

# Forms of care and movement: ethnographic experiences among Indigenous, Quilombola communities and small scale, family-based women farmers

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## ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic studies that were carried out in different contexts - with Indigenous (Pankararu) tribes in the states of São Paulo and Pernambuco, with Afro-descendant groups (*quilombolas*) in Alcântara in the state of Maranhão, and with small scale, family-based female farmers in the eastern part of Minas Gerais - we propose that “forms of caring” are part of a relationship ethics that involves tangible beings -men, women, plants, and the land - and intangible beings, that are part of the “divine,” supreme realm of human existence. We also explore the possibility of the existence of care practices linked to “movements” that take place with varying intensities and rhythms. Within the contexts of our respective ethnographic fields, the forms of caring, as the organizing axis of social relations, are carried out by women, although they are not perceived as intrinsically being tied to “women’s nature” and are also understood in their affective and disruptive dimensions. By bringing up the relationship between “movement and care,” we aim to contribute with a new perspective to the debates that have been held on these topics.

## KEYWORDS

Forms of caring and care-taking; movement; women; Pankararu; *quilombola* communities; women farmers

## Modos de cuidar e se movimentar: experiências etnográficas entre indígenas, quilombolas e agricultoras familiares

**RESUMO** Com base em etnografias realizadas em diferentes contextos - povo Pankararu em Pernambuco e São Paulo, quilombolas de Alcântara/MA e agricultoras agroecológicas do leste de Minas Gerais - propomos, neste artigo, que os “modos de cuidar” fazem parte de uma ética de relacionamentos que envolve seres tangíveis -homens, mulheres, plantas e a terra - e seres intangíveis, como os encantados. E, ainda, que há práticas de cuidado relacionadas a “movimentos” que se realizam com intensidades e ritmos variados. Nos contextos trabalhados, os modos de cuidar, enquanto eixo organizador de relações sociais, são protagonizados pelas mulheres, embora não sejam restritos ao universo feminino, e são compreendidos em suas dimensões afetivas e disruptivas. Ao trazer a relação entre “movimento e cuidado”, nosso propósito é contribuir com uma nova perspectiva para os debates que têm sido realizados sobre estes temas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Modos de cuidar; movimento; mulheres; Pankararu; quilombolas; agricultoras familiares

## INTRODUCTION

This article aims to address, through three different ethnographic contexts, the relation between the forms of caring for others and the forms of movement carried out by people and other-than-humans<sup>1</sup>. We propose that forms of “caring for” involve a framework of social, spiritual and material interdependence through a web of relationalities that encompasses people, plants and supernatural entities, which are in constant movement. Thus, we understand movement as practices that cultivate care, expressed in forms of *healing*, *affection* and *control*. People, things, objects, “*encantados*” and plants circulate between places and help modulate care-oriented actions. In the case of human spatial mobility, movement can be understood as a “principle organizing social dynamics,” which possesses varying rhythms and intensities, and “even when at rest, propagates connections, spaces and identities,” as observed by Carneiro and Daianese (2015, p. 145; 154, our translation). According to these authors, geographic and social mobility can, on the one hand, be extensive, that is, characterized by flows at a distance, involving the movement of people between specific locations. On the other hand, they can be understood as “intensive,” that is, those that are circumscribed in more immediate spaces, between houses, yards and fields, but affect people, animals and other beings. Although we divide reflections on extensive and intensive movements in two different sections, we understand that extensive movements involve intensive movements, because even in the circulation between distant spaces, there are points of intensification and convergence, and it is not our intention, therefore, to place them in dichotomous terms.

In this article, we are three anthropologists in dialogue who discovered in their ethnographic fields the centrality of movement and care. What brought us together were the points of connection between the approaches that our different ethnographies enabled in terms of our academic dialogue and our analytical perspectives. The investigations were carried out among Pankararu women in São Paulo<sup>2</sup>, *quilombola* women in Maranhão<sup>3</sup>, and family farmers in the eastern region of Minas Gerais. In the first two cases, care practices are related to a cosmological view that has as its underlying principle the support of a web of relationalities that includes the “*encantados*.” In the Pankararu context, care is understood as a modulating action that presupposes reciprocity between humans and other-than-humans. People take care of that which the “*encantados*” own—robes, *campiôs* (ritual pipe), plants—and these protect their human relatives from attacks by evil forces (bad beasts, spirits, evil enchanted beings, etc.). In the *quilombola* context, “*os encantados*”, also known as the “invisible” forces, and people take care of portions of the territory—forests and bodies of water. In addition, “*os encantados*” help to manage, in healing rituals, the

1 | We use the expression “other-than-human,” coined by Marisol de la Cadena (2018), to refer to the plurality of human and non-human beings who participate in the composition of the cosmos. Similarly to La Cadena, other authors have been relying on notions that question the centrality of agency and human protagonism and that show the intercommunicability between humans and non-humans (Descola, 2005; Ingold, 2011; Haraway, 2003, among others).

2 | Currently, the Pankararu people are mostly located in the Pankararu Indigenous Land (TI Pankararu) and the Entre Serras Indigenous Land (TI Entre Serras), in Pernambuco. The location of these IIs is part of the territorial configuration of the old settlements carried out by the Jesuit missions and refers to a fourth settlement, called Brejo dos Padres, near the banks of the São Francisco river, which, according to shared ancestral memory, was an “imperial donation” to a “religious mission that settled its ancestors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Arruti, 1996: 24-32). In São Paulo, the group is concentrated mainly in the Real Parque district, south of the capital of São Paulo, and in other districts in the metropolitan area of São Paulo.

3 | Footnote 3 on page 3.

close relations between relatives and neighbors, which can potentially produce a “malefaction.” In the case of women farmers from three municipalities in the eastern region of Minas Gerais, we observe their movements through a mosaic of spaces—garden, orchard, field, yard — in which they carry out experiments in agricultural production and harvesting, developing an acute awareness and bodily perception of these environments through their activities. In this other mode of agricultural production that some call “agroecology<sup>4</sup>,” we witness the nuances of a relationship of care woven with people, nature and institutions in the face of threats and dangers, such as the use of chemical pesticides,—the “poisons”—, that are introduced into plantations by their husbands or children in an attempt to “maximize” production and fit into the molds traditionally required by the mercantile regime.

Articulated with the idea of movement, care arise as a way of understanding the intentions that mediate relationships between human beings and between human beings and other-than-humans. In some way, it constitutes an aspect that is associated with mechanisms of control, protection and healing, as we will see below, making and unmaking relationships. In addition, care involves danger and disruptions, which leads us to question the widespread conception of care as a set of “affective and harmonious” actions, since dissent participates in relationships (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 16, our translation). What we are proposing is that women’s practices that we recognize as forms of care constitute an axis that organize social relations in their contexts and are articulated with the movements of their bodies inside and outside their communities, without, therefore, reinforcing any perspective that naturalizes women’s practices and work as “good caregivers.” By this we mean that we are aligned with feminist criticism in relation to the moral and affective dimensions of the exercise of care (see, among other authors, Maizza and Cabral de Oliveira, 2022; Bellacasa, 2012, 2017; Haraway, 2003 and 2016; Stengers, 2015 and 2018).

