"Cadê meu anzol?": An Interpretive Reading of Santa Rita Pescadeira in *Torto arado*

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Abstract: In the third section of *Torto arado* by Itamar Vieira Junior, an *encantada*, an Afro-Brazilian spirit being, takes over as narrator; her name is Santa Rita Pescadeira. *Torto arado* depicts the struggle of twentieth-century tenant farmers, and some critics, identifying the novel as one concerned with social justice and agrarian reform, find fault with the encantada's intervention, understanding it as a "magical" solution. I argue that the book's third section is not an escape into mysticism. *Torto arado* takes place—and here I borrow terminology from Christina Sharpe—in the enduring "wake" of the Middle Passage, in the "still unfolding aftermaths" of slavery. I approach the figure of Santa Rita Pescadeira as a powerful example of Herbert Marcuse's conceptualization of the return of the repressed.

Keywords: Itamar Vieira Junior, Jarê, Herbert Marcuse, Christina Sharpe, Afro-Brazilian literature

The third and final section of Itamar Vieira Junior's acclaimed novel *Torto arado* presents us with a surprising shift in narrative voice.[1] The novel, set on a twentieth-century plantation, Água Negra, in the interior of Bahia, in a Brazil at once modern

[1] This analysis refers throughout to the Brazilian edition of *Torto arado*, recipient of the Jabuti and Oceanos Prizes, published in 2019 by Todavia. An earlier edition of the novel was published in Portugal in 2018, when the manuscript received the Prêmio LeYa. There is also an English version of the novel: *Crooked Plow* (Verso Books, 2023), which I had the distinct honor of translating.

and anachronistic, introduces us to a community of tenant farmers who reside on the land but whose continued presence there depends entirely on the whim of the property's owner.[2] These workers plant and harvest the landowner's crops but earn no salary. They are given permission to tend their own small gardens but only if they agree to forfeit a percentage of their produce. They build their houses but are forbidden from using durable construction materials. A fundamental vulnerability—the threat of sudden homelessness—informs their daily life. Much of the novel focuses on two sisters, Bibiana and Belonísia. Intrigued by a mysterious knife tucked away in a suitcase hidden beneath their grandmother's bed, the two girls pay a terrible price for their mischievous snooping; one of them, for the rest of her life, will be left unable to speak. *Torto arado* is narrated first by Bibiana and then, in the second section, by Belonísia. In the third section of the novel, the first-person voice shifts again, and something rather astonishing happens: an *encantada*, an Afro-Brazilian spirit being, takes over the book's narration. Her name is Santa Rita Pescadeira, and she belongs to the pantheon of encantados within the belief system of Jarê.[3] The ethnographer Gabriel Banaggia describes Jarê as

> uma religião de matriz africana elaborada no Brasil. O jarê, que pode ser considerado uma espécie de candomblé de caboclos (Senna 1998:36, 74–76, 116–17), envolve festas em que praticantes cantam, dançam e em geral permitem que as entidades das quais mais se aproximam se manifestem em seus corpos. Frequentemente há repastos, rituais ou não, e, ocasionalmente, sacrifícios de animais quando em ocasiões iniciáticas. ("Canalizar" 10)[4]

[2] One example of how, in *Torto arado*, Brazilian society seems at once modern and anachronistic is that the character Salomão dreams of transforming his property into a trendy ecotourism destination—while simultaneously exploiting a community of sharecroppers.

[3] Although the word "Jarê" is not capitalized in Brazilian Portuguese, in English we generally capitalize the names of religions and sacred belief systems. The National Geographic Style Manual, for instance, capitalizes "Candomblé," even if Brazilians themselves do not.

[4] According to Banaggia's longer, book-length study, *As forças do jarê: Religião de matriz africana da Chapada Diamantina*, the Jarê practitioners of Lençóis, where Banaggia conducted his research, identify subtle differences between Jarê and Candomblé: "as principais distinções entre as práticas tinham a ver com os toques dos atabaques, as cantigas, as danças e as manifestações das entidades" (139).

My analysis of *Torto arado* focuses on Santa Rita Pescadeira, the encantada especially important to the novel. "Santa" announces her sacred aspect, while "Pescadeira" makes clear that she is associated with the local rivers and fish. One of the encantada's powers—in some sense, it is a burden—-is the reach of her memory: her mind travels back across centuries. Santa Rita Pescadeira cannot forget. My discussion of this encantada takes an approach different from that of much of the relevant literary criticism. Like other critics, I recognize that Santa Rita Pescadeira lends a magical aspect to the novel; I do not read her intervention in the story as a retreat from the historical world or as an escape into mysticism, however—but as the return of the repressed.

