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FAMILY BETRAYALS: THE TEXTURES OF KINSHIP

THE HOSPITALIZATION

> Relationships require a repeated attention to the most ordinary of objects and events (Das, 2007: 6-7)

I begin my reflections with a phone call I received from Leonor in mid-2017. During our conversation, Leonor narrated to me the "critical moment"[1] (Han, 2012) she had gone through: dona Carmen, her mother, had been admitted two days previously into the emergency ward of a public hospital in Rio de Janeiro city. The diagnosis was pneumonia. At the moment when we talked, she had spent more than 30 hours standing next to her mother, alternating with a few hours sat in the hospital's visitor hall. Aged 84, blind, with no teeth, partially deaf, with advanced Alzheimer's, a tumour in the kidneys and difficulties moving about, dona Carmen required constant daily care and her daughter provided it with maximum dedication (Pierobon, forthcoming). In 2017 it had been four years since Leonor brought her mother to live with her in the popular housing occupation where she lived, making herself the sole provider of the "caring acts" (Kleinman, 2015) that assured dona Carmen's life. In her view, her brothers had abandoned their mother and found it *convenient* that she performed this function *alone*. When dona Carmen developed coughing and a fever, Leonor sent messages her brothers on her mobile phone, advising them about the state of their mother's health. Leonor complained to me that none of them had replied. The lack of any reply from her brothers and dona Carmen's worsening

health led Leonor to decide to take her mother to the hospital without telling them about the admission.

The decision not to inform her brothers had consequences for Leonor. With one nurse for every 30 patients, it was obvious to the daughter that dona Carmen would not receive the care necessary for her recovery and that she would need a full-time companion. But the emergency ward had no space for companions. This explained why there were no chairs, beds or any other facilities that could provide some comfort. Sixty years old and suffering various health problems herself, Leonor was *exhausted* and told me that she felt she would never recover from the nights she spent on her feet in the chilly hospital. Faced with this situation, Leonor lived a moral dilemma that was embedded in her "ethics of care" (Laugier, 2015). She wanted the presence of her younger brother, Cleber, to share the care of their mother and to be able to rest; and she rejected his presence because in everyday life the spectre of the brother left her feeling uneasy. Cleber, though, was told about the admission and went to the hospital. Silvio, Leonor's son and neighbour, had called his uncle and passed on the information. The reader may ask where Silvio was when his mother and grandmother needed help. But Leonor and Silvio had fought and not spoken for days. Leonor threatened to report her son to the police since he had punished his small daughter, Leonor's granddaughter, leaving bruises on her leg. Silvio did not offer to help his mother and she was determined not to ask her son for help.

But Leonor *could not bear any more*. When she met up with Cleber, she convinced him to take her place that night, staying at hospital and caring for dona Carmen. Leonor left the hospital close to ten o'clock at night. There was torrential rain. The streetlights had blacked out and no buses were running. Without money for a taxi, Leonor walked for 20 minutes to the building where she lived and walked up the three flights of stairs that led to her home. She began to feel sharp pains in her bowel. She moved from the toilet to the shower and let the hot water fall over her body. Leonor had another two brothers living in distant cities. While she tried to take a hot shower, they called her nonstop for news of their mother. In the interval between one phone call and the next, Leonor received messages on her mobile accusing her of deliberately not wanting to answer. Leonor narrated to me that when answering the call from her older brother, she said the following to him:

> Have you no humanity? I spent the whole night on my feet and I'm 60 years old. I spent day and night with back pain and breaking my neck. Do you know what it is like to sleep breaking your neck? I just want to have a shower in peace, can't I even do that? I deserve to stand under a shower.

After venting her frustration, Leonor and her brother talked and she went to lie down, but the cramp in her legs kept her awake. Just as she was falling asleep finally, her youngest son, Vitor, arrived from work selling drugs,

switched on the light of the one-room home and made something to eat. *Annoyed with the 'big light' blinding her*, Leonor asked her son if he *felt no pity for his mother*, given she had spent *two days on her feet in hospital*. But he remained silent, finished making his meal and then switched off the light. To conclude her story of what had happened, Leonor told me *she knew* her son *did not pity* her, *he had no humanity either*. She added that this *lack of humanity* was like a *bomb placed inside* her *body that would detonate and explode inside her*. Leonor concluded by saying that it was *impossible* for her siblings and child to have *humanity* because her *genealogical tree* was *terrible and horrible*. Although she strove to change this family *lineage*, she *could not keep harbouring the illusion that apples can grow from banana trees*.

INTRODUCTION[2]

At an initial level, the critical moment (Han, 2012) lived by Leonor appears to encompass the caring relations that the daughter dedicates to her old and sick mother (Woodward, 2012); the rendering invisible and silencing of the endeavours made by women to ensure life continues (Blanc, Laugier & Molinier, 2020, Laugier, 2015); the accusations of abandonment by other family members (Fernandes, 2017, Biehl, 2005); or the difficulties of providing care amid precarious living conditions (Fonseca & Fietz, 2018, Han, 2015a, 2015b). Exploring these questions entails confronting the social, economic and political problems repeatedly found in the everyday lives of thousands of women in Brazil and elsewhere. The fact is that the words enunciated by Leonor meant her "life [was] taken as a whole" (Das, 2018). Although these words are elusive in nature, we shall see how her life history is embedded in this moment. I am aware that the issue of care is present in the situation being described. However, I shall bypass this question to concentrate on the "kinship genealogies" elaborated by Leonor and on the "betrayals" that meant "inhumanity" was inscribed in members of her family.