Thus, it becomes evident that the forms of care express several motivations, encompassing actions that not only signal forms of proximity and alignments, but also allow for expressions of distancing, tensions and ruptures. Therefore, we align ourselves with an understanding of “care” that is distanced from the naturalization of this concept as a protective “impulse” that is coupled with an idea of “internal cohesion” within the webs of relationalities woven with human beings, other-than-humans and forces of nature. Our focus is on women’s “know how” experiences associated with care, whether through healing, affection or even control<sup>5</sup>. Next, we point out some connections between the analytical paths that we will explore through our ethnographic data and the contributions brought by feminist theories and epistemologies through the category of “care”, which to some extent, opens up possibilities for investigation of other crucial themes.

3 | The *quilombola* communities of Alcântara result mostly from the disaggregation of old cotton and sugarcane farms that took place throughout the nineteenth century. Religious orders also owned farms in the region, such as the Society of Jesus, which founded in 1722 a missionary village at the bottom of the Bay of Cumã, giving it as patron Saint John. In the late 18th century, the Pombaline project for the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará was underway, decreeing the end of the slavery of indigenous people and removing, in 1757, the power of religious missionaries over the indigenous villages (missionary villages of the Jesuit *reducciones*). As a result, the old indigenous villages were mostly transformed into peasant villages, as Karasch (1993) informs us, or into “places” (*lugares*), as Lopes (2002 [1957]) informs us. At that time the trafficking of enslaved Africans to the region was intensified. In the lands of the old missionary village is one of the *quilombola* communities that is addressed here. This is the context in which indigenous people, free former enslaved and *quilombolas* begin to build their autonomy, configuring peasant villages, now recognized as remaining afro-descendent “quilombo” communities. For a better understanding of this context, consult the following reference: Pietrafesa de Godoi (2023).

4 | Agroecology is a proposal for a “sustainable” model for organization of Brazilian agriculture that has been built since the mid-1990s by a set of groups and social movements composed of farmers, as well as organizations that provide assistance (technicians and researchers) and that oppose the model of the Green Revolution, widely disseminated in the country since the 1960s. One dimension that stands out is its critical stance in the face of the economic bias that has predominated in agronomic studies, in an attempt to recover a more holistic and systemic view of production processes based on the perspective of “production systems” or “agrosystems.”

5 | Footnote 5 on page 4.

Although the scope of this endeavor does not encompass a conceptual and empirical deepening of the nexuses between the analytical categories of “care” and “movement,” with which we are working, and the approaches of feminist theory, it is important to elucidate that we hope to avoid falling into an epistemological trap that is common within this field of studies: the reinforcement of the role played by women as “caregivers” as if it was something “natural”, inherently ingrained within the “feminine” essence.<sup>6</sup> First, we adopt an approach to “care” as a set of gestures and practices that are immersed in an extensive and elastic web of relationality, which encompasses people and other-than-humans, and which finds resonance with feminist theories that challenge biological determinism in the interpretation of relationships (Yanagisako and Collier, 1987; Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995). We endorse a view based on the “modes of relationality”<sup>7</sup> (Carsten, 1997, 2000), which are expressed in the various manifestations of mobility by women who are protagonists in processes of agricultural production and harvesting, as well as healing practices. Within this broader perspective of “relationalities,” we recognize “gender social relations” as one of their expressions, that materialize through forms of surveillance and control of the actions of “others,” which in turn can constitute forces of opposition, reinforcing dissonances, hierarchies and asymmetries. Thus, we conceive the conceptualization of gender as an analytical perspective, as suggested by Scott (1995).<sup>8</sup>

It is important to point out that the convergent points within the movement-care dynamic in these three empirical situations do not have as their main purpose the search for a comparative analysis, so as to understand our terms in a totalizing or homogeneous manner. It would certainly not be a successful proposition from an anthropological perspective, as these are not comparable contexts. On the contrary, we intend to establish “partial connections” through the correlations between our empirical fields in an exercise of compatibility and not of comparability (Strathern, 1991).

## 1. MOVEMENTS, RHYTHMS AND DIFFERENTIATIONS: EXPERIENCES OF EXTENSIVE MOBILITY

Mobility is constitutive of the world of our interlocutors and engenders socio-political effects, as it is through the spatial-temporal forms of movement and modes of action that they give meaning to relationships. In this article, we approach the meanings associated with the idea of “movement” articulated in work within a line of research that has been coined “anthropology of mobilities” (Guedes & Vidal e Souza, 2021), which questions the model of representation of society and space—tied to an idea of “spatial fixity”—, and takes into consideration what subjects

5 | It is necessary to recognize the vast amount of approaches that have been adopted to deal with the theme of “care” through different feminist approaches, such as the diffuse border between the manifestations of “care” and “work” based on the theoretical framework of Feminist Economics (Carrasco, 2006); the resignification of a “care ethic” based on the perspective of the restructuring of nature-culture relations (Herrero, 2023; Federeci, 2014; and Guétat- Bernard, 2015) and the connection built between “care work” and the “affective-relational plane, related to emotional well-being.” (Orozco, 2012).

6 | This essentialist perspective within the field of studies on the theme of “care” became better known through the theoretical contributions of Carol Gilligan (1983; 2021), who affirmed a dichotomous view of the two forms of “moral” thinking (male and female) based on the notion of complementarity. It reinforced the association of gestures of “care” with the feminine essence.

7 | The work of Carsten (1997; 2000) represented a “turning point” in kinship studies, based on a broader conception of “relationality modes,” which contemplates cultural practices as key elements within the construction of relationships, such as commensality. This view introduced an understanding of both the creation and dissolution of bonds with other beings as a crucial component in the processes of “being alive”, that are intertwined with the “here- and-now” of the human experience.

8 | The author defines gender as a web of “relationships structured through cultural symbols and representations, norms and doctrines, social institutions and organizations, as well as subjective identities [...]” (Scott, 1995, p. 18).

think about their own practices.<sup>9</sup> Our focus is, then, on examining the practices of indigenous, *quilombola* and female farmers located within the contexts presented, with emphasis on the close connection between their ways of moving and caring for others.

Contemporary Pankararu mobility is understood as a “way of producing life,” as people, as “encantados”, plants and goods circulate between the village Brejo dos Padres, in Pernambuco, and the city of São Paulo, as a means of taking care of bodies (Lovo, 2017). As proposed by Ingold (2011, p. 12-13, our translation), people do not only inhabit places, but “paths,” constituting themselves historically and mutually in a landscape, because “the path, and not the place, is the primordial condition of being, or rather, of becoming.” “Paths” are the places that, throughout Pankararu history and memory, have constituted forces of interaction between beings and things, and are also a way of understanding the territorial dynamics through the coextensive experience that connects village and city.

From 1940 onwards, a continual process of geographic mobility of men and women from the Pankararu IL to the capital of São Paulo began, intensifying in subsequent decades due to the search for work in the area of civil construction. At first, this flow consisted of men who sought out work for short periods “without integrating permanently into the city,” and, later on, “women intensified their travels and the capital of São Paulo apparently started to serve as a reference point for more lasting stays, offering a source of stability” (Arruti, 1996, p. 166-167, our translation). Thus, over time, a kinship network was consolidated in the former “favela da mandioca,” the name given to the place that is now known as Real Parque, a neighborhood located in the southern area of the capital of São Paulo, where about 180 Pankararu families live. This network, composed of relatives — consanguineous and the like—helped to establish the bonds between those who gradually “fell into” or “spread themselves within the world,” a native expression that informs the movement of people towards the outskirts of the village.

