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CAMPUS IN CAMPS

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GRUPO CONTRAFILÉ

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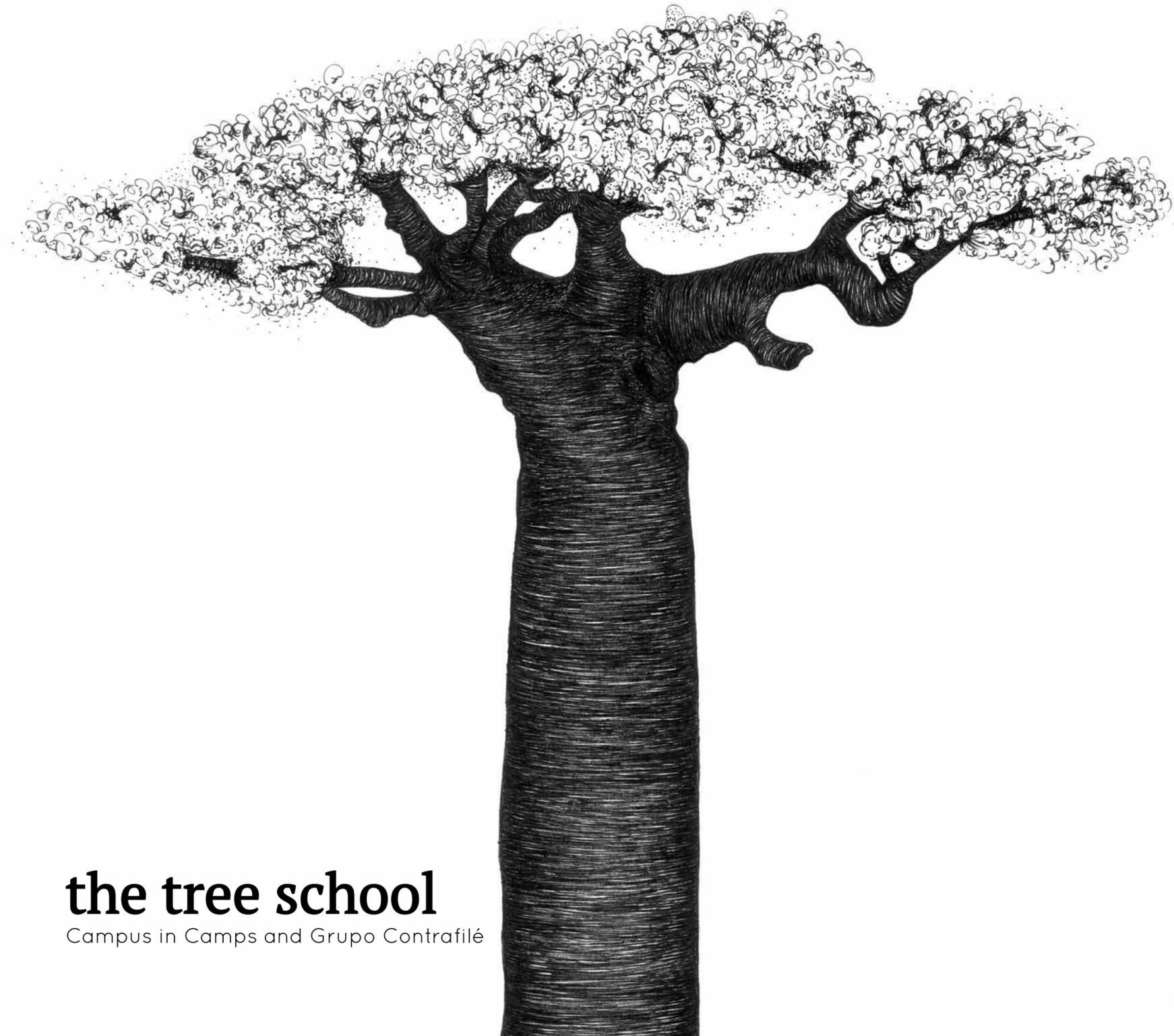
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the tree school

Campus in Camps and Grupo Contrafilé

the baobab creation

Many are the myths about the baobab. Originally from Africa, it is one of the world's oldest trees. The adult baobab is the tree with the thickest trunk, sometimes reaching up to twenty meters in diameter. Baobabs are living witnesses of history, guardians of the memories of the world. They may live up to six thousand years and grow up to thirty meters tall. In their gigantic stalk, they can store up to one hundred and twenty thousand liters of water. This is why they are also known as the "bottle tree". In many parts of Africa, they are sacred.