In her book *Life and words: violence and the descent into the ordinary*, Veena Das (2007: 10) writes that the "relationships betrayed made up the aesthetic of kinship." I set out from this observation to examine the histories of family betrayals entangled in Leonor's daily life and that form the textures of her relationship to the world. Put otherwise, I describe how the pain of a son's death, sibling conflicts and forms of remaking the self so as to reinhabit and renarrate events are embedded in existing relationships and go beyond family relations.[3] Following the path trailed by Das, I propose to think about family betrayals, sibling conflicts and the death of a son not as spectacular events but as threads in the weave of life. These betrayals enter the everyday as never-forgotten experiences and become expressed in the most ordinary situations. I argue that the death of Leonor's son inhabits the family relationships and is infused in her everyday ethical choices (Das, 2007, 2012, 2018, 2020).

By evoking her genealogical tree, Leonor transformed a difficult situation into a critical moment (Han, 2012). How does something convert into a crisis? How are certain events carried forwards and backwards in time? In dialogue with Veena Das's analyses of events during the Partition of India (1947) and how they invaded the present of her interlocutors, I suggest that the betrayals entangled in the moment described above are not limited to one specific happening. On the contrary, it is the accumulation of large and small disappointments experienced over the years that slowly constitute an "atmosphere that cannot be expelled to an 'outside'" (Das, 2007: 62). It comprises a feeling, a "poisoned knowledge," which means that certain events are never over and may re-emerge suddenly. Through the movement of bringing her genealogical tree into the present, Leonor shows us the multiple durations folded into the now (Das, 2020: 5) and inscribes this situation in a temporality that exceeds the time of a human life (Han, 2015a).

In her works, Veena Das (2020: 10) invites us to descend into the ordinary "with what words we have in hand." She teaches us the value of words but also the value of the silences woven into events. By accepting the challenge of interweaving words and silences, I propose to pursue the connections made by Leonor in which living and dead members from different generations of her family, spirits and religious entities are all embedded in the critical moment that opens the text. As we shall see, Leonor elaborates distinct kinship genealogies and shows us how these genealogies give meaning to her life processes. As Janet Carsten (2014) has demonstrated, we need to view kinship beyond merely its synchronic dimension. Michael Lambek (2011), meanwhile, reinforced the importance of us comprehending the relation between siblings in our explorations of kinship. For both authors, the temporalities of family relations matter to our analyses of relations between kin. Accompanying kinship genealogies not as something static but as actively elaborated by Leonor helps us reveal the fragility of family agreements and the slippages that make certain moments difficult to bear (Das & Leonard, 2007).

Time here is not analysed as an abstraction but as concretely lived by Leonor. The text also approaches time as a quality in doing anthropology. Veena Das teaches us to trust in the "work of time" as an ethnographic methodology. For the author, anthropology is a form of sharing worlds, a path to inhabit with people in an exercise of "critical patience" that involves listening attentively to what and how people choose to narrate their lives to us (Das, 2015a). The exercise of "inhabiting a life together'" (Das, 2015a: 94) allows us to become embedded in the continuous and sensitive process of reconstructing oneself and one's relations. It is precisely the act of listening to words and silences that leads us to descend to the ordinary in order to comprehend how devastating events occupy the everyday. With Veena Das I learnt that ethnography is precisely about capturing the moments when changes in humour reveal the tex-

tures of daily life and the trust that small events can transform into great horrors (Das & Pathak, 2018).

In this text I establish a dialogue with the thought of Veena Das, especially with her discussions of betrayals, sibling conflict and family deaths. I have also chosen to invoke authors with whom Das dialogues or the reverse, authors who dialogue with her on the themes proposed here. In the process of reading Veena Das's work to write this article, I gradually incorporated her way of seeing the world, such that Das's vocabulary became constitutive of my own thoughts and writing. This does not signify a passive appropriation of Das's concepts. As she herself teaches us, anthropology is not a community for sharing concepts that, very often, may blind us to what is before our eyes. Rather, anthropology is a profound engagement in everyday life, in forms of being together with others and in the work of making the ordinary appear (Das, 2020).

During fieldwork, my day-to-day life slowly became infused by Leonor's life and by Das's words. Before proceeding further, I shall let the reader savour the beauty of the words chosen by Mariana Ferreira (2015: 163) to present her understanding of the word embed (or *embeber* in free translation into Portuguese) in Veena Das's work.

> *embeber* (to embed/infuse) involves a gradual aspect of absorption through the pores and is interesting since it encompasses both a passive dimension of 'being embedded,' which respects the question of attention, as a form of submission, as a reflexive character of 'becoming embedded/infused,' and an active dimension of embedding/infusing, that is, make a liquid penetrate and become absorbed by another material. It is delicate, but also precise and incisive, because another of the meanings is 'to introduce (oneself) by opening; embed (oneself), bury (oneself).' So, it appears to involve two aspects: the decision to introduce oneself, penetrate, and subsequently the decision to remain there, to allow oneself to be affected by that atmosphere. Here, then, we can connect the idea to Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin's definition of testimony as 'that which doesn't go away.' Embedded/infused, you can no longer leave because you have been constituted by this experience and cannot detach yourself from it.