Shirley de Souza Gomes Carreira describes Santa Rita as having "onisciência e atemporalidade" (155). Henriete Karam and Maria Eduarda Negrão de Miranda Lopes similarly describe her as "um ser atemporal . . . uma narradora onisciente" (443). Rodrigo Soares de Cerqueira uses the same language, referring to the narration of the encantada as "atemporal e onisciente" (88), and writes that this part of *Torto arado* "nos lança para fora da História: quem assume a palavra agora, na terceira parte, é um ser sobrenatural, uma encantada" (87). Gustavo Tenório Cavalcante Silva and Gabriela Maia Rebouças portray the encantada in similar fashion: "percorre o tempo sem o peso da finitude humana" (6). I argue, however, that Santa Rita Pescadeira, as she is represented in *Torto arado,* is neither atemporal nor omniscient, attributes we would more confidently ascribe to the God of the Catholic Church. In and around Água Negra, the encantada's name is no longer invoked; her songs are no longer sung: "ninguém atinava a aprender as cantigas da encantada" (Vieira Junior 205). Her dances, too, have been forgotten: "Já não danço porque não recordam Santa Rita Pescadeira" (Vieira Junior 225). The encantada, in fact, laments her own obsolescence. She appears in a weakened condition, finding it difficult even to move: "tomada pelo estupor, fiquei completamente imóvel" (Vieira Junior 206). She returns to the looming threat in the book's final chapter: "Se esqueceram da encantada, seu nome talvez não seja mais lembrado, e a encantada vai se esquecendo de quem é, muito se aproxima a sua hora" (Vieira Junior 259). In short, Santa Rita Pescadeira fears her own end.

Not only does the encantada foresee her end; she reveals her own beginning. She explains that she is much older than the elderly Miúda, the woman who had served as her *cavalo*, the metaphoric horse that an encantado rides: "Sou muito mais antiga que os cem anos de Miúda" (Vieira Junior 203). The comparison

makes the encantada seem old, indeed, but not ageless, certainly not atemporal. Santa Rita Pescadeira does not live outside of time; she does not transcend it. Similarly, the encantada's wealth of knowledge is vast, but she is not omniscient. For instance, when Severo is murdered, Santa Rita Pescadeira notices a river of blood, but she does not know the source; she must seek it out: "segui o rastro do rio de sangue que corria, não se sabia de onde" (Vieira Junior 206). Later, the encantada describes the vehicle that transports Severo to the hospital as "uma carruagem de fogo" (Vieira Junior 207); she does not know the correct word. My analysis, however, is most interested in the encantada's relationship to time. When she speaks of the past, Santa Rita Pescadeira does not reach back beyond the 1500s. Her devotees are the enslaved and the displaced as well as their descendants—the ones who, if I might put it this way, sing the encantada into existence.

If my analysis insists that Santa Rita Pescadeira is neither atemporal nor omniscient, it does so to identify her as a figure associated with a specific historical context: the Middle Passage and its aftermaths. It is valid, of course, to assert that Santa Rita Pescadeira is a magical or supernatural figure in the text, as many critics have done, but my discussion of *Torto arado* focuses on Santa Rita Pescadeira not so much as an otherworldly figure but as a figure of our world, as a way of thinking about our historical past, specifically as it relates to the unfathomable rupture of the Middle Passage. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* provides us with the relevant and very useful concept of the wake: "our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery" (8). Sharpe's use of "wake" is a "conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery" (2). I contend that, in *Torto arado*, the spirit possession of Bibiana and Belonísia is a way of representing how two women are swept up in this wake; the violence they commit in the third section of the book cannot be fully explained by their individual personalities, for they, too, are vessels, moved by powerful historical forces that predate them.

Before I advance this argument, I should discuss Santa Rita Pescadeira's complex association with the waters of the Chapada Diamantina. As the encantada narrates, she admits that the local rivers, once teeming with life, can no longer be relied on to provide fish for the tenant farmers who bear the brunt of the periodic drought and famine. With wounded pride, the encantada admits to her increasing irrelevance:

> Os rios foram ficando sujos e rasos. Sem abastança de água para pescar já não tinham porque pedir nada a Santa Rita Pescadeira. . . . Esses peixes miúdos que restaram por aqui não matam mais a fome de ninguém. Envergonham até quem pesca. (Vieira Junior 205)

Like the Utinga and the Santo Antônio, the rivers running through the novel, Santa Rita Pescadeira herself is under threat.[5] She specifically identifies diamond mining as one of the principal reasons for this environmental catastrophe: "a mineração trouxe muita areia para o leito e afastou os peixes maiores" (Vieira Junior 224).[6] It is important to keep in mind that the modern infrastructure of waterworks has not yet reached the tenant farmers of Água Negra, even though the novel takes place, for the most part, in the latter half of the twentieth century. For instance, in one moment, Bibiana informs us: "para mim destinava o carregamento de baldes de água do poço ou do rio" (Vieira Junior 48). If the rivers are threatened, so too is the community. It is because of the deterioration and degradation of the local rivers that Santa Rita Pescadeira's stature has diminished.