The elders say there are no young baobabs; they are all born old. The baobab I know is a young-old-kid, and while I sat against its trunk, it confirmed the story I had heard about the upside-down tree:

At the dawn of life, the Creator made everything in the world. First he created a baobab and only then did he continue making everything else. Next to the baobab there was a pool of still water. Sometimes its surface was as flat as a mirror. The baobab stared at itself in that water mirror. It stared at itself and complained:

"Well, maybe my hair could have more flowers, maybe I could have bigger leaves." So the baobab decided to complain to the Creator, who listened carefully.

Whenever the baobab took a breath and interrupted its complaining, the Creator commented: "You are a beautiful tree. I love you, but let me go, for I must finish my work. You were the first being to be created and therefore you possess the best features among all creatures."

Still the baobab begged him: "Please, make me better here, make me better there..."

But the Creator, who had to make people and all the other creatures of Africa, left him alone. So the baobab followed him everywhere he went, wandering to and fro (and this is why the tree exists all over Africa).

The baobab looked at everything that had been created and continued begging for improvements: "Creator, make that tree over there a little better! Creator, that river is too dry, can't you put more water in it? Creator, is that mountain high enough?"

Of all beings, the only one that was never satisfied was precisely the one the Creator thought was so wonderful, the one that didn't resemble any other, the first to be created! One day the Creator became very, very angry, for he didn't have time to do anything else. He was furious. So he turned to the baobab and said: "Stop bothering me! Stop complaining and stay quiet!"

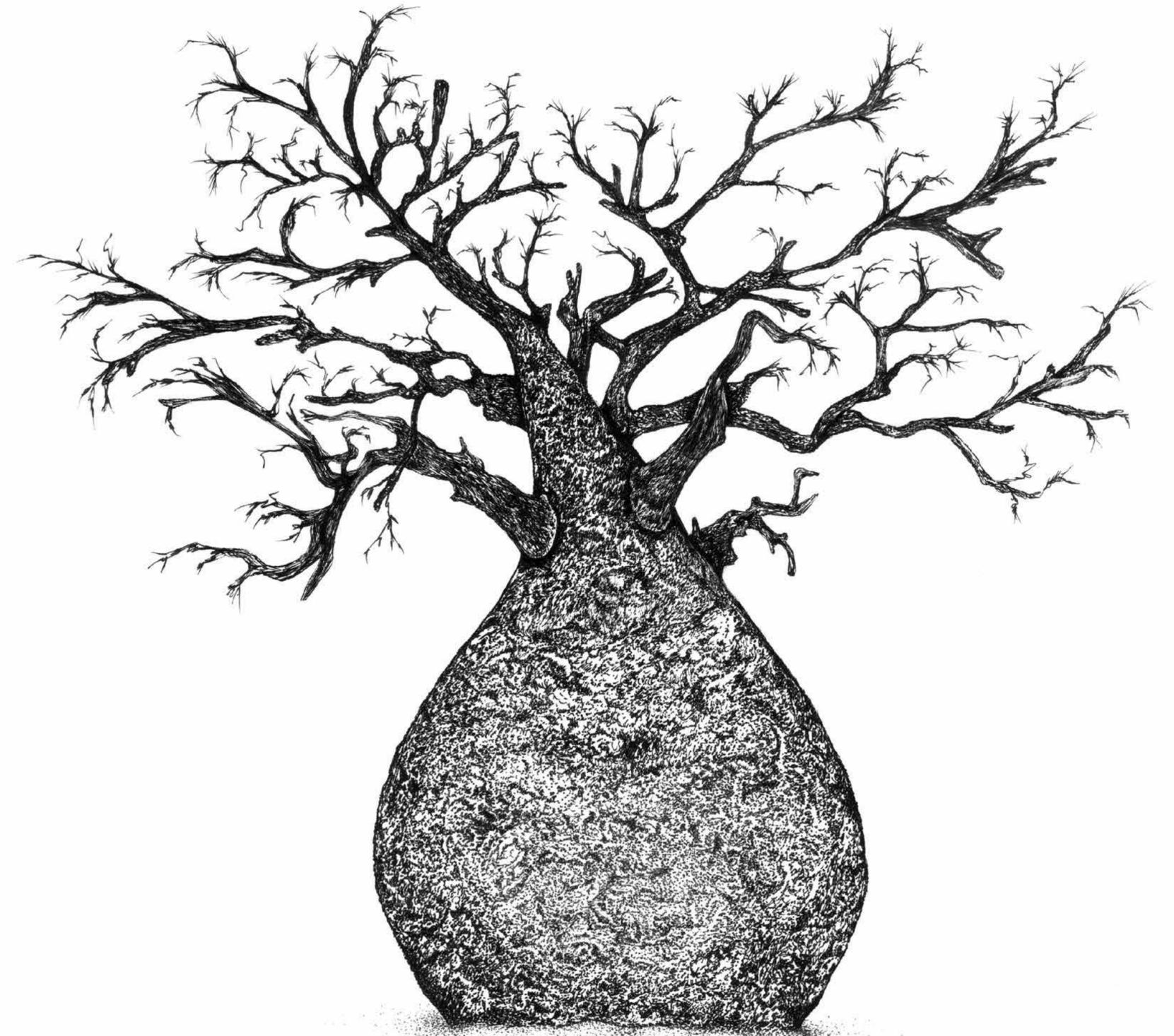
But the baobab didn't stay quiet.