The life trajectory of the Pereira family will be focused on as an example of these configurations of mobility that take place between village and city, revealing forms of “extensive and intensive movements.” This family is made up of Manoel Alexandre Sobrinho, known as Bino, his wife Maria Senhorinha da Conceição, known as Ninha, and their children. Bino’s father worked on the construction of the Cícero de Pompeu stadium—the Morumbi Stadium—in the 1950s in São Paulo. Years later, in 1977, Bino made his first trip to this city, accompanied by his brother to work in civil construction services. At first, he stayed at the house of relatives and when he could not travel, the village sent money and goods to his nuclear family (Lovo, 2017, p. 78, our translation). In the 1980s, Bino’s wife and children began to live in Real Parque, with seasonal returns to the village, especially during Corrida do Embu, an

9 | In this endeavor, as pointed out by Guedes & Vidal e Souza (2021), Ingold’s work (2007, 2011) has gained prominence as part of what can be known as a “mobilities turn”, based on “a comparative anthropology of the line” and a concentrated effort to bring “anthropology back to life.”

important ritual that takes place in the Pankararu Indigenous Land from October to March.

In 2014, Bino, Ninha, along with their daughter Dora, returned to the village after having lived thirty years in Real Parque. From then on, this family will travel from the village to São Paulo to receive medical treatment provided by indigenous health professionals of the Basic Health Unit (UBS) at Real Parque.<sup>10</sup> In these visits, there is no suspension of movement, as staying in the city implies new trips in the capital of São Paulo and the expansion of their circulation, through attending medical appointments, visiting relatives or buying goods. It is important to highlight that, just as people, plants and goods circulate between village and city, os “encantados” —beings who provide protection — accompany “rezadeiras” — figures who are seen to be female healers and medicinal plant experts —, in São Paulo, as we will see below. However, as Maria Lídia points out, “here, it is just a visit, because *they* are not from here.” Visiting, in this case, expresses the functioning of these beings that have derived their personal power and sense of identity from their ways of moving through the territories and territorialize themselves elsewhere, in order to maintain a proximity that allows them to take care of their human relatives.

In the case of the eastern part of the state of Minas Gerais, what we have classified as “extensive movements” represent a “backdrop” in this sociocultural context, as it is a region that has been characterized by a process of emigration to the United States since the 1960s, that have been carried out mainly by men (husbands and sons) of family configurations that go out in search of resources for different motives: sometimes to qualify their agricultural production or in other instances, possibly to improve their housing conditions. These migration patterns began incipiently in the city of Governador Valadares and gradually spread to rural areas, gaining intensity in the second half of the 1980s (Siqueira, 2009).<sup>11</sup>

The interlocutors classify this “migratory wave” as a “fever” that “started” in Governador Valadares and “propagated,” which demonstrates the apprehension of this mobility as a phenomenon that has effects classified as “contagious” in nature, in the sense that they expand their range of action gradually and upwards, on a regional level. From a gender perspective, it is possible to see transnational migration patterns as a process that affirms the construction of masculinity, as Woortmann (1990) illustrates through his fieldwork in Sergipe among small farmers, since “travelling a path” and “facing the world” are practices that strengthen the “man” as a subject and guarantee the acquisition of a certain “social capital,” making those who move between places “superior to those who have never left their home.” (Woortmann, 1990, p. 37, our translation).

Although the “women who stay” are socially represented as the guardians of the house and property, who should passively wait for the arrival of their husbands

10 | These professionals constitute the Indigenous Family Health Team (ESFI) composed of two Family Health physicians, a nurse, a nursing technician and two Indigenous Health Agents (AIS), including the healer and medicinal plant expert Maria Lídia, who plays a fundamental role in the coordination between indigenous knowledge and biomedicine.

11 | It is notable that the outbreak of comings and goings to the United States was preceded by travel experiences to destinations within the national territory: São Paulo, Belo Horizonte or Rondônia. Almost all the families of the women interlocutors in this ethnographic field had some story to be told about a relative who “likes to walk” or “be on the move” — whether it be a son, husband, nephew or uncle — and who had been absent for prolonged periods because of their wanderings. Most interlocutors claim that a relative who has emigrated to the USA possesses the capacity to “influence others,” such that mobility can be seen to be a phenomenon that has had a “ripple” effect in the region.

and/or children, what is observed is that, with the absence of these family members, women are represented, in their own terms, not as the those who “suffer and wait” (Rumstain, 2015, p. 284, our translation), but as “mother and father,” “man and woman at the same time,” and “widow of the living husband.” The strategies they employ to deal with such absences shed light on a process of restructuring their roles at the family and community levels, as they begin to perform new tasks, such as managing financial resources and negotiating products for sale, in addition to circulating through other spaces, seen to be part of the “public” sphere, such as marketplaces, stores and banks.

In the *quilombola* context, in addition to the movements of people between the communities and Alcântara, the municipality to which the villages belong, and São Luís, the capital of the state, there is a more extensive movement to the metropolises in southeastern Brazil, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. People move mainly in search of better livelihoods, which does not denote ruptures with their communities, but rather signals not only the interdependence between spaces, but also the existence of a network of relationships that connects them as people and communities. What we see are movements of people that are structured around an “aggregating house” (Pina-Cabral, 2011) within the community, that has the capacity to extend its influence over a distance, reaching out to suburban districts of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This entails the formation of a kind of network that expands gradually, in which people, goods and forms of care freely circulate. Understanding how people’s movements are organized through a house that is considered to be a unifying force enables us to accompany people from the *quilombola* community to neighborhoods in the capital of São Paulo and to problematize the “place of origin/place of destination” dichotomy. This binary opposition is associated with the analytical concept of “migration,” as noted by Palmeira and Almeida (1977), which homogenizes very different practices of movement of people and prevents the understanding of the diversity of the meanings of such forms of mobility. The idea that people, men and women, move and carry with them the relationships that constitute them has a greater epistemic potential than the widespread meanings of migration, as it enables us to understand the nature of the relationships that are woven and the complexity involved in the return of these people to the community after more than two decades in the major cities and their surrounding areas within the southeastern region of Brazil.

The case of Mr. Iran and Mrs. Maria do Carmo is quite revealing, in this sense. They left the São João de Cortes community (hereinafter SJC) in the 1970s, at the time of the largest flow of people that directed themselves to São Paulo and also to Rio de Janeiro. Mr. Iran left the village in 1974 and Mrs. Maria do Carmo in 1978; despite both being from SJC, they “really met” in Rio de Janeiro, where they lived

for 25 years. They married, had children, and returned to SJC in 1999. While they were in Rio, whenever they could, they would return to take part in the Saint John Festival, an occasion, by the way, when they brought two of their children to be baptized by relatives. We were told that the *Maranhenses* and the “*Cortenses*”—as the residents of the SJC community call themselves—who live in Rio de Janeiro -, are concentrated in the neighborhood of Campo Grande, a space in which we can witness the prolongation of relations of vicinage and cohabitation. Mr. Iran, at first, lived in the home of relatives; after he managed to “rent a place to live,” he invited his two sisters to come to Rio. Thus, Mr. Iran changed his work situation, from fisherman and farmer to worker in the textile industry in that city.