However, during one of the festive rituals of Jarê, Santa Rita Pescadeira makes a sudden and surprising appearance. The community responds with incredulity, even mockery. The encantada manifests herself through her cavalo, and to the bewilderment of the onlookers, Miúda begins singing an unfamiliar song: "Santa Rita Pescadeira, cadê meu anzol? Cadê meu anzol? Que fui pescar no mar" (Vieira

[5] At several moments, the encantada speaks for the local rivers. Christopher D. Stone has argued, quite suggestively, that environmental entities—rivers, for example—should be given standing, a legal voice, even if they cannot literally "speak": "It is not inevitable, nor is it wise, that natural objects should have no rights to seek redress in their own behalf. It is no answer to say that streams and forests cannot have standing because streams and forests cannot speak. Corporations cannot speak either; nor can states, estates, infants, incompetents, municipalities or universities. Lawyers speak for them, as they customarily do for the ordinary citizen with legal problems"(17).

[6] Regarding the ongoing environmental devastation from the mining industry in Brazil, *The New York Times* (December 10, 2018) reports: "Analyzing data from six Amazon countries, researchers identified 2,312 illegal mining sites and 245 large-scale areas where miners have established sophisticated infrastructure, tearing down native forests and contaminating rivers with mercury as they dredge for gold and extract diamonds and coltan, which are used to make mobile phones." The following assessment of pollution due to mining—specifically in the Chapada Diamantina region—comes from Samadhi Gil C. Pimentel's doctoral thesis, "*O diamante é o piolho da terra": Relações socioambientais no garimpo de draga da Chapada Diamantina, Bahia*: "Os impactos que mais chamaram a atenção, de acordo, com as entrevistas foram a poluição e o assoreamento de rios, principalmente dos rios Paraguaçu, São José e Santo Antônio na borda leste da Chapada Diamantina"(194).

Junior 80).[7] There is something self-reflexive about the encantada's song, for as it operates as a prayer, it also seems to be describing the very act of prayer: to cast a hook into the sea is to make contact with another realm, a world one barely comprehends, hoping that the hook will return with blessings from the beyond, that the sea will say "yes" to you. While the song of Santa Rita Pescadeira focuses on the image of the hook, her dance alludes to a different fishing implement: the net. The encantada describes the dancing of the woman she has possessed:

> As saias de Miúda giravam na casa do curador. Os braços de Miúda se agitavam como a correnteza do rio da alma. Ela lançava uma rede para apanhar as desgraças das vidas dos presentes e levar para o fundo das águas. Nessas horas, éramos uma só. Sentia o conforto de estar abrigada num corpo de mulher forte. Também era mulher-peixe. Era uma mulher-peixe dentro de outra mulher-peixe. (Vieira Junior 225)

Not only does the passage describe the rhythmic movements of the dance, it also reveals the healing aspect of this ritual, its therapeutic—some might say "spiritual"—function. The poetic language of the encantada does something else, too; in this depiction of one of the Jarê ritual dances, Míuda and the encantada become one. We encounter a decidedly female version of a trinity: woman, encantada, and fish. The text undermines the border between bodies; between self and landscape; between fish and flesh. In these moments of spirit possession, *Torto arado* suggests that one's thinking is not entirely one's own. Banaggia's *As forças do jarê* offers this fascinating description of *incorporação*:

> Quando incorpora entidades, quem frequenta jarês passa por uma transformação sensível, comumente acompanhada por uma alteração de postura, semblante e tom de voz—por vezes acompanhada por uma outra dicção. Caso falem sobre seus aparelhos, enquanto incorporados, os caboclos se dirigem a eles

[7] An encantada/o, while manifesting her/himself during one of the *festas* of Jarê, might be, simultaneously, the addressee of the *cantiga* as well as the one singing. Banaggia clarifies: "Quando uma entidade se encontra incorporada, é comum que ela própria puxe suas cantigas antes de começar a dançar" (204). Two recordings of Santa Rita Pescadeira's cantiga, with slight variations in the words, can be found at: http://www.cantigasdojare.com.br/cantiga-aldeia-dagua.html.

> usando a terceira pessoa, já que não estão falando de si mesmos. (271)

Torto arado, in its representation of Jarê rituals, encourages us to consider, in a more general sense, the degree to which the mind escapes one's full understanding and, more to the point, one's control. Míuda's individual memory becomes occupied by an ancient memory, one that is part of her story but not necessarily her recollection. Walter Benjamin has written that "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (197). In the aforementioned description of Miúda's dance, which is also the encantada's dance, the metaphor of "o rio da alma" not only describes the rippling movements of Miúda's arms as she dances but also, rather cunningly, encourages us to imagine individual identity as a river of shifting margins—a river, we might imagine, that spills into other bodies of water. Where, exactly, does a river end and the sea begin?