GENEALOGY OF DISTRUST

It was in 2013 when Leonor and I took our first steps towards the friendship that we still maintain today. The path passed through terrains that I had never imagined walking. We had already exchanged some words in previous years. But Leonor saw me as someone to distrust and I had no idea of the potency of this gesture.

I began to frequent the popular housing occupation where Leonor lives in 2010. At the time, I worked as Patrícia Birman's research assistant and was following the paths trailed by Adriana Fernandes. Recently arrived in the city of Rio de Janeiro, I learnt from them how to walk through the streets of Central do Brasil and take in the wealth of life that exists in the historically working-

class district. Through them, I met some of the people who lived in the region's housing occupations and little-by-little I entered the network of relations as a supporter of the popular housing movements. It took me some time to realize that my connection to people classified as "activists" generated distrust and delimited my position. My middle-class university background amplified the suspicions that the residents of the occupation felt in relation to me, stemming from previous experiences with other "activists" like "me" (see Fernandes, 2020). But a local critical event (Das, 1995) changed the courses of this history.

In 2013, the occupation where Leonor lived had just recently obtained official regularization of the property after nine years of hard campaigning. But in May of the same year, the building was invaded by members of the drug faction dominant in the region. The possibility of reliving experiences of submissions and humiliations, and the anticipation of living under the daily threat of death, brought together those whose relations had been eroded by the tough battle involved in maintaining everyday life in a popular occupation (see Birman & Pierobon, 2021; Pierobon, 2021, 2018; Fernandes, 2020; Birman, Fernandes & Pierobon, 2014).

Leonor's home was one of the places where residents and activists would meet to devise strategies to remove the drug traffickers from the locality. As she narrated to me, it was the first time that she had opened her home to so many unknown people. After the first meeting was over, I accepted her invitation for a coffee and remained there. In a far from warm conversation, Leonor told me the following:

> I don't trust anyone; I was born suspicious. But also shit happened in my home. My father went after my older sister and said that I would be the next. At that time, I slept with a knife under my pillow. Later, my older sister had an affair with my husband while I was pregnant with my first child. I didn't like him but doing that to me was nasty. I was 17 years old and still had girlish dreams. My brother beat my mother. He also ordered my oldest son to be killed after he received notice of the police report I had filed against him. My son was 24 years old when he fell from the rocks at Arpoador [on the Rio coastline]. He left behind two children. I found his body twenty days later there in Niterói, his head was full of shrimps. I learnt to distrust inside my home, which is why I don't trust anyone. The place that was supposed to protect me was where I was most harmed. You can try, Camila, but I'll always expect you to deceive me.

Leonor's words froze me and left me unable to respond. If her own family was the place where she *had been most harmed*, how could I, a young woman of 30 at the time, be able to assure her a relation based on trust? How could someone from a family that protected its children from conflicts between kin absorb those words? At that moment, I turned to the teachings of Veena Das (2007: 39) when she says: "I cannot claim to know the pain of the other." Even though Leonor had shown me why she harboured such distrust, this does not mean that I could comprehend her. Sat in a chair in Leonor's home, I experi-

enced the feeling of being lost in the anthropological experience (Das, 2020: 30). I fell silent and thought about how to leave her home. And that is what I did. But Leonor's words bothered me and something drove me to confront this universe. Indeed, I did not know what awaited me. "If I come to doubt such things as my relations to my parents, the fidelity of our love, or the loyalty of my children, these are doubts that put my world in jeopardy" (Das, 2007: 4).

A world in jeopardy! Leonor's remarks bind kinship to the series of family betrayals that occurred at different moments of her life. As Veena Das teaches us, certain experiences of pain are never over and can suddenly invade the present. We are not dealing here with a specific event, but with the accumulation, repetition and overlapping of events that occurred in different phases of her life. Childhood, adolescence and adult life, the multiple durations of the past are entangled with the present situation. Her father's threats, her sister's disloyalty, her brother's violence and her mother's complicity do not convey the feeling of being past – on the contrary, they form the very textures of her relation to the world. Hurt, pain and disappointment accumulated, overlapped and remained in everyday life bound to her sense of kinship. But Leonor's words do not refer to the past only; they also project the future of a friendship that was beginning. The family betrayals functioned as an armour for her to relate to the unknown in which she expects deception and disappointment.

As the years passed, I understood that Leonor's words were the public face of the fractures in her family relations, something that she enunciated, even to someone she distrusted. A "grief was objectified in the form of a portrait" (Das, 2007: 49), a wound exposed to show too her strength. Words that, even when frozen, still retain the poison of the relations betrayed and the potency of the painful reconstruction of the self. The logic of family betrayals penetrates Leonor's thought and forges her ethical relation to the world. Leonor's kinship genealogy is in the textures of the forms with which she presents herself to others and weaves herself among the possibilities of inhabiting life. As Veena Das demonstrates, families are not merely an institution of surveillance and regulation, nor do they operate only in the key of ambivalence. Family is the place where the world can be corroded (Das, 2018).

In the same year, 2013, another important change occurred in Leonor's life: she fetched her mother to live with her. I had been frequenting Leonor's house for six months and I accompanied this process first-hand. Dona Carmen arrived anaemic with nits and lice and a lot of back pain. Leonor accused her brother of mistreating her mother, including physical assaults. With dona Carmen's arrival in her home, Leonor began to dedicate her own life to prolonging her mother's, but this is another conversation (see Pierobon, forthcoming). At that moment, the first steps to inhabiting life with Leonor had been taken and I began to enter the painful terrain of family betrayals and the multiple emotions implicated in these events. With Leonor and Das I comprehended that

devastation is not something that comes from outside but occurs with the people close to us with whom we inhabit the world. We can note that these betrayals did not lead to a rupture with the family members concerned. There is a continuity and sustaining of relations, even with those who hurt Leonor. Thus, the memories of family betrayals can be read as a testimony to the instability of kinship (Das & Leonard, 2007) and also its assiduity.

