symbolically and physically, had the saddest consequences, and the suffered losses were what incentivized these subjects to act initially at the individual level in order to restore their rights. Some of them achieved this. For example, Aleksander Todorovic, through a hunger strike, mobilized the media and conquered the right to write his name on the birth certificate of his daughter, Aleksandra. After the success of these individual attempts, the beneficiaries—due to their vindicative stance—adopted attitudes that mobilized more of the erased people. Many of them did not even know that there were more people in the same situation. Acting collectively, they adopted the name *Izbrisani*, 'the erased'. From that common condition, they united to fight against the perversity of being annihilated in life. "It is reasonable to state, that then, the movement of the *Izbrisani* started as a moment of paternity, when Aleksander was upset about the absence of his name on the birth certificate of his daughter" (Aitken, 2019b, p. 186).

Based on the stories collected, it became evident how, in that context of state ethnic violence, the resistance of families was directly related to the father figure. Aitken (2019a) was aware that these were very nuanced stories, since sometimes the position of parents in the resistance movements was seen positively by sons and daughters. In other cases, fathers were considered not only responsible for the horrible situations of their families, but also understood as enemies of the government. Regardless of what the family relationship was based on—respect or bonds of affection, or bonds based on shame and grudge—as the family story unfolded with the history of the *Izbrisani* movement, care communities started being created. "Although the stories are not always encouraging, positive outcomes are possible from even the most tragic events" (Aitken, 2019a, p. 6).

The work of Aitken (2019a) departed from these situations of loss of rights but had the intention to look into them as possibilities for the creation of new life forms. Despite the disturbances suffered, fathers, together with their families, were able to come out of these crises, and this effort deepened paternity relationships, creating care communities or spaces in which relationships could develop with trust and safety. Even when daily life was falling apart, fathers needed to keep taking care of their families. This is why Aitken (2019a) argues that these were also stories of hope, because despite living in extremes, in the stripping

to the post-human element and also to the acknowledgement that cultural artifacts present agency in social relationships. L. Le Grange (2018), by attempting to find an answer for 'What is (pos) qualitative research?', points to some situations that characterize that form of research: it is a methodology 'yet to come', cannot be considered a finished, totalizing methodology that is formed by more methodologies; decentralizes knowledge as an interpretation locus, having a tendency to ethics, ontology and epistemology due to its condition of indivisibility as a principle; criticizes representational logic; moves subjectivity to its ecological condition; establishes another relationship with the data produced; presents a methodology in performance, being an ethical condition immanent to the process.

away of life as it was known, they had to move forward and continue together, taking care of one another. In his words:

[...] For young people, parental relationships and authority are important, and when the State attempts to erase identities, family boundaries are exposed. I want to make it clear that I speak comprehensively, taking the boundaries of care/family beyond heteronormativity, to 'more than parents', without leaving aside what is important about the ways in which families represent an opportunity to fight the State (Aitken, 2019b, p. 186-187, author's emphasis).

In their fight against the Slovenian state, in the loss of their past live, families transformed, but fathers continued to be fathers, to exercise their paternity, through care and zeal for family even under the most adverse conditions. Aitken (2019a, p. 16) argues that "[...] family can become a safe space for resistance against state violence, and that fathers are an important part of the security from which young people can push back". The author proposed a new paternal policy in which fathers, sons and daughters relate to each other in a less authoritarian and more emotional way, forging a family connection that is capable of taking a stance and fighting against the policies of a violent State. In other words, a connection that creates what the author understands as "[...] a safe familial space for political activism" (Aitken, 2019a, p. 4).

The works of Aitken show an important aspect of studies on parental relationships: space as an indispensable imprint in the intersectional dispute emerging in a particular way in the different territories of the planet. This also marks, in care relationships, the existence of a geography of care that cannot be forgotten, which despite being overlooked is present. It is possible to perceive, in the narratives of the subjects, how diverse expressions of that space materialize. For example, the scalar dimension of domestic spaces is reached by broader scales from the governmental sphere, among others.