My interpretive analysis of the figure of Santa Rita Pescadeira is interested in an incongruous but intriguing aspect of her song: although these *festas* of Jarê take place deep in the interior of Bahia, the setting that is described in the encantada's song is the distant ocean. The incongruity is revealing; it reinforces our understanding of Santa Rita Pescadeira as the voice of displacement. She might inhabit the riverbanks of the Chapada Diamantina, but Santa Rita Pescadeira is a sign of the still-remembered sea. Her song clarifies her own powerful connection to the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy's heuristic term for "the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering" (3). In one particular passage, when the encantada takes over as narrator, she alludes to an ongoing history of forced removals and wanderings:

> Sou uma velha encantada, muito antiga, que acompanhou esse povo desde sua chegada das Minas, do Recôncavo, da África. Talvez tenham esquecido Santa Rita Pescadeira, mas a minha memória não permite esquecer o que sofri com muita gente, fugindo de disputas de terra, da violência de homens armados, da seca. Atravessei o tempo como se caminhasse sobre as águas de um rio bravo. (Vieira Junior 212)

The Middle Passage might be the most traumatic but, as we see above, it is not the only experience of displacement to which the text refers. Bibiana and Belonísia are inheritors of this long history of displacement, and a number of accounts of exile and kidnappings are woven throughout the book. The encantada describes her own travels as though she were one more exile. She has followed her devotees across far-flung geographies, but she has traveled, too, across centuries: "Atravessei o tempo." Santa Rita Pescadeira's intervention in the story—taking possession of the two sisters at the end of the novel—represents the refusal of historical trauma to be relegated to the past. The community, however, suspects that the encantada is not real; she is met with pitying smiles when she takes possession of Miúda: "Alguns pareciam estar perplexos. . . . Outros sorriam, talvez incrédulos, achando que a velha Miúda havia enlouquecido" (Vieira Junior 80). If my point above is convincing, that Santa Rita Pescadeira is the living memory of the Middle Passage and its aftermaths, let us move forward with this line of thinking: the fact that the descendants of enslaved peoples and of the enslavers do not remember her (Santa Rita) or it (the Middle Passage) sets the stage for the violent return of the repressed.

Like the sisters at the heart of the novel, the new owner of the plantation, Salomão, is not aware of Santa Rita Pescadeira's involvement. Even if he sees death approaching, he sees only the hand of Belonísia raised above his head. He is not capable of seeing what the book is asking us, the readers, to see: that time has caught up to Salomão, a time that is beyond his understanding. Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" is a way of thinking about a novel's representation of time, a time that "takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (84). We might approach Santa Rita Pescadeira's *incorporação*—manifesting herself by taking possession of a body—as a kind of chronotope, as the past expressing itself, physically and forcefully, in the present. Santa Rita Pescadeira is an Afro-Brazilian spirit being, yes—but it is wrong to assume that the encantada resides in some heavenly realm; encantados are intimately connected to our earthly landscapes. They might inhabit the crossroads or a nearby forest or riverbank; some spirits enjoy getting tipsy on cachaça. Santa Rita Pescadeira herself tells us: "vago pela terra" (Vieira Junior 205). When she moves through Bibiana and Belonísia, her far-reaching memory is, in that moment, to borrow from Bakhtin, "taking on flesh," and the historical trauma at the foundation of Brazilian society returns in a bloody reckoning.

In Freudian terms, Santa Rita Pescadeira represents what has been kept at a distance, or turned away, from thought and exists on the other side of that "sharp

cleavage" between the conscious and unconscious mind ("Repression" 569). We are making use of the Freudian concept of "repression" here, but Freud approaches spirit possession as a primitive belief to be surmounted ("The 'Uncanny'" 401–2). As his discussion of the uncanny in the art of storytelling suggests, Freud would understand the third section of Itamar Vieira Junior's novel, when the encantada is given a voice, as an aesthetic error; blurring the magical with "common reality" produces, according to Freud, "a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit" ("The 'Ucanny'" 405). *Torto arado*, however, takes spirit possession for granted, precisely because it is situated within the Jarê community. Is Santa Rita Pescadeira real? Of course she is real; she is one of the book's narrators. She is as real as Bibiana or Belonísia. The novel aims to represent the practices of Jarê; why would it invite everyone to join the festa except for the encantados themselves, the guests of honor?

Herbert Marcuse's reimagining of the Freudian concept of repression inspires my analysis of the figure of Santa Rita Pescadeira:

> The *return of the repressed* makes up the tabooed and subterranean history of civilization. And the exploration of this history reveals not only the secret of the individual but also that of civilization. Freud's individual psychology is in its very essence social psychology. Repression is a historical phenomenon. (16)

In his Marxist approach to the concept of the repressed, Marcuse shifts our attention from the sick mind to the sick society, a society organized through forms of dominance. Marcuse distinguishes between classic Freudian "repression" and what Marcuse refers to as "surplus-repression," or "the restrictions necessitated by social domination" (35). For Marcuse, the return of the repressed is a means by which we might imagine a happier and more just society. In my analysis of *Torto arado*, I understand that the society itself—through its enduring forms of structural oppression—carries the trauma of the Middle Passage in its veins, and the effects continue to be felt in everyday life even if the trauma goes unremembered or unacknowledged. Santa Rita Pescadeira is the embodiment of what has been forgotten but not erased, certainly not resolved. When Santa Rita Pescadeira directly intercedes in the story, when she makes herself known during the rituals of Jarê, even when she manifests herself through shocking physical violence, she

is not acknowledged or recognized. When the repressed returns, it takes forms that are not understood.