> What is the relation between the elaborate managing and staging of narratives that speak of violence, betrayal, and distrust within the networks of kinship and the thick curtain of silence pointing to an absconding presence? (Das, 2007: 80)

With Veena Das's question, I turn to one of the most difficult experiences lived through by Leonor, the premature death of her oldest son, but showing how different narratives of this death were transmitted with the gradual development of intimacy. I learnt from Veena Das (2012: 134, original italics) that anthropology is a form of "cultivation of sensibilities *within* the everyday." With each story that I heard, the frozen narrative dissipated and I was able to perceive how family betrayals form the textures of Leonor's everyday life. Little-by-little, I understood that creating relations of trust in a life marked by distrust and deception made it impossible for me to leave. For Veena Das, the ethical commitment to the people with who we inhabit life is indispensable, not only for us to be able to descend to the ordinary but, especially, for us to offer a home for the other's pain.

SIBLINGS, HOMES AND DEATHS

That was how all the trouble began. Cleber, his wife Rosana and their two children were living with dona Carmen and her husband in a house in Rio de Janeiro's West Zone. In 1999, the father of Leonor and Cleber died. To take part in the mourning rituals, Leonor travelled from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro. At the wake, she had to deal with a difficult situation: the sight of her sister Laura crying next to the coffin alongside dona Moema, the woman with whom Leonor's father had made a second family. Leonor told me she did not understand how these three women could cry together over a man who had done them so much harm. At the wake, she marked her position by refusing to greet her father's *second wife* and the children of the couple whom she classified as *theirs*. When the wake was over, dona Carmen and her children went to the family's home. The 'home' was formed by a central house and two smaller houses at the back. Leonor decided not to return to São Paulo and stayed in one of these small houses. After the first few months, Leonor's children came to live with her.

Cleber, though, had other plans for the houses at the rear of the plot. As far as he was concerned, they belonged to him! Cleber began to charge Leonor rent but she refused to accept her brother's demand. In Leonor's view, the houses were the *inheritance* left by their father. Since he had four children with dona Carmen, the houses obviously belonged to all the couple's children. Thus,

if Cleber lived in one of the houses, she reasoned that she too could live there. If Cleber's children lived there without paying rent, Leonor's children could also live there without paying rent. During this conflict over the house, Glauber, Leonor's oldest son, began to confront the orders and threats issued by his uncle, defending his mother and challenging the family hierarchy. To these confrontations were added the gossip that spread through the neighbourhood, the insults, the slapping and shoving, and the threats between siblings, cousins and uncles that, as time passed, acquired more violent dimensions. Cleber knew some dangerous people in the district and the neighbours warned Leonor to watch out for her sons. After being threatened by *a police officer known to like killing minors*, Vitor, Leonor's youngest son, thought it wiser to return to live with his father in São Paulo. But there was one last fight. In it, Cleber *beat* Leonor *until she was almost dead*. Leonor reported her brother to the police and left the house. She and her children received help from a female friend from the Baptist Church and began to *live as a favour* in this friend's home.

There was another complication. When Leonor first went to Rio de Janeiro with the children, they had needed to earn some money. With no knowledge of the city, Glauber followed in his uncle's footsteps and began to sell food on Ipanema beach, savoury snacks and sandwiches that Leonor made in her home in the West Zone. As time passed, the dispute over the sales patch deepened the family conflicts. One day, Glauber left early for work but the person who arrived at night in Leonor's home was her sister-in-law Rosana. As soon as she saw her, Leonor *felt* that something *bad* had happened to her son. Leonor told me that she immediately began crying and shouting at Rosana, saying: *what have you done to my son?* Leonor's bad feeling attributed responsibility to her sister-in-law and brother for Glauber's fall from the rocks of Arpoador into the sea. When narrating her son's death to me, just when we were beginning to develop a relation of trust, Leonor used the word "fall", but she always left in the air the possibility that her sister-in-law or brother had pushed him.

Glauber disappeared into the sea. His decomposing body was found on a beach of the neighbouring city, Niterói, 20 days later and was identified by his mother. How could Leonor live in the same place after Glauber's death? How could Leonor live with relatives who she suspected of killing her oldest son? Here we are faced with a conflictual relationship between siblings recognized as co-heirs (Das, 2007: 67).[4] As Lambek (2011) remarks, the relation between siblings is central to our understanding of kinship. Here, the conflicts between siblings become inscribed in the shadow of two deaths and the inheritance of a house. The fights over the inheritance of the house were embedded in the continuum of family betrayals and led Leonor to suspect that her brother and sister-in-law killed her son. As we know, the "house" is a central element in social life and in the configurations of kinship (Carsten, 2018; Motta, 2020).[5] The battle for the house and the sibling rivalry instigated a deadly tension between those who considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the dead father.