A different thing happened to Juliana, who returned from São Paulo to the community after 21 years, and today lives with her husband in an extension of her parents’ house. Mr. Iran accumulated financial resources, built his home in SJC, and today makes his living through fishing and the payments from his pension. Juliana, however, was able to gain what could be considered to be another type of resource: she acquired abilities and skills that provided her with the conditions to take on the role of community representative in the Rural Workers’ Union of Alcântara. Before her, her father was the formal representative of the trade union. Although union representation is a “family business” (Comerford, 2003), this particular duty was not passed on to his adult son who remained living in his parents’ house, but instead was passed on to his daughter, who, throughout her trajectory, which was characterized by mobility – moving between social spaces -, acquired the needed expertise for this role. She was the one who learned the appropriate language to be used in situations that required different forms of mediation with the rural workers’ trade union.

It is interesting to note that, among the classical authors who worked with the notion of mediation, it was Wolf (1971) who first situated it in relation to “mobility” and “connection.” According to the author, at that time questioning the existence of “isolated communities” in the Mexican context, communities rely on people or groups of people who establish “the local-national relationship,” the *brokers*, and this capacity for mediation results largely from their mobility (Valle, 2016). In this regard, Juliana was more qualified than her brother for the role of union representative. Union representation can also be read, in this context, as a type of “care work,” in the sense that one of its functions is managing relationships between people.

A similar effect of “extensive” mobility, which concerns a political dimension of the life of these communities, was found among female farmers in the eastern part of the state of Minas Gerais. New attitudes and behavioral traits are adopted by many of the women who can be classified as “community leaders” and who engage in local or regional organizations, such as the trade union movement. Female farmers who assume a leadership position have acquired specific skills that enable participation



in different spaces associated with the “public sphere”, through the development of their discursive practices — such as the capacity to make a “public” speech in collective settings.<sup>12</sup> This shows the dynamism of the mobility process: the direct involvement of rural women in what can be considered to be new spaces, outside of their daily transits, entails changes in their modes of subjectivation. The alterations in their understanding of their own personal capacities—a subjective process - can be witnessed in the history of Teresinha, a female farmer who became the first woman to assume the position of president in the rural workers’ union of Simonésia/MG in 2010 and who took on a role as “mediator”, in the sense expressed by Wolf (1971). Thus, she gives an account of “the struggle” she experienced to adapt to an organizational management model in which the capacity to deliver a “speech” that contains certain valued characteristics – such as being well phrased, coherent and convincing - is decisive in the decision-making process and in altering power dynamics, as women enter the “hard core” of the organizational structures for governance, moving inward “from the outskirts.” In such a way, female leaders gradually “gain respect” in spaces that have historically been strictly reserved for men, who are considered to be the official “spokespersons” for family and community configurations and within formal social settings. Thus, “becoming” a leader in the context of the trade union environment involved learning new skills—such as “diplomacy” to deal with conflicts and the fine-tuning of a specific mode of constructing arguments within speeches — that materialize within the conflict-ridden political field in which such social interactions take place.<sup>13</sup> Also, in this particular context, we observe the emergence of new forms of management that involve the rotation of functions and positions, the consolidation of decision-making instances that are more expansive and participatory, and the construction a more extensive directory board. It is noteworthy that such practices can be interpreted as expressions of “care-work”, in the sense that they enable new forms of participation for those who are often “on the outskirts”, as well as challenging crystallized hierarchies and the restrictive routes for circulation of power within many organizational structures.

As Vincent (1987) points out, anthropology has classically addressed the social mobility of women especially through the process of marriage. In her article, the author notes that female farmers also move to cities in search of work and that they are important agents in effecting structural change within many societies in the course of such migration patterns. The fact that most migration studies are focused on the movements of men, as protagonists of these forms of mobility, contributes to the invisibility of women’s expressions of “movement” – in the broad sense of the term – all of which expand the scale of their actions and have repercussions on the web of relationalities within the family and community settings.

Just as “extensive mobility” defines movements based on spatial movements

12 | It is important to point out that, for women who start to exercise their leadership potential through the new positions they occupy, the desired leadership model is built through the management of discursive practices: word usage, as well as the ability to build an argument and defend one’s point of view with credibility. These are prized skills that gain value within these organizational settings. What we witness is a process of social evaluation of the capacities of emerging leaders, which involves the ability to “produce discourses considered suitable for this type of public event, that is, knowing how to speak well, speak beautifully, present a speech, or simply knowing how to speak.” (Comerford, 1999, p. 91).

13 | Here we note the ambiguities that are intrinsic to the dichotomy between “public” vs. “private”, a mode of thought predicated on seemingly stable oppositions that has been systematically reinforced by liberal theories of political processes and that has been the target of criticism within feminist studies. (Okin, 2008; Zelizer, 2000) The entry of women into the spheres framed as “public” is associated with a process of “politicization,” to the extent that they expand their forms of mobility as they gain autonomy and gradually take on leadership positions. However, this does not mean that the sphere that comprises “the domestic” is alien to what we might classify as political practices, as becomes evident in the transits between the kitchen, the backyard gardens and other contiguous spaces, which involve a network of relationships and produce socio-political effects.

that occur within larger distances and their variations, in the following section, we will highlight “intensive mobility,” which refers to movements within places that, although seemingly “stable and fixed,” propel the circulation of people, plants and other-than-humans.

## 2. “The know-how” in gestures of care in backyards: experiences of intensive mobility

In this section, the focus is on events on the empirical level that reflect the various manifestations of mobility that are circumscribed to spaces seen to be extensions of the house, such as backyards.<sup>14</sup> In the case of women rural workers in the eastern area of Minas Gerais, the forms of caring are revealed through the consolidation of a framework of knowledge that comes into fruition through “doing,” based on the practices carried out mainly in the backyards —, a space in which they exercise their autonomy in the dynamization of plant and seed exchanges, in the introduction of new species and propagation of seedlings and in the creation of diversified productive arrangements.

The backyards, which have historically been seen as a mere extension of the domestic space, not only reveal a varied production of foods of nutritional and medicinal value, but are also places in which we witness a wide range of agroforestry practices, such as tree planting amid agricultural crops, plantations based on the natural succession of species and fruit planting around dwellings.<sup>15</sup> The experiments carried out by women farmers involve the resignification of yards, since *the field*—which is considered *productive* par excellence and is typically seen to be under the domain of men—is no longer considered to be the only place in which production is connected with the marketing circuits. Thus, we note the introduction of agroecological production from backyards that are managed by female farmers into the Programmes for Public Purchases for institutional markets<sup>16</sup>, thereby guaranteeing that the income generated provides economic support for many rural families who are experiencing certain “critical” moments within the cycle of agricultural production. We refer here to moments in which there are fluctuations in the prices of the main foods that were planted in the fields and sold on a local and regional scale in certain parts of the eastern region of Minas Gerais, such as coffee.

This dynamic learning process - which these interlocutors call “learning by doing” - is grounded in different conceptions of the phenomena that occur in nature, in addition to the uses of time, resources and spaces. “Care” can be characterized as a dimension of “know-how” (Woortmann & Woortmann, 1997), since the activities for agricultural development and collecting that they carry out reflect a posture of

14 | We observed that backyard gardens, that are often adjoined to the homes, interact with other spaces dedicated to agricultural production and collecting plants, such as the field or the forests. The “field”, in the context of *quilombola* and small-scale family-based farming, should be understood as much more than merely a space for cultivating crops and as the foundation of economic practices. We are oriented by a systemic vision of the co-relation between different spaces, such as yards, *capoeiras* [areas where vegetation grows after deforestation], forests. In other words, a way of life with relative autonomy is developed around this system of interconnected spaces, that involves calendars dictated by activities dedicated towards farming, collecting and ceremonial activities, while also encompassing multiple expressions of everyday sociality.