Let us borrow a useful description of Santa Rita Pescadeira's narrative provided by Karam and Lopes: "sua narrativa conjuga passado e presente como um só tempo" (443). There is trauma at the foundation of the society, and it continues to express itself across the centuries, in the "now"—a trauma that informs Bibiana and Belonísia's daily life as disenfranchised Brazilians, but one that prefigures their existence. It is especially telling that Santa Rita Pescadeira never names the landowner, Salomão, in the book's climactic final chapter. She refers to him only as the "onça" (Vieira Junior 261) terrorizing the region. When Salomão attempts, unsuccessfully, to avoid falling into the trapping pit, he is described by the encantada as a jaguar clinging to the edge with his "garras" (Vieira Junior 261). When he hits the bottom, his "presas" (Vieira Junior 262) sink into the dirt. He tries to escape, but his neck is brutally slashed. Santa Rita Pescadeira is not confused here; she knows the difference between a man and a beast. In fact, she refers to Salomão by name throughout her narration, until she arrives at the book's concluding chapter. By not naming Salomão, by referring to him as an animal of prey, she returns him to anonymity, clarifying the deeper logic of the book.

Salomão is no longer Salomão here but the expression of a certain kind of power, one that would be familiar to an encantada who has been witness to Brazilian history across countless generations. Santa Rita Pescadeira recognizes this power, one exercised by a corrupt elite against the interests of the landless. Salomão is not uniquely villainous; he is the result of a system that makes someone like him inevitable. Such power cannot be bested on its own terms—thus the need for trickery, which we find in the image of the trapping pit. As she moves toward the conclusion of her narrative, the encantada encourages us to see the novel's characters—Bibiana, Belonísia, Salomão, even the encantada herself—not merely as individual personalities but as manifestations of power. According to Banaggia:

> Todas as entidades mobilizadas no jarê, em especial as que se incorporam no povo de santo, de determinado ponto de vista, podem ser pensadas como forças em estado concentrado, capazes de participar no cotidiano dos seres humanos, entre várias outras

> formas, por meio de manifestações em seus corpos. ("Canalizar" 15)

Spirit possession, as a concept, prepares us for understanding the individual as a vessel through which forces move—whether magical or historical. During the incorporação of Jarê spirit possession, Miúda is both herself and not herself. Toward the end of the book, we discover that the encantada has been, for a number of nights, taking possession of Bibiana; this explains Bibiana's nocturnal journeys through the woods. When Bibiana begins digging the trapping pit, the text offers this deeply disturbing bit of language:

> Bibiana havia sido levada para um dos muitos cantos de Água Negra e seu corpo guardava a voragem dos sobreviventes. A cada golpe soprava um mal que havia visto. Uma mulher que matou seu filho para que não fosse escravo. Um homem ofendido e pendurado num galho de jatobá. (Vieira Junior 260)[8]

In *Torto arado*, the horror is never spirit possession—the horror is history. The grotesque imagery above captures our attention, but, once again, the text introduces an incongruity, small but fascinating, deeply relevant to our analysis. Santa Rita Pescadeira is suggesting here that, somehow, Bibiana, a woman of the twentieth century, has witnessed atrocities that predate her. Bibiana's memory is not exactly her own, and the physical work she is doing is informed by something much larger than her own intention. On one particular occasion, in the wee hours, when the time has come for the jaguar to be destroyed, the encantada takes possession of Belonísia. It seems Belonísia is the right person for the bloody task at hand:

> Foi cavalgando seu corpo que senti que o passado nunca nos abandona. Belonísia era a fúria que havia cruzado o tempo. Era filha da gente forte que atravessou um oceano, que foi separada de

[8] We are reminded of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which an enslaved woman kills her child in order to prevent the child's enslavement. *Torto arado* echoes *Beloved* in another sense: when Beloved speaks, she remembers, in a way that seems impossible, the crowded slave ships of the Middle Passage: "I am always crouching" (Morrison 211).

> sua terra, que deixou para trás sonhos e forjou no desterro uma vida nova e iluminada. (Vieira Junior 261)

The encantada depersonalizes Bibiana and Belonísia, similar to the way in which she depersonalizes Salomão. Just as the encantada understands Salomão as an expression of power, a kind of terrorizing force not unique to one man, the encantada sees in Bibiana "a voragem dos sobreviventes." She identifies Belonísia as an ancient "fúria," one not properly belonging to Belonísia herself but expressed *through* Belonísia.

In this climactic scene in the dark woods in the interior of Bahia, far from any shoreline, the text invokes once again the still-remembered sea—because the Middle Passage is very much present in this moment, even if the characters themselves do not, or cannot, remember. If we were to choose one overarching struggle represented in this novel, it would be the struggle that Bibiana and Belonísia have inherited: the struggle against their landless condition. The Middle Passage is the unremembered origin of that homelessness. If Belonísia is "a fúria que havia cruzado o tempo," she is not necessarily aware of this because her time is not the time of the encantada. Belonísia does not know the depths of her fury because this ancestral fury is not entirely hers. An enduring, foundational injustice is the festering wound that has not healed, and, ultimately, the violence represented in the text happens not because, or not only because, Salomão deserves to die, but because Belonísia is the vehicle of a rage that prefigures her; it is a rage that could never be pacified or resolved by emancipation. It is the righteous indignation buried beneath the thousand tasks of daily life, a rage both obscured and quietly nourished by those same tasks, many of which are themselves injustices handed down from generation to generation, injustices that can no longer be faced with the gratitude we find in a figure such as Zeca Chapeú Grande, and so *Torto arado* ends in blood.