So the Creator grabbed it, pulled it out of the ground and planted it again. But, this time, upside-down, with its head in the ground, so it would remain silent. This explains why today the baobab looks so strange, as if its roots were on its head... The baobab is just an upside-down tree!

And still today it is said that its skyward pointing branches resemble arms that continue complaining and begging the Creator for improvements to the planet.

They also say that those who sit under the baobab may listen to its stories.

Eugênio Lima





arrival in bahia

July 9, 2014

Contrafilé, a Brazilian-based art collective, and Campus in Camps, an experimental educational program based in Bethlehem's Dheisheh refugee camp, Palestine, have been invited to develop a common project on the occasion of the *31st Bienal de São Paulo*. Both groups share a common interest in decolonizing knowledge and aim to build a dialog from south to south, a direct exchange of thoughts and experiences rooted in common urgencies. They work around ambivalent questions concerning the relationships between *land*, *exile*, and *commoning*.

This project aims to cultivate and produce knowledge that emerges from regions of the world that rarely speak to each other, despite the fact they have very much to learn from one another. Particularly in this historical moment following the revolts in Arab and South American cities, these "two worlds" share similar urgencies in terms of social justice and equality. Though both regions have accumulated large amounts of wealth in recent years, its distribution remains dramatically unequal and power is still arrogantly detained by an elite. Colonialism is not just a ghost of the past. At the same time, the history of social movements in Brazil and the resistance to colonialism in Palestine are essential experiences to be shared and from which to learn.

Both groups are interested in drawing analogies and identifying differences between two exceptional spaces: Brazilian quilombos and Palestinian refugee camps. Quilombos were communities established by enslaved Africans and Afro-descendants who fled their oppressors as an active form of resistance. Later, they became spaces of refuge for many

other groups in Brazil. Palestinian refugee camps were established in 1948 as a consequence of the *Nakba* (Arabic for catastrophe) in order to provide shelter for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were exiled and had to flee their homes located in what today is Israel. After over sixty-five years, these camps have developed into semi-autonomous dense urban environments that are no longer simple recipients of humanitarian aid but rather active political spaces.

A shared interest in these spaces and communities provides a key for reflecting and understanding the relationships between community, territory, and politics beyond the idea of the nation-state.