This has been our research interest (research projects approved by the Ethics Committee for Research CEP/UFJF. Resolution numbers 1.998.584 and 4.314.532). Over the years of our work, we have devoted ourselves to the understanding how those care relationships spatialize in the diverse territories, and how they are placed in the frontiers with other territorial relationships. For us, this is an important argument to be considered in these reflections, which involve the materiality of historical existences, bringing together the axiology of spatial languages. Thus, there exists a geography of care that needs to be considered. This paper deals with the aforementioned topic.

We acknowledge that this is a debate present in other fields of knowledge. Anthropology⁵ deals with the dimension of the *topos* concept and the processes of humanization and the question of the sense of belonging. Psychoanalysis⁶ also contributes to the topic by developing the psychological need of belonging. In this way, we recognize that this discussion is not restricted only to geography and that consequently there are significant interfaces to be considered in future articles.

Blessing. Chapada Diamantina. Mares de Morros Mineiros. Brazil

Previously, the works of Aitken (2019a, 2019b) were discussed, because we wanted to show the relationships between fathers and children that occur in the spaces of their life, as well as how fathers create a geography of care in their environment. As pointed out, our intention has been to understand how care relationships spatialize and how that geography

⁵ Such as the studies by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1973).

⁶ Such as the studies by Sigmund Freud (1969).

of care generated by fathers constitutes a geography of parenting. With this purpose, another recurrent topic in our research has been addressed, now in Brazilian territory: the practice of blessing.

Sitting on a chair, a thin lady with grey hair holds a baby in her arms, she stretches the two legs of the child and shows the mom the staggered legs, crossing her right arm over her own body, softly saying, 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit', these are the last words that were able to be heard, the following ones are pronounced in a very low voice. After some time, the legs of the child are again stretched and are at the same length, facing each other, the blessing is over. The child is returned to the mother, who tells me: 'Children have too much bad wind, that's why I bring them for a blessing, it's good to do so every week'. I asked what 'bad wind' meant and she replied: 'It's a children's thing' (Lopes & Vasconcellos, 2006, p. 104).

The fieldnote above was recorded in a community inside Zona da Mata Mineira and, as shown in the end, things like 'bad wind' are children's things, something that affects the children of that place, which needs to be 'treated' through prayers that are known by some adults, in the case of that space, especially by women.

As it may be perceived, there is a geography of care that intertwines with the own idea of childhood territory. Before continuing, we believe it necessary to conceptualize these two terms so readers become more acquainted with the academic aspects addressed.

The term geography of care was systematized in Brazil from the studies of the field of knowledge called Childhood Studies: Geography of Childhood (Lopes & Vasconcellos, 2005). The central objective of studies in this field is to understand the plurality of childhood based on the geographic space or on the spatial expressions derived from the same, for example, the territory. In this sense, it is possible to refer to the territory of childhood, since this comprises various social segments involved in the lives of infants and children in the many spaces and the own agency of infants and children in that process. This is because during childhood, "There is a broad negotiation space that implies the production of rearing cultures, places for children designated by the adult world and its institutions, and rearing territories, with a configuration called children territoriality resulting from that conflict" (Lopes & Vasconcelos, 2005, p. 39).

And in the meantime, care relationships are also present, that is to say, in the field of childhood geography there is also a geography of care, which involves those generational borders. Our senses are placed on those links.

Let us go back to the blessings. And, now there is more than one father figure. We bring the character of Zeca Chapéu Grande, from the novel entitled *Torto arado*, by Itamar Vieira Junior⁷, as a possible representation of that subject that takes care of his own sons and daughters, but that practices a paternity that expands beyond his home, comprising everyone who goes to him in search for care and protection. Before discussing more in detail how the parenting of Zeca spatializes in his life in a *quilombola* community, we attempt to better understand the figure of the blesser in communities of Minas Gerais. Therefore, in the next paragraph, the character is introduced to then summarize some details of his life as a father, blesser and peasant.