While the last chapter depicts the murder of Salomão, we should remember that it operates as a flashback. Chronologically speaking, chapter 13, not 14, is the "real" ending of the story—the return of plentiful water to the fields and riverbeds of Água Negra:

> As águas caíram generosas nas últimas semanas, recobriram todos os cantos e convidavam os moradores para cultivar suas roças com

> o que pudessem plantar. Havia peixes nas poças d'água ao longo das áreas que antes estavam secas. (Vieira Junior 254)

Torto arado ends in blood, but, in another sense, the story ends in water. The story ends, too, with the happy announcement that the tenant farmers will not be evicted; given the size of the community and its long-standing presence cultivating those fields, it is even possible that the property of Água Negra might be redistributed. This turn of events is conveyed to the reader in a rather unassuming paragraph:

> Meses depois, a notícia dos assassinatos trouxe funcionários de órgãos públicos, que ouviram moradores num processo de reintegração de posse. Aquela chegada foi celebrada com alívio. Tudo permanecia incerto, não havia prazos para a solução do problema, mas aquela movimentação indicava que a existência de Água Negra já era um fato. Não eram mais invisíveis, nem mesmo poderiam ser ignorados. (Vieira Junior 257)

While the death of Salomão might be cathartic for the reader, it is, more importantly, beneficial for the community of Água Negra; the workers are allowed to stay in their homes and continue farming, cultivating their own sustenance. Ana Emília de Lima Ferreira and Thallys Eduardo Nunes de Araújo Oliveira explain: "Embora não se apresente uma solução definitiva para o problema, que fica em aberto no romance, o próprio fato de conseguirem se pronunciar diante daquela questão e serem ouvidos por representantes do poder público aparece como vitória de um povo obrigado a conviver com o silêncio por séculos" (13). The vengeance depicted at the conclusion of *Torto arado* is described as socially transformative by Rejane Pivetta de Oliveira and Claudia Luiza Caimi: "*Torto arado* constitui-se como ficção política utópica, valendo-se de forças ancestrais afro-ameríndias como elementos de reconstrução da história passada e presente, com vistas a transformações futuras" (8). The news that the farmers will not be evicted and the return of the rain portend good things to come: "Havia um ar de recomeço naqueles dias" (Vieira Junior 255). The fact that Salomão, a murderous and corrupt figure, has been purged from the social body brings a sense of well-being to the community and, if we dare to hypothesize this, to the landscape itself. It is as though the curse over Thebes has been lifted. Violence, it would seem, is both the

poison and the cure. The throat of Salomão had to be bled in order for the cure to be realized, for the social body to be healed.

According to Marcelo Cordeiro de Mello, *Torto arado* proposes a solution to the oppression of tenant farmers, a solution that "is not found in violence, but in organizing strategies to claim rights." Although my analysis is sympathetic to this claim, it seems that violence is precisely what the conclusion of *Torto arado* offers, a violence that is not the prerogative of the state or the *senhores da terra*. Against the armed elite of modern Brazil, the female figures of *Torto arado* improvise their weapons. Michelle Márcia Cobra Torre argues, quite suggestively, that we might interpret Belonísia's severed tongue as a symbol for the larger struggle of Black Brazilians to be heard in a system that attempts relentlessly to silence them (163). The knife that Belonísia employs to cut the scrub of the *caatinga* and to gut fish from the river is the same knife that severed her tongue when she was a girl; it is the very same knife she uses to slash the neck of Salomão. We must intimate this, for the knife's presence on the final page is only revealed between the lines. In Portuguese, one refers to such a knife as an *arma branca*—an object not specifically designed as a weapon (compared to a gun, for example), but something redirected for that purpose. Even the land itself, we come to realize, can become an arma branca, turned against the masters of the fields. Santa Rita Pescadeira herself reminds us: "A terra pode ser uma armadilha" (Vieira Junior 260). We discover the truth of her assertion when Bibiana's hands open the pit, then camouflage it with dried cattails and *buriti* fibers: "Há quem jure que capatazes usaram as mesmas armadilhas de caça para capturar escravos fugidos no passado" (Vieira Junior 261–62). Santa Rita Pescadeira finds this information important enough to mention in the final sentences of her narration—because the terrifying trapping pit is another example of return. Bibiana might not recognize the pit as the nightmarish shape of abduction from generations past, but the encantada knows exactly what it is. Santa Rita Pescadeira, the living memory of the Middle Passage and its aftermaths, guides the two sisters toward violence, a violence that is socially beneficial—but, in the final chapter, who, exactly, is aware of Santa Rita Pescadeira? Only the reader. The reader is the one capable of understanding what even our heroes, Bibiana and Belonísia, cannot: they are vessels propelled by the enduring wake of the Middle Passage.