In order to explore these questions, the two groups visited and conducted fieldwork in Southern Bahia, where important quilombola communities were historically established and where, today, new communities are experimenting different forms of life and knowledge production. Bahia is the "birth place of Brazil" manifesting and maintaining its fundamental link to Africa. They met with quilombolas, thinkers, artists, and activists from the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in order to discuss the practice and theory of issues, such as displacement, exile, right of return, identity construction and subjectivity building, among others, that integrate the contemporary definition of collectivity.

They formed a Tree School, where new forms of knowledge production are made possible, when teachers and students forget that they are either teachers or students.

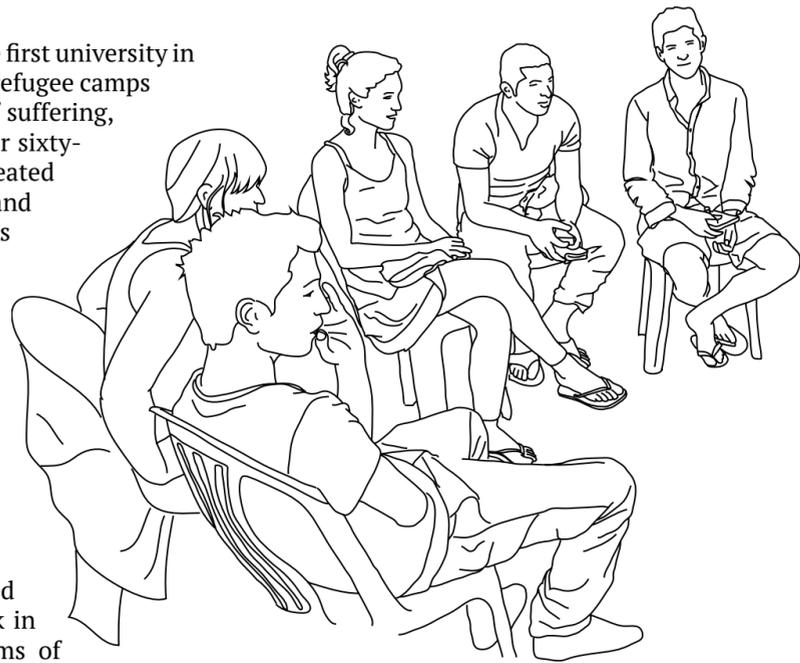


grupo contrafilé and campus in camps

The Contrafilé art group feels there is an urgency to create transgenerational spaces of critical production that try to overcome experiences where adults teach, children and youth learn, and elders are isolated. These new experiences open up an existential territory where everyone plays together, positioning themselves as *bodies in manifest state of creation*. The projects *A Playground for Thinking and Playing* and *Backyard* were born of this desire.

When building a backyard in São Bernardo do Campo (a municipality located in the São Paulo metropolis), the group realized that, to many, the backyard refers simultaneously to an intimate and vast landscape (in which “the backyard is the world”). Generally, immigrants coming to the city from the Brazilian countryside, from the forests and farms, are met faced with presumably less honorable jobs and precarious living conditions. Yet, these are precisely the people who know how to work with “the land”. One of the many effects of the exile of their deep skills is the forgetting of a possible bodily relationship with the city, which could be experienced as an art(e)fact.

Campus in Camps was established in 2012 as the first university in a refugee camp, based on the strong belief that refugee camps in contemporary Palestine are not only sites of suffering, marginalization, and political subjugation. Over sixty-five years of exile, an entire culture has been created in terms of communality, political struggle, and an absolute sense of hospitality. Refugee camps today are sites of a different form of knowledge that remains undetected and invisible. By bringing a university, a campus, to refugee camps the program intended to create a space where these forms of knowledge could flourish and interact with life outside the camps. What is at stake in this initiative is the possibility for the participants to realize interventions in camps without normalizing their knowledge and their conditions or simply blending the camps into the rest of the city. Campus in Camps brings together motivated and active young refugees from the West Bank in an attempt to explore and produce new forms of representation of camps and refugees beyond the static and traditional symbols of victimization, passivity and poverty.