THE POISONS OF PREMATURE DEATH

> What it takes to allow life to be renewed, to achieve the everyday, under conditions of grinding poverty or catastrophic violence that erode the very possibility of the ordinary?
> (Das, 2012: 134)

Day after day, I made myself present in the small routines and rhythms of Leonor's daily life. For years I visited her home regularly and spoke to her almost daily by telephone. I was with her on birthdays, at restaurants, and during visits to the homes of her friends, children and "the house" where Cleber and his family lived. I accompanied Leonor on the occasions when she or her mother were admitted to hospital or went to consult health professionals. I attended assemblies in the occupation where she lived and took part with her in meetings at different public bodies to press for solutions to housing problems.

Open to the exercise of critical patience proposed by Veena Das (2015a), I turned my attention to the moments when the death of her oldest son surfaced in daily life. Waiting for and listening to the fragments of this experience in the moments when Leonor evoked it and the form in which she chose to narrate it to me – rather than me asking the direct question "what happened" and being content with a single reply – meant that this death inhabited our relationship, weaving bonds of trust. Slowly over time, I ceased being the activist, university-trained, middle-class and indeed secular outsider and became Leonor's friend and confidant. As a friend, various religious and spiritual experiences emerged and her son's death acquired other dimensions. In this movement, I argue that histories of resentment, pain and suffering have their own singular aesthetic when shared. Following the decision to stay, the option to not leave Leonor's life, I took in her histories and absorbed the depth of her pain. She narrated her son's death to me various times. On one of my visits to her home, about two years after the previous narrative, Leonor narrated the death of Glauber to me in a way quite different from the accounts I presented above. It is this renarration of her son's death that I present now.

After ensuring that Glauber was buried, Leonor told me that she entered *a state of deep depression, I spent a year depressed, I could not act or do anything*. When she eventually managed to get out of bed, the first thing Leonor did was to move from the neighbourhood where she lived to the popular occupation where I met her. "When a child dies, life's projects had to be reformulated" (Das, 2007: 73). Although the death of the child breaks apart the present, death could not collapse the future. It was necessary to "absorb the residues, the poisons of untimely deaths, in a way that they might protect future generations" (Das, 2007: 235). The hope of a possible future is central to making life habitable. Weaving a habitable everyday life for oneself and others forged an ethics, not

as a sterile or abstract vocabulary but as a concrete practice infused with this death.

The premature death of her son made Leonor recreate her relations with the living, but also with the dead, spirits and religious entities. As a believer (*crente*), a frequenter of the Baptist Church, Leonor saw here living children take the *wrong paths* and *run risks*. To protect Silvio, Vitor and her only daughter, Layla, Leonor ceased frequenting the Baptist Church and began to visit Umbanda and Candomblé temples (*terreiros*). The entities Maria Mulamba and Cigana, who had protected Leonor at other moments of her life, came back to visit her home and work to protect her children (see Pierobon, 2018). Seeking protection, Leonor believed that Glauber died because of her *blindness* to the *trabalhos espirituais* (literally "spiritual works" that were being targeted against her, assuming responsibility for this death too. Here I invite the reader to consider a question evoked by Veena Das: "how is bad death to be represented?" (Das, 2007: 51).

At one of the Umbanda temples that Leonor visited to *undo the spiritual works* targeted at her, the entity Exu Caveira told her that *someone* had offered a banquet for him to *take* her son. Refusing to accept what she had just heard, Leonor wanted to know who specifically had performed the *works* to kill Glauber. In response to Leonor's questioning, Exu Caveira said that the betrayal had been by her brother. Leonor told me that she was initially sceptical of Exu Caveira's narrative, though this did not stop this story from inhabiting her thoughts. On another trip to the *terreiro*, Leonor talked with another entity, Zé Pelintra, who categorically affirmed that Cleber had offered a banquet for Exu Caveira to take Glauber. But Leonor was unconvinced and insisting on confirming the veracity of these words. So, she consulted the shells with a *mãe de santo* and they confirmed what Exu and Zé Pelintra had told her.

At one point, Leonor wanted to return to the house where Cleber and dona Carmen lived, partly to fetch the belongings left behind after their sudden move, but also to survey what had happened since. Layla accompanied her. To avoid any conflict with Cleber, Leonor and Layla decided to reach the small houses at the rear of the plot via a side alley. To Leonor's surprise, her brother was washing clothes in the yard and singing: *'Iêra, Iêra, salve o Exu Caveira, salve a mosca varejeira*,' ['Iêra, Iêra, save Exu Caveira, save the botfly.'] Leonor told me that when she heard her brother singing to Exu, she doubted her own senses, thinking that they may have been just *things in her head*. But when Layla replied to her mother's questions saying that she too had heard her uncle singing, Leonor realized that the person responsible for her son's death really was her brother: *it was confirmed!*

During the years that I frequented Leonor's house, Cleber was an ever-present figure, whether on the occasions when he visited his mother, dona Carmen, or when he took some money for her upkeep, or as the spectre of

someone who should have been helping take care of his mother but vanished whenever the situation became difficult. In one of the conversations, I asked Leonor whether she had asked her brother about the spiritual works that had taken Glauber. Her answer was *no!* She had never spoken to Cleber or any other relative about the matter. For Leonor, this conversation was unnecessary, not just because the *santos* (religious entities) were not tricking her, but because such betrayals were a hallmark of her family and were within the realms of the possible. Her father had maintained sexual relations with her older sister, which produced a child; this same sister had relations with Leonor's husband precisely when she was pregnant with Glauber; Cleber used to beat dona Carmen and the son had pointed a gun at his mother. It is within this continuum of betrayals by family members and so many others that the death of her son is embedded. We are presented here by a context that absorbs and exceeds the conflicts over inheritance of the house and leads Leonor to accuse her brother of having *ordered the killing* of her son. Although the accusation of her son's killing cannot be enunciated and shared directly with the family, it inhabits Leonor's relationships to her mother, siblings, nephews, nieces and children, as well as the friendship that she established with me.