The blow to Salomão's neck is a blow to what Roberto Schwarz has described as the insidious system of the "favor" planted in colonial Brazil:

> Esquematizando, pode-se dizer que a colonização produziu, com base no monopólio da terra, três classes de população: o latifundiário, o escravo e o "homem livre", na verdade dependente. Entre os primeiros dois a relação é clara, é a multidão dos terceiros que nos interessa. Nem proprietários nem proletários, seu acesso à vida social e a seus bens depende materialmente do *favor*, indireto ou direto, de um grande. (15–16)

This system of the favor establishes a fundamental vulnerability in the daily life of a tenant farmer who, at any moment, might be evicted at the whim of the landowners. When Zeca Chapéu Grande was a young man, he heard news of a plantation called Água Negra, whose owners were looking for farmers not afraid of hard work:

> Os donos da terra eram conhecidos desde a lei de terras do Império, não havia o que contestar. Quem chegasse era forasteiro, poderia ocupar, plantar e fazer da terra sua morada. (Vieira Junior 183)

Zeca believes that he is indebted to the landowners because he accepts the original terms of their offer. His children, however, have never accepted these terms, and perhaps this frees them to imagine an alternative. The Peixoto family owned Água Negra before they eventually sold it to Salomão; regarding the Peixoto family's claim to the land, the phrase "não havia o que contestar" is rather telling. The voice here is supposed to be the anonymous voice of word-of-mouth, but we might say it "doth protest too much." It insists on the fact that the ownership of those fields is beyond question, when such a point would have been better served by not raising the issue at all. One might suspect, then, that the text here is deliberately failing, so to speak, by positing the certainty of the property's title but with the effect of actually encouraging the reader's skepticism. To accept, without question, the landowners' claim to these lands, one would have to accept wholesale the

legitimacy of monarchical rule and the legitimacy of the Lei de Terras in 1850, a law that served only the interests of the Brazilian elite.[9]

The defining struggle of this novel is the struggle for land, for a home. Edu Teruki Otsuka and Ivone Daré Rabello offer this interesting critique:

> Ainda que *Torto arado* pareça continuar a defender a perspectiva do reconhecimento legal dos direitos —sem a transformação do sistema econômico-social—, o ato bárbaro que responde à barbárie do sistema é legitimado no plano da figuração literária. . . . Para direcionar a luta rumo à emancipação efetiva, seria preciso romper com a legalidade burguesa, sempre pronta a ceder aos interesses econômicos. Mas isso não parece estar no horizonte de Itamar Vieira Júnior, para quem a solução mágica propicia a busca pelo direito na justiça burguesa.

There is, of course, room for debate here, for one might argue that a transformation of the reigning socioeconomic system and a break from capitalist forms of oppression are deeply relevant to the political imagination of *Torto arado*. It is a novel in which exploited agricultural laborers, with little or no formal schooling, articulate a critique of money as inherently untrustworthy and even alienating (Vieira Junior 198); they refuse to live in the city where they would not be able to cultivate their own food. *Torto arado* is a novel in which two characters, Bibiana and her husband Severo, begin organizing a labor union despite threats of violence; Severo, in fact, is assassinated precisely because he has mobilized the workers. Bibiana and Severo identify the tenant farmers of Água Negra as *quilombolas* (Vieira Junior 256), aligning their movement for social justice with one of the

[9] Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling put it succinctly: "The aim of the land law was to discourage subsistence farmers and prevent future immigrants from owning land" (304). Tiago Miguel Stieven and Ivânia Campigotto Aquino offer this historical context regarding the Lei de Terras: "Historicamente, no Brasil, pela Lei nº 601 de 18 de setembro de 1850—Lei de Terras—a compra era o único meio de acesso à terra" (332). They explain, however, that the legal concept of property would evolve—in a way deeply relevant to the tenant farmers in *Torto arado* who are threatened with eviction: "Com o advento da Constituição Federal de 1988, o ordenamento jurídico brasileiro trouxe a positivação do princípio da "função social da propriedade", o que, por sua vez, posteriormente à promulgação da Constituição, acabou por refletir em diversas leis infraconstitucionais" (333).

original resistance movements of enslaved and disenfranchised Afro-Brazilians.[10] It is a novel in which two sisters, Bibiana and (especially) Belonísia, resort to brutal physical violence, a kind of violence traditionally assumed to be the prerogative of the patriarchy. Not only does this violence mean the end of Salomão, the exploitative landowner; it also means that the community of tenant farmers will avoid homelessness, for Salomão had been threatening to evict them and destroy their modest houses. While the book leaves us with an uncertain conclusion, it allows for the very real possibility that these same tenant farmers will now enjoy a very different relationship to the land and to their own labor. Água Negra might even become a recognized quilombo, perhaps a cooperative. As Tiago Miguel Stieven and Ivânia Campigotto Aquino assert: "Salomão é assassinado e, dessa forma, a exploração atinge o início de seu fim através de processos de reintegração de posse. A partir desse momento o povo começa a alcançar seus direitos, os quais até então eram suprimidos" (340). Bibiana and Belonísia have achieved success by working within—but also against—the dominant system.