15 | Anthropological works such as that of Lewitzki (2019) endorse a broader view of the multiple functions of the backyard gardens, as a space focused on the preservation of health, since it serves as a source of medicinal plants and foods to be used as “remedies” in healing practices. It also represents a space in which different forms of sociability are also observed, such as the intense exchange of resources and inputs between family members and neighbors who transit through the backyard and the woods surrounding the rural properties.

16 | Here we refer to the public policies (PAA—Food Acquisition Program and PNAE—National School Food Program) that were first designed and implemented by the federal government respectively in 2003 and 2009.

affection both with the other and with the forces of nature. We witness here a unique feature within the framework of techniques and methods that they use in agricultural production. The expressions of “care” are intertwined with the dimensions of affections, which brings to the center of our analysis a phenomenological and immaterial dimension that has repercussions on intersubjectivity (Orozco, 2012), as we will see through the following examples.

Rose, a farmer from the community Santa Terezinha in the municipality of Sobrália/MG, points to a series of lessons that she has learned through attentive listening to the “signs” of nature, many of which were passed on from parents to children, such as the practice of “weeding” or using “manure” to enrich the soil and attract “another quality of plants.” Her wisdom about new forms of cultivating crops is revealed in the following narrative: a certain plant stayed in the same place for two years and began to stagnate because “it no longer grew”; however, from the moment it was moved “to another place”, it began to flourish. (Weitzman, 2016) Rose, as well as other female farmers from this rural community in Sobrália/MG, say that, because of this kind of experience, they have decided to move the crops from one area to another every year. She also highlights the strategies used to deal with the forces of nature that integrate cyclical movements, claiming that one must know how to act according to the demands that the context of each space within rural properties and communities present during “each part of the year,” precisely because “time does not stand still”; that is, the field is eternally in motion. The development of “know-how” implies the careful observation of movements, degrees of intensity and rhythms, from the moment one has “hands-on experiences” and opens up to the possibility of experimenting other ways of building knowledge. It is a phenomenon that goes beyond a process strictly focused on the practices of planting and harvesting food, referring to an acute perception of the environment that is experienced bodily and that can be filtered through its sounds and smells. (Carvalhosa, 2021; Tsing, 2019).

The ability to carry out effective land management, involving a familiarity with the signs of a possible tension or form of rupture —that inevitably manifests itself in a subtle manner, “invisible to the eyes” —reveals a deep understanding of the cycles of nature and the dynamics of revitalization and regeneration. In this sense, Rose perceives the “lack of control” that is revealed in the forces of nature —such as, for example, the excessive growth of vegetation —as an indication of the lack of a form of care. Thus, she claims that the new generations are not capable of making a full analysis of the conditions of this “vegetation that comes in excess,” which, in her point of view, arises precisely because “the land is without endurance” and “pesticides have already weakened the soil.” (Weitzman, 2016)

Among the *quilombola* women of Alcântara, “care work” is considered to be part of a web of relationalities that connects humans and other-than-humans,

which in this case, are plants. The tasks associated with care in this context involve a perceptive awareness about the functions of each plant within practices that entail cultivating, harvesting and the fabrication of medicinal remedies in the backyard gardens and surrounding forests. Although the backyard gardens function as a space for circulation and repairs of equipment such as fishing nets—instruments typically used by men, they are cared for, above all, by women. *Quilombola* backyards are examples of agrobiodiversity: they almost invariably contain one or more babassu palm trees (*Attalea speciosa*) and several fruit trees, as in Elza's backyard. In Elza's backyard, we encounter *murici* (*Byrsonima crassifolia*), *carambola* (*Averrhoa carambola*), *tamarindo* (*Tamarindus indica*), *carnauba* (*Copernicia prunifera*), coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*) and *canhambuca* or *cujubeira* (*Crescentia cujete*), a “tree that yields raw material to make gourd” and, as she teaches us, after opening “both sides,” becomes a bucket, an important utensil in household chores. Nôris' backyard also has a diversity of plants: *juçara* (açai), *limão-verdadeiro*, lima, *limãozinho*, *acerola*, *manga*, *laranjão*, *goiaba*, *coqueiro* and *limão-tanja*. This diversity is only possible due to women's care work in the management of plants within the backyards: they fertilize them with the residues of their kitchens and cultivate them, in addition to engaging in what can be classified as “reciprocity practices”, through donations and exchanges of plants and seeds with their neighbors.

These backyards are referred to by women's names and, are not viewed merely as a “productive space,” since they are focused primarily on health and healing. They contain a variety of spices, such as pepper, chives, “*hortelã de folha grossa*” and basil, as well as therapeutic, medicinal plants, such as “*trevo de macaquanim*,” that is used to stop bleeding, and “*paticholin*,” that is used for constipation, as Nôris teaches us. In other parts of the backyards managed by women, there are plants such as *capim-santo*, *santa-quitéria* —, which are recommended for stomach ailments such as ulcer, gastritis, “agony” (chest pain) and tiredness; *itaboquina-roxa*, used in the case of “aches in a child's belly,” so as to mitigate the “whining of a child experiencing pain”; *quina*, recommended against fever and infection; *maravilha*, “good for the heart”; and *pau-d'angola*, used in the bath. Women are responsible for the daily care and preservation of the health of bodies of family members as well as neighbors, who resort to their “help,” an emic category that, in the context of the *quilombola* communities and family-based farms within Minas Gerais, refers to the forms of reciprocity between relatives and neighbors, who are partners in many exchanges.

In addition, there are expressive aspects of the relationship between humans and plants - they can indicate to the father, mother or grandparents, for example, if a child will be (or will not be) successful, in their future, with the fields: Antonio, husband of Nôris, prepared fields for Mateus, his grandson, when he was only 2 years old.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Antonio explained to me that the motive for “naming the child” is “to see

17 | As explained to me, a smaller field, close to the house, not in the “centro”, a place far from the houses, used for planting and harvesting. Such family fields are about an hour away by foot or by canoe - a little more or a little less -, depending on the location.

if they will be lucky in the field.” Mateus’ field was cared for by his mother, Juliana. One day, when she saw Antonio arriving with cassava from “Mateus’ field,” Nôris exclaimed: “that is the baby’s cassava!”. In addition to taking care of the backyard, Mateus’ mother was responsible for taking care of the “baby’s field,” so that, like the child, it could thrive. It is worth noting the proximity of the “baby’s field” to the family’s backyard, both of which are cared for mainly by women.

It is important to note that the backyard is a space that allows for the circulation of children between houses, as it is not separated by fences, especially in the homes of grandmothers and their daughters with grandchildren, that constitute a space for the exchange of food, plants and expressions of care. This last aspect is clearly revealed in the peripheral region of São Paulo, in the houses with which the “aggregating house” of the SJC *quilombola* community—that is, where the people who are in São Paulo came from and where they return to—extends its relations. In the case observed, two conjoined houses were built on the same lot by a pair of brothers married to women from SJC. They share a yard corridor, where their children play and receive the care of their mothers—a solution that reveals the vicinal relationships that are generated in contexts of cohabitation. As in the *quilombola* community, the movement of children between homes remains intense in the metropolis of São Paulo. Here we observe an aspect of “intensive mobility”, that takes place through the “extensive mobility” that occurred with the movement of people from the SJC community to São Paulo.