> But I do know the difference in the aesthetics of kinship in this kind of world between trusting your words to the care of the concrete others with whom you have shared *this* kind of past, *this* kind of laughter, *these* kinds of tears, and releasing it to a public that might mutilate your words by treating them as if they were just like other objects in the world (Das, 2018: 544, original italics).

In evoking this passage from Veena Das, I wish to reflect on the importance of comprehending Leonor's aesthetic choices when narrating her son's death to me during different moments of our friendship. After reading the narrations on Glauber's premature death, I propose that we avoid analysing them as different versions of the same story that, combined, could reach a cohesive and true final version. Drawing support from Das's works, I argue that the work of memory is a continuous process embedded in the intimacy of relations. Confiding to the other words laden with pain depends on a gradual process of trusting this other with whom laughter and tears accumulated. In turning to her childhood memories to understand how the Korean War infiltrates the everyday life and intimacy of family relations, Clara Han (2021) tells us that there is no coherent history to fix and organize the meaning of the experience of the war within her family. Like the author, I believe that memories are always "revived, recast in their retelling, their tone and intensity shifting in the flux of our lives" (Han, 2021: 61). Here I understand the importance of the work of time as making ethnography too.

GOOD DEATH, BAD DEATH: A HOME FOR THE DEAD SON

Michael Lambek (2018: 87-88) tells us that the death of someone close to us is not a condition but an event. It is not simply the end of a life but an occurrence that marks the life of others. When death occurs, it permeates the course of life, leaving a before and an after, opening a crack in the established social relations that will be more or less well repaired. What happens to the living after the experience of death? How does death repercuss in family relations? These are questions that guided Lambek's work among a community of Kibushy (Malgaxe) speakers on the island of Mayotte in the west of the Indian Ocean. In his text, the author discusses kinship through a comparison of the informal narratives of the family of the dead person and the narratives performed in a funeral ceremony that took place soon after the death. Lambek's reflections allowed me to think about the work of memory and the renarration of the death of the father and Leonor's son. If death is an event that marks the life of others, here it is important to compare how the death and mourning of the father and the son are inscribed in Leonor's own life and in the relations that she establishes with members of her family.

Veena Das (2007: 51) tells us that one of the functions of public mourning rituals is to absolve the living of responsibility for the death that occurred. While searching in my notes for the narratives of the deaths of Leonor's father and the son, I realized that she had never shared the mourning rituals for Glauber with me. In the almost ten years of our relationship, I never learned who was at the wake or what the burial of her son was like. I had never wanted to ask. The aesthetic chosen by Leonor to share Glauber's death with me was the pain of searching for him for 20 days and finding his body in a state of decomposition *with his head full of shrimps*. Very different from the way in which she lives the death of her father: the narration of the latter's wake continues to set things in place, including Leonor's dignity in refusing to greet the woman with whom her father raised a second family. I do not know the circumstances surrounding the death of Leonor's father. It is unnecessary. What Leonor's words tell me is that her father's death was over with the mourning rituals while her son's death remains unfinished. The death of the elderly father is experienced as part of the course of life while the death of the young son is lived as a rupture, the singularity of a life abruptly extinguished.

In *Life and words*, Veena Das reflects on the social differences of the experience of living a good death or a bad death through the control of the mourning laments of men and women. In dialogue with Das's reflections, I turn to focus now on the meanings of the premature death of Leonor's firstborn. I think that the meanings of the good and bad death are present in Leonor's narrations of the loss of her son Glauber. The first time I entered her home, Glauber's death was hurled like a piece of shrapnel that immobilized me, an attack and a defence directed at someone she did not know. When she narrated to me how

Glauber "fell" into the sea, she showed me this death as a "good death": public, shouted, lamented, wept over and shared, even with those who she silently accuses of being responsible for it. At the same time, she lives this death as a 'bad death,' embedded in the certainty of family betrayal, deeply infused in her own subjectivity, not publicly shared but present in the silences and intimacy of relations. Here it is the ritual and public dimension that distinguishes the good death from the bad death. And what maintains death as bad is the absence of support from kin (Das, 2007: 51). Public and private deaths are distinct forms of acting out the same event. But Leonor's condition is even more sensitive; she inhabits the zone that exists between these two deaths and the transition between them does not occur in simple form.

> When death is seen as caused by the wilful actions of others, then a great tension prevails as to what definition of the situation will come to prevail through the control of mourning laments (Das, 2007: 51-52).

The ethnographic exercise on which I embarked entails understanding how Glauber's death inhabits the everyday life of Leonor, how it is inscribed in the continuum of the family betrayals, and how it raises these betrayals to a lethal degree. If the death of the son has an unfinished quality, what makes this death persist in the textures of life? It seems to me that the slippages between the good death and the bad death, between accidental and intentional death, between the possibility of being and not being, between doubt and certainty, are what embeds this death in everyday life. Inhabiting the zone between two deaths ensured the singularity of Glauber's life while it also allowed Leonor to reconstruct ties of kinship. Leonor's silence and the management of her words is what simultaneously maintains and corrodes family relations. Doubt and control of the mourning laments mean that the death of Glauber is not over and continues to act in the present. Thus, inhabiting the zone between two deaths assured the reconstruction of life, ensured the passage of her son from this life to another plane, and maintained the event alive in the day-to-day. Living in the incessant slippage between a good and bad death made it possible for Leonor to reinhabit the world, even if the weaving is made from corroded threads.