It is important to assert here that the small practices of everyday life among these tenant farmers are, in themselves, practices that undermine the logic of the capitalist order. The work of a *curador*, a Jarê healer such as Zeca Chapéu Grande, is work offered to the community without charge, without any expectation of financial profit. The same must be said of the work of the *mãe de pegação*, the community midwife, such as Salustiana, who never charges mothers in labor for her services.[11] These are not examples of exploitation but, rather, very powerful forms of community-building and solidarity. I disagree with Otsuka and Rabello,

[10] Henriete Karam and Gilson Santiago Macedo Júnior offer legal context concerning the recognition of quilombos: "No art. 68 do Ato das Disposições Constitucionais Transitórias (ADCT), a Constituição estabelece a obrigação jurídica do Estado de promover a regularização das terras dos remanescentes quilombolas, que deve ser interpretada em conjunto com o art. 216, § 5º, que determina o tombamento de 'todos os documentos e sítios detentores de reminiscências históricas dos antigos quilombos (BRASIL, 1988, *on-line*). São 3.475 comunidades remanescentes de quilombos em todo o país, sendo que a região Nordeste concentra 2.196 comunidades (61%) (BRASIL, 2021)" (668). Severo argues that the tenant farmers of Água Negra are quilombolas; Joyce Fernandes points out that Água Negra was not, historically, a quilombo (237), but she argues that Severo is making a politically savvy decision: "Faz sentido que a comunidade de Água Negra buscasse se identificar como quilombolas para fazer com que a lei valesse também para eles . . . a decisão de se auto definir como quilombola, evocada no romance principalmente pelas vozes de Severo e Bibiana, faz parte de um movimento de integração a uma causa coletiva que afeta diversas comunidades afrodescendentes no país, não somente aquelas provenientes de quilombos como concebidos no período colonial" (238).

[11] In "Forest of Midwives," Eliane Brum writes from Amapá about this traditional figure of the midwife, one who understands her work to be a calling, not a business.

for, ultimately, Itamar Vieira Junior's novel does not rely on a magical solution, nor does it limit itself to the realm of "a justiça burguesa." My reading of *Torto arado* also contradicts that of Daniel Brazil, who argues along the same lines as Otsuka and Rabello:

> O problema que a terceira parte de *Torto Arado* nos coloca é até onde dependemos de soluções externas, místicas ou religiosas para resolvermos o problema material da questão agrária, da luta no campo, do reconhecimento de direitos do povo negro, dos indígenas, dos imigrantes. . . . Num país dilacerado por um governo genocida, racista e destruidor do meio ambiente, é ingênuo crer que os deuses irão salvar os indígenas, os quilombolas, os desempregados, os sem teto e sem comida.

Indeed, Santa Rita Pescadeira lends a magical aspect, but the novel is very much grounded in the possible and the historical. The trapping pit into which Salomão falls is the result of the physical work of Bibiana's blistered, wounded hands. Is this so magical? The near-decapitation of Salomão comes at the hands of Belonísia; her muscular arms, shaped by years of labor in the fields, bring the blade she wields crashing down against his neck. Again, is this really so magical? If certain critics, focusing on the issues of social justice and agrarian reform, find fault with *Torto arado* because the appearance of Santa Rita Pescadeira seems to them a magical solution, then I would argue that these critics take a far-too-literal approach to the magical. The book's violent conclusion is not an escape into mysticism. *Torto arado* is, of course, a work of literature, and, as such, it takes advantage of literature's imaginative capabilities to provide us with new language and new ways of understanding that are simply not possible through so-called realism. We do not have the time or space here for a protracted discussion of the usefulness of the term "magical realism" as it relates to *Torto arado*; however, Scott Simpkins, in analyzing the magical aspect of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, makes an argument that seems quite relevant here: "A 'realistic' text is hardly a satisfactory mode, much less an accurate presentation of the thing in itself" (143). The "realistic" text, it turns out, is also a kind of conjuring, but one that tends not to admit it. Simpkins argues that "magical" texts, on the other hand, "reflect upon

their own blind spots, generating a metacritical discourse about their own indeterminate modality" (151).

If Santa Rita Pescadeira is a magical figure, what *Torto arado* conjures for the reader is something quite real—what is real but cannot be seen, for the bright waves of the Atlantic offer no evidence of the nightmare of the Middle Passage and its aftermaths, and even the twentieth-century mud houses of the tenant farmers are designed to leave no trace. Through the figure of Santa Rita Pescadeira, *Torto arado* offers not a mystical solution to the injustice we find at Água Negra but a way for the reader to understand this injustice within a larger context of struggle. I have argued that Santa Rita Pescadeira represents the return of the repressed; we should not lose sight of the fact that the violence the encantada narrates is carried out by the calloused hands of two women, women who turn the tools of daily life on the plantation (a hoe and a knife) into weapons of liberation.

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