There are some points that link the experiences of quilombos in Brazil and Palestinian refugee camps. The first is that they are not utopian projects, but rather lived experiences and experiments where education plays a crucial role, enabling possible forms of decolonized knowledge to challenge dominant forms of political subjugation. In this sense, they allow us to imagine ways of conceiving a political community beyond the idea of the nation-state. It seems to us that this is the most relevant political discussion today, a time when the nation-state is in crisis but has not yet disappeared.

Therefore, how can we think of communality and individuality beyond the categories of the public (state) and the private (private property)? The “common” is hence a third productive category, which is sometimes independent and at other times partially coincides with public and private spaces. Consequently one could think about the political relation between people and space, not only in terms of citizenship, but also from the perspective of the refuge. The quilombos were originally built as places for people seeking refuge. Instead of always imagining how to become a good citizen, the question could be: Can we build a city and a territory today based on the notion of hospitality and refuge?



SANDI HILAL
(Campus in Camps)

I'm interested in the spatial configuration of camps and exploring the notion of collectivity in common spaces. I'm a co-founding member of Campus in Camps.



JERUSA MESSINA
(Grupo Contrafilé)

I'm a visual artist and (self-)educator. I research movement and its manifestations through drawing, the body, human relations and life itself.



TC SILVA

I'm a musician, composer and arranger, musical instrument maker, and one of the founders of Tainã Cultural Center, a political space for cultural and educational production. It is the starting point in the Mocambos Network (producing knowledge and communication between quilombola communities) and in the route of the baobabs.



PEETSSA
(Grupo Contrafilé)

I only look Japanese. As all Brazilians, my soul is *cabocla*: half indigenous, half black. Give me an axe, a knife and some fire, and I'll build a spaceship just so I can see from above how the Earth spins around and around.



RAFAEL LEONA
(Contrafilé)

I come from Argentina, where I began my political art group production within GAC (Grupo de Arte Callejero). I came to Brazil in 2006 and joined Grupo Contrafilé. I've always been interested in creating spaces where creativity can be politicized.



DAVID KOSTENWEIN
(Campus in Camps)

I'm an urban planner and I'm interested in urban development and international cooperation. I had the chance to work for the United Nations in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jordan and the West Bank.



FLORIANA BREYER

I develop artistic interventions in urban and rural contexts. I work together with collectives and traditional communities on projects connecting art, regeneration of land, and production of income.



CIBELE LUCENA
(Grupo Contrafilé)

I'm a geographer by training and I research forms of producing powerful spaces of gathering which enable access to educational, self-educational and political dimensions of art.



ALESSANDRO PETTI
(Campus in Camps)

Besides being an architect and a researcher in urbanism, I'm interested in radical education. I'm a co-founding member of Campus in Camps.



PEDRO CESARINO

I'm a professor of Anthropology at the University of São Paulo. I specialize in indigenous ethnology, oral tradition and anthropology of art.



SAMA PETTI

My name is Sama, which means "sky" in Arabic. I am 5 years old and I love exploring the world by myself. At night I enjoy listening to and creating bedtime stories.



TALA PETTI

My name is Tala, which means "young palm tree" in Arabic. I'm 8 years old, I love learning new languages and I often tell myself stories.



ISSHAQ I.M. ALBARBARY
(Campus in Camps)

I'm from a small refugee camp in Bethlehem called Beit Jibrin. I've been a member of Campus in Camps since 2012. I'm interested in connecting the Palestinian struggle with the rest of the world.



AHMAD F.A. ATTAALLAH
(Campus in Camps)

I'm from Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank and a member of Campus in Camps, where I analyze and activate interventions in common spaces and on the borders of the camp.



EUGÊNIO LIMA

I'm a DJ, actor-MC, researcher on diasporic culture, founding member of the Núcleo Bartolomeu de Depoimentos and the Frente 3 de Fevereiro and a member of the band CORA - Orquestra de Grooves Afrobrasileira.



JOANA ZATZ MUSSI
(Grupo Contrafilé)

I'm a social scientist and found in the intersection between urban thinking, art and education a way of existing. For me, the process of "denaturalising social facts" is an essential approach to practice.