The excerpts from the book *Torto arado* draw inspiration from the *quilombola* communities from Chapada Diamantina, in the state of Bahia. José Alcino da Silva or Zeca Chapéu Grande is the blesser of Água Negra, state where the characters in the book live. In addition to being the person who heals and takes care of the residents, thereby holding a

⁷Itamar Vieira Junior is a geographer and did his PhD in Ethnic and African Studies at Universidade Federal da Bahia. The deep coexistence of the author with the habitants of quilombolas communities inspired the novel *Torto Arado* (2020), which was awarded the 2018 Leya prize and the 2020 Jabuti prize.

level of prestige, trust and responsibility position, Zeca is also father of the two main narrators of the book, the sisters Bibiana and Belonisia, who also have a younger brother and a sister. Zeca is one of the central figures in the community, acting as a blesser, someone who has the power of mobilizing the enchanted—or supernatural beings—to obtain healing and protection.

Blessers served to restore the health of the body and spirit of sick people, it was what we knew from birth. What arrived the most at our doorsteps was the ailments of divided spirits, people who forgot their stories, memories, separated from the self, without distinction from a beast lost in the jungle (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 39).

In the research of Pereira and Gomes (2018), most people who healed through words were women. But there were male healers, also initiated in the secrets and knowledge of blessing, who learned from the elders which words or gestures to use for the practice of healing, function that needed to be carried out with devotion and sacrifice. Female and male blessers who accepted this mission were aware that the priority of their lives was to take care of those who needed it.

Pereira and Gomes (2018) immersed themselves in the popular culture of the state of Minas Gerais to research one of its most significant materializations, the blessings, to understand the figure of blessers, who perform healing and protection rituals “[...] and act as intermediaries between gods and humans [...]” (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 15). In the words of the authors:

Blessers stand out as social agents that play—in rural areas or in the periphery of major centers—the role of keepers of the balance between humans and the world. Although they may prescribe herbs and teas as complementary measures, blessers heal with the power of the word and their work is paid, despite their conditions for material survival being difficult in general and, in many cases, harsh (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 15-16).

The study—conducted in 198 towns in the state of Minas Gerais, with the researchers collecting data from 35 of them personally—proposes to record and understand the religious healing rituals that are traditional in cities from Minas Gerais. These rituals, we believe, can be considered care practices in which blessers weave dedication and seal fabric around them with the objective of keeping the members of those communities in balance with their lives and with the world. The power of the words of blessers is part of the connection between the Creator and all his creation. Pereira and Gomes (2018) explain what a blessing is considered as:

It is an oral-gestural language with which some people—owners of special powers—control the forces that oppose the harmonious life of humans. Blessing are to guarantee the functioning of the desired normality and to contain evil. [...] The value of blessings resides [...] in its privacy and in the fact that it is transmitted among the chosen, being a privilege of a small number of initiated (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 24).

To become a blesser, it is necessary—or not—to accept the mission. In addition, it is necessary to be chosen by an older blesser, a master that gives the power of healing. Disciples, when accepted and blessed, will learn the craft, memorizing the magic words they will inherit. Blessers are “[...] heirs of knowledge that only become useful if pronounced according to the criteria and norms of a specific language—the language of sacred words or of healing words” (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 34-35).

Another possible relationship that also involves the power of the words and healing was already indicated in the work *Structural anthropology* by Lévi-Strauss (2008). Based on the book cited, we believe that a relationship between Lévi-Strauss and what we have denominated geography of care is possible. Three conditions are necessary for the

existence of a cure, or for the power of a spell: healers should believe they have the power of healing, whoever asks for their help should believe in the power of healers, and the local knowledge and beliefs of the entire community should also believe in this cure, because if healers are removed from their geography and culture, their 'power' loses the healing effect (Lévi-Strauss, 2008).

Our studies add up to the works of those authors and turn to the space where that practice occurs. Again, let us return to the scalar dimension. When speaking in a local scale, it should be noted that these blessings are performed, generally, in smaller spaces chosen for that purpose, usually a room of the house or a more private corner where the prayers can be said. In the spatialization of life, the healing language selects some points in the space where those narratives can be expressed. Out of those, intonation is not possible, that is to say, the sacred is performed in those prayer territories, in which parents take their babies and children to be healed.

