

There's A Hole In The Kitchen

My Memories are fresh. I tell my last day on the farm, when Maria and I would perform our farewell. I'm at Canudos State Park, the heart of Brazil's Semiarid zone. A friend is about to pick me up. He'll soon help me gather my things and say my goodbyes to two other families that I also lived with before I "go back home" for Christmas. I've been away for a year now.

Maria has been my Great Mother and Master for these past 9 months, a time when I've had no fixed address in the backlands of Bahia, the "oldest" state in Brazil from a colonialist perspective. Her house rests on the rural hills of Canudos, a small village nationally known for a cruel civil war that killed literally every one of its inhabitants, 123 years ago. Maria comes from a family of survivors - and by survivors I mean the ones who left before the Final Fire destroyed it all. Canudos was Sacred Land for small farmers, former enslaved workers and landless natives, during its short and prosperous existence, between 1893 and 1896. Maria's grandmother was part of this alternative and "subversive" community guided by a wise and devoted pilgrim who roamed the land for 25 years before settling ground. This pilgrim was Antonio Conselheiro, and he baptized Maria's grandmother's firstborn son.

My grandfather, on the other hand, was a white civil servant from the wealthiest part of the country. I believe he too helped my being here today. One could argue that we are both in Canudos by virtue of our Ancestry. But because Maria and I come from such different backgrounds there's an abyss dividing the way our Ancestors influence us. I'm a white young Woman born in a middle-class urban family, allowing myself to flow through a commitment-free life in an Exotic Land. I choose to deliver myself to an existential quest, something that Maria's background would hardly allow her. I feel embarrassed when I put it this way, and yet acknowledging my privileges is something I've gotten better at during my travels.



Maria, myself and Jorge's right arm

The Sun is high. The Wind is high. And I feel high, too. I go into the kitchen and sit by the table. I observe. There're two cats by the window, some goats outside and chickens scratching the Earth - you're never alone on a farm. All at once, my Inner Eye captures a Hole floating in front of us. This Hole recollects a sort of Invisible Substance that I take as divine. It's something one's brain wouldn't accept, but my Backlands are definitely mystical. I wonder if it's The Invisible Flow allowing Itself to be partly seen for a glimpse. I drink the weak and sugary coffee appreciating It. Maria waits for me on the balcony. Jorge and Sasha keep her company. They're both down on the floor.

Jorge is Maria's oldest son and he no longer walks. And Sasha is a small pinscher that enjoyed being inside my sleeping bag throughout the nights. Maria gave birth for the first time when she was 16 and Jorge is 64 now. You do the math. Jorge's father was a cousin she had to marry because of her pregnancy. She tells me she had no idea she had even had sex when she realized she was expecting a child. She would later have only one more boy, an exception among other traditional and large families. As Time passed us by and I nourished some Intimacy with Maria's clan, I noticed new and noble chores were being entrusted to me. One of them was taking better care of Jorge. During my last month there, I'd bathe him daily, at the sunset, on the front step of the farmhouse. That's where we stand now.

I face the Big Mountains in front of us; Maria, Jorge, Sasha and me. We wait in silence, holding back our tears. It's summer, so most of the trees have run out of leaves. This is one of the driest areas of the country. Water is used with precision. We call this biome Caatinga, which stands for "white trees" in Tupi native language, and it exists solely in Brazil. Maria and her landscape are a fetish to my formal-educated-journalistic eyes. They're also an excellent portrait of Brazil's History and Identity. Their Memory speaks of today, when an ultra-conservative government is making life harder for the majority, once again. But somethings escape one's reason. Canudos exists in my depths.

My last day is the quietest possible. Normally, this house is pure movement - there're around 10 people living here. Maria conducts their collective reactions to everyday events. She wears a beautiful dress for my departure. I hug Jorge. I pet Sasha. And I look into my Master's gray watery eyes. Some loving words are said. I get in the car. She cries. And I'm crying, too. My mind records our final scene: Maria's body leaning against the wall, her black skin matching the golden dust. I love her.

Lia Rezende Domingues, March 2020



Our Last Scene, before the car leaves on the dirt road