These aspects, that highlight the forms of sociality and the affections between people and plants are found in the Pankararu case, where “intensive mobility” is perceived in places such as the backyard in the context of the relations between female healers, who make use of medicinal plants, and midwives<sup>18</sup>. In the village known as Brejo dos Padres, in Pernambuco, the backyard is the place where fruits are planted—banana, papaya, green coconut, cashew, etc.—and plants considered “sacred”<sup>19</sup>, such as *pião-roxo* (*Jatropha gossypifolia*), *quebra-faca* (*Croton micans*), *alecrim-de-caboclo* (*Baccharis sylvestris*) and *junco* (*Cyperus esculentus*). The plant “junco” is a crucial part of a remedy called *lambedouro*—a drink made of syrup, water and honey—as well as being an important ingredient for ritual baths. Such plants, however, cannot be harvested by just anyone, as taught by the female healer Josivete, because “it is necessary to be clean,” a notion that organizes the Pankararu cosmology and indicates the importance of sexual and food safeguards so that the “encantados” are closeby, providing protection and not taking revenge.

The yard is the place where the *prato* [dish] can take place, a payment for what was done and that is part of a system of provision and consideration, carried out when someone gets sick and makes a request to the “encantado” for help in the healing process. This ritual was conducted at the home of Josivete’s mother, “the

18 | Those who possess expertise in medicinal plant use as well as midwives are considered to be specialists in “rituals” that are carried out in healing practices. They are those who “have the “gift”; in other words, they are seen to possess the innate ability to establish forms of communication with “os encantados.” In addition to them, we can highlight fathers and mothers of “praiás” — those who watch over and take care of the robe (ritual clothing)—and the singers who participate in the “healing tables.”

19 | The notion of sacred, in accordance with the native conception, is considered to be the realm that is related to the kingdom of “os encantados”, the dwelling of the entities and that exercises control and protection of natural resources, such as mountains, ridges and rivers.

owner of the dish,” that is, the one who was sick and asked the entities for support in the healing process. “The dish is a source of joy,” it is a party in which relatives and the “encantados” participate so as to “eat *pirão*, drink *garapa* [sugarcane juice] and dance *toré*.” When the person is healed, they are under the “obligation” to offer food—rice, *pirão* (a kind of porridge made from cassava flour) and meat (a protein that can be goat, beef or fish) to their human and non-human relatives.

During the ceremony involving “the dish”, women need to be “prepared,” that is, they must adopt sexual and food safeguards so as to be able to handle food. In this aspect, we can perceive a sexual and spatial division between women and men. On this occasion of the ritual, the women cooked the *pirão* in a fire in the yard while the men remained in a room of the house smoking *campiô*, “concentrating.” The smoke of the ritual pipe, in addition to being a link of communication with the “encantados”, constitutes a mesh of protection against threatening forces. It should be noted that this sexual differentiation is not understood—in this context, as well as within the contexts of the *quilombolas* of SJC and the farmers in eastern Minas Gerais—as if the women were deprived of agency, since domesticity produces political processes and can be considered to be an intrinsic dimension of social dynamics (Strathern, 2006).

Care relationships through healing possibilities centered on the backyard space are presented in several ways. Midwives have a relationship of care with the land<sup>20</sup>, since they ask permission from the “encantados” to harvest and handle sacred plants, such as those used during the pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum periods (Lovo, 2020). It is common for them to place specific herbs on the womb of the parturient so that the “owner of the body” does not take revenge and “returns to their place,” as this entity controls the reproductive functioning of the woman. The yard is also where the woman’s placenta is buried, as explained by the midwife Maria das Dores, known as Dora, who inhabits the village Brejo dos Padres: “Didn’t she give birth at home? So! We have a hole dug and plant it [the placenta] in her yard,” signaling a relationship that extends between the land and the person.

Dora says that, although the teachings of these practices are derived from a family tradition, it could be that the girl “becomes a midwife by chance.” In this sense, she gave an account of a situation in which she was hastily called to assist in a childbirth. In the absence of an apprentice, she called the pregnant woman’s twelve-year-old daughter to help her. The girl, attentive, remained by her side, seeing, hearing and imitating the procedures that were conducted and requested. This fact demonstrates that knowledge is not produced only by family tradition, but through the inventive capacity of the person, as we have seen in the “know-how” of female farmers who adopt agroecological practices, as well as women from *quilombola* communities. This dynamic learning process reminds us of the analytical perspectives of Ingold (2010), when proposing that human cognitive

20 | This relationship of care with the land is also perceived in relation to the “tiradores de croá,” people who are authorized to harvest croá (*Neoglaziovia variegata*), a seed endemic to the northeast region that contains fibers used to make the “robe.”

processes also occur through the acquisition of *skills*—which the person learns by imitating another, in a form of “education through attentiveness.” Thus, the sharing of knowledge generated by women through the exchange of their practices and techniques in experiments result in a certain kind of “know-how” in regard to land cultivation, production and management.

### 3. CARE AS MANIFESTATIONS OF HEALING AND CONTROL OF OTHERS: PROTECTIVE AND DISRUPTIVE DIMENSIONS

The manifestations of care, which, as we have seen, are not static, but gain distinct meanings in the core of agricultural, harvesting and therapeutic practices, also evoke relations involving gestures of control and protection, which signal the disruptive potential of care (Bellacasa, 2017). This fact highlights a significant aspect addressed in studies on care: the role of dissonances in practices conceived as “care,” which show that conflicting situations are not absent from the processes of “caring for” (Maizza, 2020) humans and non-humans, but inherent to them. In this sense, “care” is expressed through forms of protection against threats arising from human intervention that cause harmful effects on the organic processes of nature, such as the use of what female farmers label as “poisons” (pesticides) in the eastern part of the state of Minas Gerais. It also manifests itself through the construction of a harmonious web of relationships with entities - “donos” and/or the “encantados” - designed not to cause disruptions, as we observe when examining the experiences of *quilombola* and indigenous women.

In the context of the eastern part of Minas Gerais, it is clear that the contingency of a destabilization of the forces of nature through human interference brings to our attention the key category of *control* with an analytical lens focused on gender relations. According to female farmers in these communities, the model of agricultural practices that their husbands and male children tend to carry out lead to a *lack of control* precisely because quick results that generate economic value are prioritized, without paying attention to the pernicious effects of the methods used. Thus, *care* appears as a driving force for them to defend themselves against dangers that may lead to environmental degradation or the dissolution of family and community ties. Exercising gestures of “care” is associated with an attempt at efficient and thorough forms of land management, that make it possible not only to defend against imminent dangers, but also to increase resilience and productivity of the land and other natural resources in the long term.