Another point to highlight is that, if there is a direct practice of the specific care of babies and children, there are also other broader blessings that comprise other situations present not only during childhood but common to everyone in a community. In the fieldwork undertaken with a small community in the countryside of Minas Gerais, Lopes (1998) also noticed the presence of blessers, mainly in relation to weather phenomena. Part of his study had the objective of understanding how the power of blessers was interconnected with the atmospheric conditions of that small community.

Weather phenomena, central characters in the lives of people from that community, appeared in the narratives as crucial elements for the daily experiences and decisions to be made. In such a religious community, the supernatural dimension intersected the relationship with the atmosphere and its phenomena. The inhabitants of the community believed that God was responsible for everything that happened: the power to decide about the weather was His. Nature, as part of the divine creation, needs to be respected.

There is a higher power, if you are not with God, you're with the Devil, you have to decide between one thing or the other. [...] We're three, we are not talking alone, we're two but there's three, because God is always present (Lopes, 1998, p. 99).

The belief was that all that manifested in the skies—and the Earth—was a product of God's desire. As a fruit of divine will, these manifestations required to be respected for a major evil to be prevented. "It is God who gives life, he has control over it, if [you are] on the wrong path, he punishes you" (Lopes, 1998, p. 100).

Blessers moved natural forces through blessings. "The prayers they use [...] it's said that it is I believe in God, the Father Almighty but reversed, a blesser once told me, he even taught me, but I never did, I don't like it" (Lopes, 1998, p. 112). However, their role in the community and their powers go beyond commanding the rain. They also blessed and cured several types of evil; they were indispensable caregivers on the communities they lived in. "[...] I bless snake bites [...] sick children, lumbago, constipation, children that do not sleep at night [...] and also rain? (I asked) – [...] of course, rain as well" (Lopes, 1998, p. 113-114).

Learning to pray to keep the rain away was something important. Male and female blessers protected the power they inherited and only passed it on people who, in fact, undertook the commitment of taking care of and healing for life. As a female blesser from the community explained: "People only teach the prayers to someone who is going to do it for good, someone who wants to learn to give it continuity" (Lopes, 1998, p. 113). Blessers, who were legitimized by the collective group, had a very important place in social hierarchy. As authority figures within that group, they had the power of controlling and protecting from

rain and wind, as well as healing ailments of the body but also of the soul, taking care of the inhabitants of that space. The access blessers had to divine gifts, to mobilize the forces of nature to heal, take care or protect made them special people, mediators between God and other people, being respected—or feared—for this reason.

In the context of prayer, the concept involved was to protect the community from weather-related catastrophes, but there were accounts related to the family dimension. In the words of the blessers, they felt protectors of babies, children and adults. The extension of someone who took care of people went beyond the classical family nucleus, despite not leaving it aside, as social mixtures were formed, involving those different concepts and categories for taking care.

Zeca Chapéu Grande, who held the position of blesser in the Água Negra estate, was one of those figures. He was a man that, in addition to taking care and healing the inhabitants of his community, also needed to work in the fields and take care of his blood relatives. In other words, a father that raised and took care of his own sons and daughters but that also exerted a paternity that expanded outside his home, encompassing everyone who went to him for care and protection.

Although the plot of this book was inspired by the *quilombola* communities of Chapada Diamantina, in the novel, as there is no defined time mark, the reader does not know exactly when the events occurred. What we know is that the plot unfolded in a post-abolition time. One of the few time marks appears in the following fragment: “My father was born almost thirty years after black slaves were declared free but remained captive of the descendants of those lords and their grandmothers” (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 164). Not specifying a time frame is intentional, so the reader has the clear notion that not much changed since the times and places where black people were enslaved. The workers portrayed in the novel still lived in a regime analogous to slavery, in a life of servitude. In the novel, landowners were concerned with not letting inhabitants build anything that could indicate how long they had lived in the place. They lived under an inquilino regime. Since brick houses were forbidden, only mud houses could be built, which could be dismantled over time as not to leave any traces of all the generations of workers who inhabited the space, who had made a home for their families on the land.