The death of her firstborn shattered Leonor's life as she had conceived it until that moment, making the present unbearable and impossible to carry on living within. Leonor was unable to go back to inhabiting the same space. She left her home, the neighbourhood where she lived, for the occupation where I first met here. She was also unable to go back to inhabiting herself. A process of religious conversion was needed that reconstructed the relations between the living and the dead. More than the mother-son dyad, the death of Leonor's son has implications that refer to past and present generations of her family, but also to spirits and religious entities. The others who constitute this experi-

ence are multiple. And these many others inhabit Leonor's present. A fragile and tricky movement of self-recreation is involved, attaining a fine balance between agency and patience in the work of reconstruction. The death of Leonor's son defines the affective quality of the present tense. It is the incessant work of domestication, silencing and renarration which entails that death inhabits Leonor's day-to-day life. I understand the narration and renarration not as the repetition of the same (hi)story but as a form of recounting her life to be able to reconstruct it again. Leonor's experience shows us how the death of the other can be absolutely our own (Das, 2015b).

LIFE TAKEN AS A WHOLE: FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I ask the reader to return with me to the critical moment that opens the text. Leonor returned to the hospital early the next morning to replace Cleber and stay with dona Carmen. On encountering his sister, Cleber told her that he thought it unnecessary for someone to stay with their mother during the night. Leonor asked him whether dona Carmen had become uncovered while she slept. He said yes. She argued that if their mother had pneumonia, if the hospital ward was chilly, if she became uncovered at night and if there were not enough nurses for everyone, then it was obvious that dona Carmen would need someone to care for her. Despite his sister's response, Cleber announced that he would not go back to the hospital. From the hospital I received another phone call from Leonor and promptly offered to substitute her in the afternoon, taking care of dona Carmen, so she could rest. Other female friends of hers also offered the same help. In this way Leonor organised another two days care in the ward until her mother was transferred to a room with a chair. In this room, Leonor could take a mattress, which she did. Although the conditions were far from ideal, at least she could lie down (see Pierobon, 2018).

The histories of suffering, pain and resentment that make the textures of Leonor's relations are many, but superficially they are marked by civility, the adherence to the rhythms and routines of everyday life (Das, 2015a). Although Leonor had asked for her siblings or children, she did not tell any to them that they lacked humanity. On the contrary, she embodied humanity by summoning all her strength to cope with the situation, care for her mother, and not revive the conflict between kin that hurts her and wears her out. Instigating an open conflict between the family members would revive the memories of those relations that I presented above and many others. It is in this sense that Leonor's words contain "life taken as a whole" (Das, 2018). Multiple temporalities compose the present moment. And in the latter are embedded all kinds of family betrayals, among which the death of her son Glauber is inserted as the most painful of all for her. Not by chance, the aesthetic used by Leonor to express her pain is the image of a *bomb* that *detonates and explodes*, not to make a spectacular show to the outside, but rather an impact on the *inside*, in a silent and

very often solitary form. There is an ethics in the choice of words, gestures and what remains silent that shows us the force of the remaking of Leonor's life, but also the harshness of the place that women occupy in family relations.

What volatilities, doubts and uncertainties are located just below the surface of habit? "If everyday life cannot show itself directly, how do we come to grips with it?" (Das, 2018: 538). Throughout her work, Veena Das has reflected on what the everyday is and what it means to capture it. In Das's view, the quotidian is not a mere repetition of automatized habits. Everyday life is elusive, vague, imprecise and difficult to conceptualize. Ethnography, then, consists of capturing the moments that allow us to see the force that daily life carries. Not in abstract terms! As Veena Das (2020) tells us, the notion of the ordinary is difficult because many narratives focus on what disturbs life and on the major conflicts that revolve around it. The question here is that these big events are present in the most ordinary objects and events. Looking at the apparently simple moments of daily life, but which just under the surface convey devastating events, shows us the force of small happenings and how tiny gestures can contain life as a whole.

> But if everyday life has the texture of this uncertainty, that inflects not only our relation to the world but to self-knowledge, how does anthropology create its concepts and how do our modes of living with others affect the way we render our experiences in our fieldwork knowable? (Das, 2018: 547)

I invoke this question posed by Veena Das not so that I can solve it, since that is beyond me, but instead for us to reflect on the ethical and aesthetic choices people make to render their lives known. And also, for the ethics and aesthetics that we choose by presenting such pain to a broader public. I have sought to choose words that make it impossible for this public, which means you, the reader of this text, to mutilate Leonor's words and treat them as any other object in the world. What I have attempted to do is establish a communication between Leonor and Veena Das, between me and you, the reader, in order to share experiences that I heard and read – not just to relate and describe them, but so that we can effectively apprehend and feel with people and with their pain. What I have wanted to do in this text is locate the meanings of an event in terms of its inscription in the everyday world and the conditions of friendship through which it was possible to speak and listen.