GIL LUCENA MARTINS

I am 2 years old, love playing ball, running on the beach, drumming and having the feeling I'm flying!



DANIELA SANJINÉS
(Campus in Camps)

I'm an architect and urban planner currently living in Bogota. I'm interested in exploring spatial similarities between Palestinian refugee camps and informal settlements in Colombia.



RAMIRO MESSINA CARIOBA

I am 12 years old, I love sports and I need to constantly be doing something. I like to fly kites, play ball and bodysurfing.



SEBASTIAN LEONA

Everyone calls me Seba. I am 4 years old, I like to invent songs, play pirates, build rockets and make sand castles. I like traveling although I miss my grandmother.



WALTER SOLON

I'm profoundly interested in social experiences and art projects questioning the legitimacy of political/artistic representation, the position of the native, nationality, and diaspora.

under the tree

July 10-11, 2014



Paulo Freire
(1921-1997) Brazilian thinker, known for his work on popular education and the creation of a critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire: Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation. (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1968).

Paulo Freire: The only one that can liberate the colonizer is the colonized. If you do not have the power to free the colonizer, the colonizer can never be freed. Let's create a liberation movement of the colonizer!

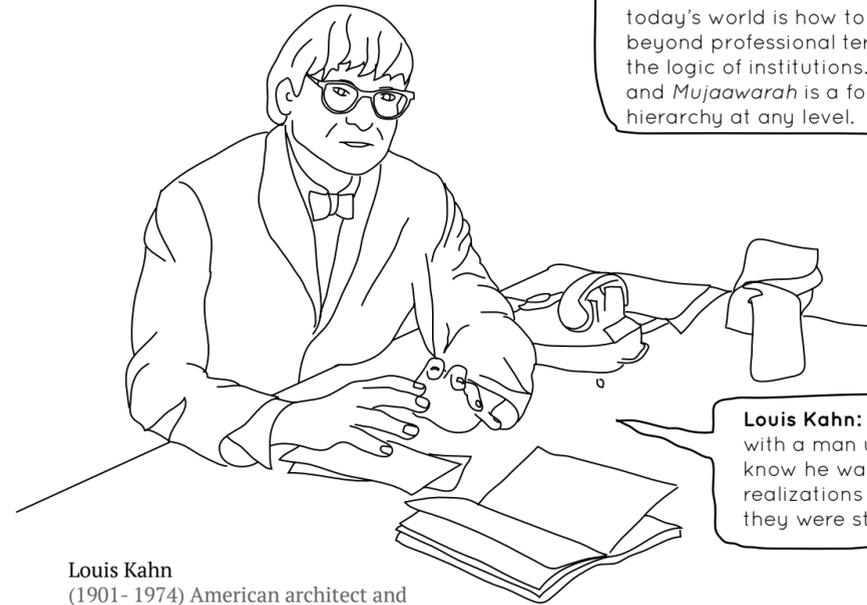
TC: That's what we're searching for. I want to exist and to say that, until the end of my existence, I won't agree with the colonization model. I want to exist by myself, not according to how someone else wants me to or not to exist. When we're talking about what oppresses us, it's neither because we deny the fact that we are victims nor wish to accept this position. We understand that we're all victims of colonialization. When we propose other forms of thinking, we're looking for decolonized forms of thinking. We don't want to integrate; we want to build something new.

TC: And, therefore, we need to have different references from those of the colonizers, so we can decolonize ourselves and help them become decolonized too. After all, who is the victim of what?



Cibele: And how, from this perspective, can we think about a radical situation of learning? Because I'm not able to disconnect a learning environment from the image of an "intersection of worlds", a place that allows us to go through so many processes and still meet. Which doesn't mean a place devoid of conflicts, but rather all the impossibilities and possibilities existing together.

Munir Fasheh: Two basic ideas that were central in our experience in Campus in Camps were *Mujaawarah* and wisdom, both of which are, in general, absent from academia and educational institutions. *Mujaawarah* as a medium of learning, and wisdom as the overarching value. A basic ingredient in both is the stitching together of the social-intellectual-spiritual fabric within communities. This embodies the spirit of regeneration in a most important aspect in life: learning. It demonstrates that another vision of education is possible and crucial. Building on what we went through during the first two years of Campus in Camps would be inspiring, not only for universities in Palestine but also in many other places. A great challenge in today's world is how to live, express, interact, think, converse... beyond professional terminology, academic categories, and the logic of institutions. Critical thinking is thinking in context, and *Mujaawarah* is a form of organization where there is no hierarchy at any level.