The floor of our houses and the estate roads were made of soil. Only with mud, which also served as food for our corn cob dolls, from where almost everything we ate would sprout. Where we bury the remnants of childbirth and the belly buttons of newborns. Where we buried the remains of our bodies. To where everyone would descend one day. Nobody would escape (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 20).

One of the most significant dimensions of the novel *Torto Arado* is paternity, the relationship of Chapéu Grande with his older daughters, Belonísia and Bibiana. In the book, we follow the life of these sisters, their upbringing, struggles, pains, relationship with the land and, mainly, with their father. “Zeca Chapéu Grande was my father, guide on Earth and responsible for who I am” (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 192). “Our father went to the fields at sunrise. He collected his tools after stroking his hand on our heads whispering prayers for the enchanted” (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 23). An essential part of the narration of their stories is permeated by the figure of the father, who raised them: “[...] I was used to the presence of the enchanted during the practice of *jarê*. It was my dad’s house, who was Zeca Chapéu Grande the healer, and I had grown up among fools and prayers, among screams and root syrups, among candles and drums” (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 81). However, besides paternity, the father also played an affective role in the life of other inhabitants of the Água Negra estate: the role of blesser and protector of his community of care, of that family that extended across the space he inhabited. “Zeca Chapéu Grande was not only a friend. He was the

spiritual father of all people from Água Negra” (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 40). The community saw, in the father of the girls, a role model, a figure of respect and admiration, to whom people went to cure their ailments and take care of their aches.

From early, we had to coexist with that magical dimension of our dad. He was a dad like all the other dads we knew, but that extended his paternity to all people in pain, the sick and those in need of medicine that couldn't be found at hospitals, and of knowledge that doctors outside the land did not have. At the same time, I was proud of the respect he was treated with, he suffered having to share the house with indiscrete guests who screamed their aches, their ignorance, impregnating the house with the smell of candles and incense, with the colors of the bottles containing root medicine, with good and bad, humble or inconvenient people who stayed at our small home for weeks (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 33).

The family man that acts as a blesser should understand that paternity, the relationship with his daughters and sons will overlap with the activities of a healer, as his cares will need to be divided between his family and the other community members. Therefore, the blesser's family is a party directly affected by the functions of the father. In this way, the house will be more than a private space, as it will need to be open to that collective life, representing

A social place where the sacred manifests [...] The mixture of social and religious senses transforms the house [...] into a *locus* of multiple experiences: there scenes of life and death, abundance and misery, group conversations and personal confessions take place. Gardens and orchards decorate the house and, at the same time, make the plants used for completing the cure through words, when necessary, sprout. The exercise of healing in the house demonstrates that [...] the practice of blessing belongs to a private universe which highlights the discretion of religious experience, work for subsistence, the bonds to family and neighbors, and the interest of sharing material and spiritual resources (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, pp. 117-118).

The life of blessers is like a mission, with many sacrifices. Most of the care they would have with their own family needs to be redirected to the entire community, as if this was also part of the former: “[...] in addition to the sacrifice derived from learning the sacred rituals, [...] they have to deal with the possibility of forgoing certain personal desires to fulfill their role in the group” (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 118).

Thus, when accepting such a mission, the initiated needed to understand that they would bear the consequences of a life dedicated to being the caregiver of a town. Since they were much in demand, blessers held prestige positions in their communities

[...] the initiation consists of a means for learning sacred knowledge. [...] the prayers win some attribute (such as the power of healing and a new role in society), but also give away something (time in their lives, physical and spiritual disposition). The initiation appears linked to certain trials and sacrifices that are rewarded as a right of healing through the word (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 105).

Even in the communities where health systems, physicians and hospitals were present, blessers played a role of healing agents, because they were the intermediaries between the divine forces and people who needed care. The word of blessers was vested with a power capable of rebalancing the forces between the divine world and the human world, of restoring the harmony between the body of sick people and their lives that needed to be lived fully. This was because

The irreplaceable presence of the blesser, the initiated subject who, aware of the vital force of the elements of nature, captures it and redirects it to the weakened body and, moreover, restores in the person emotionally wounded the desire to participate in the world as a whole. [...] And blessers [...] do

not recite nor gesture randomly. Their hands contain the new life, the life that when initiated is a promise for work and happiness, disposition and health (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 65).