I conclude my reflections with a conversation I had by telephone with Leonor while I was completing this text in April 2021. Leonor was moving to a new apartment and unable to get rid of some sacks full of cloth offcuts. In the conversation, I suggested she take advantage of the move to throw away anything she had not used for more than a year. Leonor replied that she was unable to do so. She told me that after Glauber died, she turned into a *hoarder*, not of objects like fridges or pans, but of sacks and sacks of scraps that would

never have any use. She also narrated to me that she tries but is unable to let go of the thousands of bits of cloth cuttings and that these insignificant scraps connect her to her son Glauber. It was the first time that I heard this narrative in the almost ten years of our relationship.

I hope, with the words chosen for this text, to have arrived at a certain picture of "what it is to think of textures of life and the disorders of kinship and intimacy" (Das, 2018: 547). What makes life difficult to bear is not the event lived exactly in the moment in which it occurs, but the past relations that the event evokes. The present becomes much more complicated when we comprehend how past forces are at work within it. I conclude the text with Veena Das (2018: 548, original italics) when she says "finding a *cure* for being on earth is not the issue, perhaps enduring this condition is".

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NOTES

1 Inspired by Veena Das's discussion of the everyday and by apparently small moments that nonetheless disrupt the life of families, in her book Clara Han (2012) develops diverse critical moments that her interlocutors need to confront in day-to-day life. Dialoguing with the idea of critical events developed by Das (1995), Han analyses difficult situations involving family members, neighbours and friends, altering the scale of the events important to study. Her choice of 'critical moments' shows us the force of the miniscule, of what is almost imperceptible, but which may be devastating. For the present text, I have chosen some critical moments lived by Leonor and show how they can contain "life taken as a whole" (Das, 2018).

2 I have no words to thank the invitation made by Adriana Vianna and Letícia Ferreira to contribute to this dossier. The joy of being able to celebrate the work of Veena Das, today my main theoretical-methodological reference point, added to the possibility of living through the pandemic in direct dialogue with them and also with Cynthia Sarti. The conversations on Das's work, the readings and criticisms that they made of the text helped me to make these pandemic years less difficult. I thank the careful reading and precise comments of Paula Lacerda and Marcella Araujo, fundamental to concluding the work. Finally, I thank FAPESP for the award offered, without which this text would not have been possible. Process 2018/15928-2 and 2019/25691-2.

3 Although for analytic purposes I isolate family questions from other social problems, the construction of Leonor's distrust is much more complex than presented in this text (see Pierobon, 2018).

4 For space reasons, I am unable to pursue a comparison between Leonor and Asha, so I shall simply highlight the parallel that can be drawn with Veena Das's description of the family relations and inheritance in which Asha is inserted. In moving to the house of her parents who had migrated in the Partition, the current house of her brother and his family, Asha was worried about becoming a burden for her brother's family: "But a destitute married sister who has been compelled to leave her affinal home and

make a place for herself in her brother's house comes to be an object of mistrust, especially by the brother's wife, who suspects that she may use her position as a beloved daughter to usurp a share of the brother's property" (Das 2007: 67). If we compare Asha and Leonor, we can see conceptions of material and family inheritance of the house and the place of the sister-in-law in this web in a simultaneously proximate and distinct form, which I intend to develop another time.

5 In the marvellous text by Eugenia Motta (2020), "Uma casa boa, uma casa ruim e a morte no cotidiano" (A good house, a bad house and the death of the everyday), the author reflects on how the death of the son of Maria, her interlocutor of many years, transformed the mother's perceptions of the home, configuring the meanings of a good house and a bad house. In her work of describing and accompanying Maria's pain, Motta also shows us her sensitive implication in Maria's day-to-day life to assure a "good death" to someone who, with the passing of the years, became her friend. Motta's description shows us how Maria relates the incurable disease present in her body to her son's death.

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TRAIÇÕES EM FAMÍLIA: AS TEXTURAS DO PARENTESCO

Resumo

Em diálogo com os trabalhos de Veena Das sobre parentesco, traições e morte em família, descrevo nesse texto as histórias de traições por familiares de Leonor, a inscrição dessas traições no cotidiano e nas texturas de sua relação com os parentes e comigo. Apresento como a dor da morte de um filho, os conflitos entre irmãos, bem como as formas de refazer a si mesma ao reabitar e renarrar os acontecimentos estão embebidos nos relacionamentos presentes. O texto apresenta as traições em família, o conflito entre irmãos e a morte de um filho não como eventos espetaculares, mas como fios que tecem as tramas da vida. Mostro como o trabalho do tempo é importante para a reconstrução da vida, e também para o compartilhamento de experiências de dor.

Palavras-chave

Veena Das;
parentesco;
traições;
vida cotidiana.

FAMILY BETRAYALS: THE TEXTURES OF KINSHIP

Abstract

In dialogue with Veena Das's works on kinship, family betrayals and death, in this text I describe the histories of family betrayals of Leonor, highlighting the inscription of these betrayals in everyday life and in the textures of her relationships to kin and to me. I show how the pain of the death of a son, the conflicts between siblings, as well as the forms of remaking herself by reinhabiting and renarrating the events, are embedded in the relationships of the present. The text presents the family betrayals, the conflict between siblings and the death of a son not as spectacular events but as threads in the weave of life. I show how the work of time is important to the reconstruction of life and also to the sharing of experiences of pain.

Keywords

Veena Das;
kinship;
betrayals;
everyday life.