*Poison* – a native term for “pesticides” - represents a code used to speak of the frontiers between agency and choice. It shows the limits of an attitude dedicated

to cultivating care, that is expressed through a mechanism of “control,” because not only the acts of “others” escape their field of governability, but the inputs themselves, when spread through the air, become uncontrollable vectors that cause different degrees of damage to living beings (people and plants). Chemical inputs destabilize not only nature<sup>21</sup>—“*stricto sensu*”—but also represent an imminent threat that can potentially foster divisions, since, at the local level, there is a demarcation between those who use pesticides and practice other techniques that can be harmful to the soil and those who choose agroecology as a form of living, leading to fragmentations within the “moral community.” (Bailey, 1971)

Performing gestures of “care” that are aligned with the natural forces and building a wall of protection against threats and dangers is a task that requires diligence. Their practices entail different ways of conceiving the flows of nature and the ways of producing food and relationships that are not consensual. They are the result of a constant process of negotiation with these *others*—most of them male beings—husbands and children—, who often exert pressure so that the use of chemical inputs can prevail in most spaces within rural properties. One of the challenges that the women farmers face within a constant process of negotiation is the myth that there would be an increase in the amount of production through the aid of these complementary products, which together constitute a *package* of sorts: fertilizers, biofertilizers and pesticides.<sup>22</sup>

The notions of “protection and control” as forms of care—albeit in very different situations from those described in the case of women farmers in Minas Gerais—are also found in the *quilombola* context studied. In this ethnographic field, the notions of protection and control are associated with the notion of “*dono*” (“owners.”) As *owners*, people take care of the place, as well as other beings, the “invisible” or the “*encantados*.”<sup>23</sup> We suggest that there is a framework of guiding principles that orients the relations between people, but also between people and places and between humans and other-than-humans as we could observe in another *quilombola* village, Itapuaua. There we were told that in Ponta Preta “you can’t plant in the fields because there is a ‘*dono*’ there.”

The accounts given by the interlocutors refer to punishments for acts that are seen to be abuses of natural environments, such as, for example, cultivating in areas where one should not. One case reported was that of a man who, stricken with a torpor for raiding a place that is known to have a “*dono*”, got lost in the woods; he tried day and night to return to his home, without success. He was found in a situation of great fatigue. This man infringed a set of rules and regulations when it comes to the relations between people, the “*encantados*” and portions of the environment. In order to be healed completely, he was taken to a healing ritual, where his health was restored through the mediation of the “*encantados*”, protective agents who are

21 | It should be noted that an idealized view of nature prevails here, as a place inculcated with principles of cohesion, complementarity and consonance, in which any force that comes from outside is potentially evil precisely because it destabilizes the preeminent order.

22 | We emphasize that, in this region, there is use of “roundup” in plantations, even if at a minimum level. “Roundup” is an herbicide that was introduced into the market over ten years ago and whose main function is to “kill the vegetation.” People who tend to be critical of its use, especially female farmers within the eastern part of Minas Gerais, argue that “the vegetation is the fertilizer of the land,” and by “killing the vegetation” the land becomes poor, without the microorganisms (earthworms, etc.) that “give life” to plants.

23 | Fausto (2008) argues that the “*dono*” category is “a key component of Amazonian sociality and characterizes interactions between humans, between non-humans, between humans and non-humans, and between people and things” (Ibid., p. 329). Galvão (1976), in turn, notes its importance in Amerindian contexts. Fausto explores the various denotations of vernacular terms for the “*dono*” category among various Amazonian peoples, concluding that “in all these denotations, the relationship of a subject with a resource is being defined: the *dono* would be the mediator between this resource and the collective to which it belongs” (Fausto, 2008, p. 330).



at the same time agents of “malefaction” and healing. This case is a good example of the disruptive potential of care (Bellacasa, 2017), which, as in the Pankararu context we will see below, demonstrates hostility and affection as constitutive elements of human and non-human relations.

It is important to mention that in this ethnographic context, the “*donos-encantados*” are not spirits of the dead; they belong to another category of spiritual beings. They are protectors of humans, but they can punish them severely; they also protect places, such as Ponta Preta: “There we clear the brush in a portion [a certain part of the place]: there is a path that never gets dirty, never clogs!”. By saying that the path “never gets dirty,” “never clogs,” they are suggesting that “someone takes care” of this particular place, that is, there is a  *dono*. Although the “*encantados*” live in bodies of water and forests, they also “walk” with humans and participate in “ways of caring” through relations that are forged with the land and people.

It is through the logic of “care” and “common use” of natural resources that we can understand the surveillance of the elders of the *quilombola* community of SJC in relation to areas considered to be of common use, such as when Mr. Nelson went to check if “someone from outside” was “taking sand from Mirinzal,” a portion of the territory belonging to the “children of that land” and from where they extract sand, as a resource that is used in the construction of their homes and ovens.<sup>24</sup> He was exercising protection and control, expressed through the verb “to care”, as it appears in the accounts of our interlocutors: “we use [the land], we take care of it.”

Among women farmers in the eastern part of Minas Gerais, another issue that is observed at the core of this care practice is a concern with the most lasting and sustainable forms of “healing” in an effort to build up forms of protection in the face of the “negative energies” that are unleashed in agricultural production spaces. Women farmers classify “poisons”, the name given to agrochemicals, such as pesticides, as transmitters of an “invisible and silent disease,” precisely because the effects are not easily noticeable and people cannot perceive their consequences immediately. As one of the rural women who actively takes part in family-based agriculture, Marilene, points out: “If they used *roundup* and people died quickly, everyone would be afraid. But since it’s not like that, and people are dying little by little, no one believes that it is harmful.”

The diffuse action of pesticides and other chemical inputs—which debilitate not only the land, but also affect bodily functions—makes them view techniques or methods classified as “agroecological” as possible ways to affirm another model of agricultural development that is aligned with the strengthening of processes that have been weakened. Thus, by making a “natural remedy” to combat pests that can attack and reach “their target” more easily, given the weaknesses and fragile points that have been aggravated by conventional practices, for example, they are

24 | Mirinzal is considered to be one of the “centro”, where land is “cleared” and fields are cultivated. To understand this episode, it is necessary to take into account that areas of common ownership such as “centros”, are taken to be the responsibility of all, and, therefore, can be a breeding ground for contradictions between the interests of some individuals and those of other residents. In regard to the same episode, a *quilombola* commented: “He [the one who hired the services] is not even a son of this place. I don’t think that’s right.” The right to access, exploitation and control of the common resources of the territory are expressed, in this case, in the language of kinship; as a result, there is the establishment of a border—that can be shifted, it must be understood—between the “insiders” and the “outsiders.”

endorsing a device that, in their point of view, will prove to be more effective as a cure. Practices intended to strengthen soil quality after a gradual process of erosion and depletion of nutrients are strategies for “healing” that have repercussions when we consider an important factor: time. The women farmers constantly affirm that it undeniably takes longer to perceive the impacts of such measures because of the severity of the damages, that have been inflicted on the ecosystem by more conventional agricultural practices and the application of “technological packages”, associated with the “Green Revolution.”

The “natural remedies” that are used with the intention of “saving” lands and bodies, as proposed by women farmers who carry out agroecological practices in the eastern part of Minas Gerais, are closely connected to other healing practices that are traditionally put into place among *quilombolas*, from Maranhão, and the Pankararu indigenous tribe in the city of São Paulo. Plants play an important role in the healing rituals in some villages of the ethnic territory of Alcântara, and they are present in many stages, such as the moment dedicated to “purifying” the space, which consists in washing the floor with “fragrant weeds.”<sup>25</sup> In this universe, it is important to emphasize the intrinsic efficacy of certain herbs that have their therapeutic properties enhanced through the work of male and female “pajés” - , qualified agents when it comes to the preparation and use of medicinal plants for healing purposes. As the “pajé” once said: “if I can heal it, I heal it, if I cannot, I say: take them to the doctor! And if the doctor can’t handle it, come here.” This statement was reiterated by his daughter, who began performing the healing rituals after her father’s death in 2015. We highlight a healing ritual with the use of herbs that is designed to “undo” the power of a “spell” in which the suspicion was that the person had “been injured by something done,” that is, by something that an adversary had caused—the boy had a wound on his foot that he was unable to treat “with medicine from the pharmacy.” Consultation with the “pajé” is very common in these cases to repair, albeit temporarily, these “disunions” between people, as there is a strong belief in the destructive power of the “spell.”