The paternity of Zeca Chapéu Grande was spatialized based on the land where he lived with his blood daughters, but also taking care of his sons and daughters of the saint. His paternity extended its scope to a practice of taking care of a community. He was a conflict mediator, took care of everyone to prevent major suffering, but did not rebel against oppression directly. Despite working for the landowners without a salary and forced to give a third of everything he produced during his hours of rest—in addition to not having any right to what was produced during the hours he worked for the master, from Sunday to Sunday—he was grateful for being welcomed and receiving a house. On one occasion, a son asked him exactly what was implied in working in exchange of a house, questioning

[...] why weren't we owners of that land if we were born and have worked there since forever. Why the Peixoto family, which didn't live in the estate was said to be the owner. Why didn't we make that land ours, since we lived off it, planting seeds, we harvested bread. If from there we collected our living (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 185).

And the father explained: "Asking for a house in exchange of work is when you don't know where to go, because you don't have a job where you come from. You have nowhere to make a living [...]" (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 185). Zeca was grateful for having been received in the property years ago and did not find it right to question and demand certain rights over the land, despite considering it his home. For this worker, healer and father, having some land only had a purpose if the subject was capable of working on it. In this way, any attempt of his children to question the life as it was lived there was soon censored by Zeca:

Work more and think less. Your eye should not look at anything that is not yours. [...] Landownership documents will not give you more corn or beans. It won't put food on our table. [...] Are you seeing that world of land there? The eye grows. The man wants more. But his hands are not able to work it all, are they? [...] This land that grows scrub, that grows *caatinga*, *buriti*, or palm, is nothing without work. It has no value. It may have it for those who don't work. Who don't open a pit, who don't know how to sow or harvest. But for people like us, the land only has value if it's worked. Without work, the land is nothing (Vieira Junior, 2020, pp. 185-186).

The son, out of respect for his father, did not mention the matter in his presence. However, together with some other workers, continued questioning this. The desire to fight for fair existence conditions grew stronger in them:

'We can't live like this anymore. We have right to the land. We're *quilombolas*'. This desire for freedom grew stronger and was present in almost everything we did. Over the years, that desire started to put fathers and children living in the same house in opposite positions (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 187).

Heart in the Land. Territories and people

If the Slovenian fathers studied by Aitken (2019a, 2019b) clearly manifested the intention to protect their children against an oppressive state that withdrew their rights, the paternity performed by Zeca materialized in a different way. He had his own forms of taking care of his blood, and saint family. Regardless of the form of care, whether in Slovenia or in Água Negra, the studied fathers—including the character of the healer—loved their families and looked after them. "Nobody is above the law, but fathers and caregivers are responsible for their own children more than for other children; therefore, there is a difference in authority,

‘in addition to as many caregiving styles as caregivers’” (Aitken, 2019b, p. 121-122 – bolded emphasis added).

In his world, Zeca Chapéu Grande sought to take care of everyone in the best way he could. He tried to exert an affectionate paternity, available for his blood and saint children. The paternity of Zeca, that extended paternity, was based on protection and care instead of confrontation. Living under the rules imposed by oppression, exploitation and violence, he had his gift to create changes. For example, the occasion that he healed the son of the mayor, and this passed by on his way to the Santa Bárbara commemorations, in Água Negra, as she had been the enchanted that cured his son. Due to the grace reached, the mayor offered payment to Zeca, who did not receive money for being a blesser. Charging for the grace of healing and taking care is taboo. The gift received from God should be shared without charge and it should be trusted that the same God will guarantee that blessers have, along their life, the resources necessary to live with their families (Pereira & Gomes, 2018). Instead, Zeca asked the mayor to bring a teacher to teach the children at the estate.