It can be said that the “spell” itself is part of a larger system of exchanges, which encompasses disputes, on the one hand, and on other hand, forms of making amends and seeking reparations. In rituals, reparations are made in the effort to repair relationships put at risk, through the action and mediation of the “encantados.” Thus, in the *quilombola* context, the ritual can be seen as a device for managing the proximity and distance between people, relatives and neighbors. People use medical services outside their communities, and sometimes they are recommended by the “pajé”, but this is in conjunction with local care practices, among which shamanic healing has a place of significance. These practices cannot be understood outside a system of interconnecting forms of knowledge involving families and neighbors, that

25 | Is not possible to describe in detail the healing ritual - healing play (*brincadeira de cura*) or *pajelança*, as they refer to it -, that we observed, within the scope of this article, but it is worth mentioning that in the observed ritual, healing was performed by suction and with *maracá*. In addition, there was the use of smoke and a preparation with herbs. A complete description can be found in the work of Pietrafesa de Godoi (2023).

incorporates the relations between people and the forces known to be “invisible.”

In the Pankararu context, healing practices sustain forms of caring that involve the agreements established between ritual specialists and the “encantados.” In São Paulo, women are the key protagonists in distinct kinds of healing practices — whether it be prayer, song or use of medicinal plants -, a fact that differentiates them in their techniques and types of prayer. There are those who “pray with the branch” or “pray with the maracá,” as the healer Maria Lídia explained. “Praying with a branch is different from praying with the *maracá*. Praying with the branch you are not calling the encantados.” This distinction is important because it indicates who can call for the ‘encantados.’”, that is, who has the “gift,” an emic category that indicates that the person was chosen and graced with specific skills to perform certain activities by spiritual entities.

Faith healers, who possess expertise in the use of medicinal plants, are called in to make the first diagnosis when someone gets sick. In communication with “encantados”, they signal whether such a disease is “of the order of the encantados” or of the “men who make use of the pen” (physicians),—a practice that is similar to that seen in the *quilombola* context. “Disease”, as a phenomenon, is understood as the result of a cosmological imbalance that involves the relation with the “encantados” who are considered evil, bad entities or *caiporas*, etc. Among these diseases, we can mention the *flechada* [arrow wound]—which is the most serious case—as it can lead to death if not helped in time, as explained by the “rezadeira” Josivete. She says she was at a healing table when “she had a vision and saw that her daughter was in danger.” When she got home, she saw the baby on the floor with a “black circle in her navel,” which, according to her, indicated the *flechada*. She gives an account that the *flechada* was “caught by her daughter because she did not have spiritual protection [*corpo aberto*],” that is, she was susceptible to threats from evil beings. That is why, throughout the person’s life cycle, it is essential to perform rituals to keep bodies “closed”, that is, protected by entities.

The “encantados” have desires and willpower, so that meeting these needs shows a way of action, because in this relation, they hierarchize positions, but without submitting them to command or coercion. It is according to this logic of consideration, in which “being out of someone’s consideration or not maintaining a relationship of reciprocity is equivalent to a loss of humanity” (Kelly & Matos, 2019, p 391-400) or to a process of “thinking about the other” (Maizza & Oliveira, 2022) that the agreement with such entities happens. The revenge of these beings can cause an imbalance in the cosmos to the extent that distancing oneself leaves one’s body susceptible to evil forces that cause illness. This ambivalent aspect of care is linked to a dissident dimension (Bellacasa, 2017), as care involves a relation of danger, in which the hostility of these entities needs to be mitigated with “obligations” and

safeguards.

This mechanism of protection and control also extends to the ritual elements (campiô [pipe], bathrobe), places (ridges, waterfalls, etc.) and the “natural resources” of the forest. The use of such “resources” in an improper manner can provoke the wrath of entities, such as *caipora*, for example, which can shoot arrows at children who “steal the fruits of *imbu* and *murici*.” Such a spiritual entity, as in other ethnographic contexts, has control of animals and flora, and manages “natural resources” (Almeida, 2013, p. 18).

The healers and medical plant experts say that it is necessary to “remember” the *encantados*, making efforts to please them. Remembering, however, does not refer to an act of memory, but a device with a set of actions that aim to maintain the agreement with the entity. Forgetting *them* endangers Pankararu science, “weakening” it. The “Pankararu science” refers to the knowledge that is generated from communication with the “*encantados*” and other intangible beings, and can be transmitted by dreams and visions. Not weakening science, in this case, involves an attempt to spiritually align with these entities, in order to avoid aggravating any indication of hostility or dissonance that leads to distancing.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In dealing with the intricate relationship between “movement” and “care” in three ethnographic contexts, we seek to bring a new perspective to the debates that have been held on these themes, which have, in many occasions, been carried out in a separate and dissociated manner. In doing so, we understand that “forms of caring” are part of a web of relationships that is quite extensive and elastic, encompassing people and other tangible beings, such as plants and land, as well as intangible beings, such as the “*encantados*.” We also propose that the forms of caring, although not restricted to the female universe, are an organizing axis of social relations between indigenous, *quilombola* and *family-based farming communities*, in which women play a crucial role, either through the cultivation and uses of plants, or through the gestures of surveillance and control over places and actions between humans and other-than-humans.

In the three ethnographic situations, we highlight how “extensive mobility” produces socio-political effects. This was observed in the case of women from *quilombola* as well as rural family-based farming communities, in which movements expand the scope of care, in such a way that they take on an important political dimension - through forms of representation in social organizations, such as trade unions. In such contexts, it becomes clear to what extent these expressions of

caretaking require specific skills for fostering relations between different actors. In the case of the Pankararu people, the “extensive” movements are perceived among the people from this ethnic group and the “encantados” that circulate between the village and the city, managing relationships through healing practices.

We highlight the caretaking practices of women whose backyards serve as a focal point for their actions, articulated with forms of movement that we call “intensive”, as inspired by the interpretation provided by Carneiro and Daianese (2015). The forms of cultivation, management and “control” of productive processes conform to a logic that goes against the assimilation of their lands and plants as mere resources destined for the marketplace. Such practices engender apprehension based on the “know-how” of *quilombola*, indigenous and women farmers and can be perceived as counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge that confront the conventional ideas of scientific rationality, in line with the criticism presented by Stengers (2002). The author notes that the consolidation of modern science, as the only legitimate mode of knowledge, was only possible through the delegitimization of expressions of knowledge that are considered “non-scientific.” The three contexts reveal ways of “opposing” the logics that prevail within the hegemonic societal order, through other ways of acting and weaving existence. We understand that this confrontation does not occur in an organized way, but reveals itself subtly, through the practices, expertise and knowledge of women, resembling what Scott (1985) calls “everyday forms of resistance.” Such daily experiences occur by means of healing practices that cultivate relationships and navigate the margins between proximity, distance and disruptions between people and other-than-humans, as well as within the web of relations that are woven with the forces of nature: the land and plants.

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