The mayor obliged and also promised a school. In one of Santa Bárbara’s commemorations, he was directly addressed by the enchanted, through the body of Zeca Chapéu Grande—not only had the blesser access to the powers of the enchanted, but also offered his body for them to manifest during rituals and celebrations. Embarrassed, the politician started efforts for building the school. However, on the day of the inauguration, the school received the name of the landowner and Zeca Chapéu Grande was left aside together with the other settlers, without being mentioned. But he did not care. The fact was that they now had a school. This was the way he took care of his community.

Furthermore, the prestigious position Zeca had, as is usual with blessers, granted him being heard by the inhabitants of the estate. He was a leader whose word was considered both for the workers and by the property manager, as expressed by one of his daughters:

[...] we were daughters of the healer Zeca Chapéu Grande. My father was respected by the neighbors and children of the saint, by his bosses and masters, and by Sutério, the manager. He was the worker pointed out as a model for the other workers, he never complained, regardless of the request he received [...]. He was the most highly esteemed worker of the Peixoto family. They trusted in his capacity for persuading and reconciling those who lived in conflict [...] (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 53-54).

In this way, Zeca acted through mediation, seeking harmony to cause the least suffering possible. By having the role of blesser, individuals build a unique relationship with the community, which in turn, created a collective concept of them, of how they are seen and understood within that place. With his practice legitimized by the community of care, blessers become who people should turn to not only for healing or protection but also for advice on which decisions or directions to take in some moments, or to try to understand why some events occurred in certain ways, whether in personal or in collective life. The figure of the blesser, then, has a strong influence on the forms in which communities understand and act on the world (Pereira & Gomes, 2018). Therefore, it is expected that he takes care of the settlers in matters that are not necessarily related to physical or spiritual illnesses. Zeca’s protection was required also for coexistence and work conflicts. His assessment was not only conducted between God and the men, but also between workers and bosses. In several situations, he mediated between those in power and those deprived from power. Therefore, Zeca’s mediation contributed, in certain way, to maintain that order of injustice, although this was the way in which he believed he could protect his blood and saint children:

[...] He had kept the estate settlers united, was the leadership of the people for years, and without permitting that any worker from the estate be mistreated, many times he intervened without confronting Sutério to impede greater injustices than the already existing ones. Thanks to his beliefs, he gave life to his own order, which helped us go through time until now (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 196).

During his life, Zeca transformed all the places he occupied into sacred places. His power for mobilizing the forces of nature and accessing the divine and enchanted forces was exerted during his whole life. The full disposition for the care of whom were under his responsibility made these spaces for healing and protection. His energy was all over the place, within his home and across nature. Healers have such a force for making everything they step on sacred soil:

In an open space, the elements of nature—rivers, streams, trees, woodlands, winds, rains, stones—are integrated into the action proposed through the word. The house is the most representative of closed spaces: consecration transforms the rooms, halls and courtyards where rituals are performed (Pereira & Gomes, 2018, p. 105).

Zeca was the main character in the life dynamics of Água Negra. His death left his sons and daughters without a father, taking with it the safety of protection and the certainty of care. Saint sons and daughters looked for other blessers. Blood daughters continued to live with love and the teachings of their father, Zeca Chapéu Grande. In the words of one of the daughters:

With Zeca Chapéu Grande I would go deep into the jungle in the way in and out, and I learned about herbs and roots. I learned about the clouds, when there would be or not rain, about the secret changes that the sky and the earth experienced. I learned that everything was in movement [...]. My dad looked at me and said: 'The wind doesn't blow, he is the own turning', and all that made sense. 'If the air does not move, it has no life,' he tried to teach me. Attentive to the movement of animals, insects, plants, he illuminated my horizon when he made me feel in my body the lessons nature had taught him. [...] My dad, when he encountered a problem in the field, would lay on the earth with his ear turned to its inside [...]. Like a doctor searching for the heart (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 100).

Coexistence with the father, the enchantment provoked by such a peculiar figure, strongly affected the existence of the daughters. The lack of and longing for that loving man and protector was deeply felt, but his presence continued in their lives, in their relationship with the world, in their love for their place. "When I was alone and knew nobody would look at me strangely, she laid on the floor, as she saw her father doing uncountable times" (Vieira Junior, 2020, p. 254). The daughters also sought the heart of earth.

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