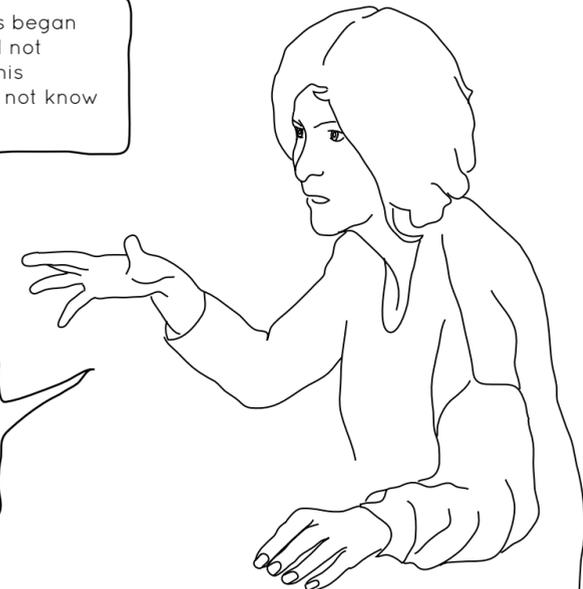
Louis Kahn
(1901-1974) American architect and educator. His reinterpretation of monumental architecture challenged the principles of modern architecture.

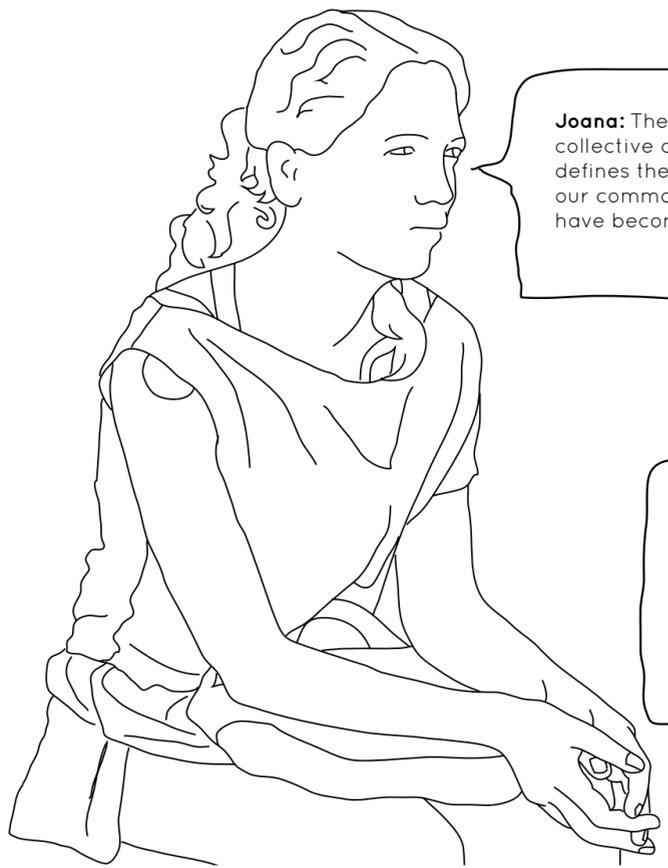
Louis Kahn: I believe that schools began with a man under a tree, who did not know he was a teacher, sharing his realizations with others, who did not know they were students.

Sandi: By expanding on what Louis Kahn said about the beginnings of school, I would like to advance the idea of a "tree school". In fact, we ourselves are forming a school. What we are doing right now is a school under a tree! The Tree School that we are forming now should not be presented as a model, but each school under a tree will have different urgencies and ways of producing knowledge.



Munir Fasheh
An innovator of forms of learning and knowledge production, he currently works with various groups in the Arab world, transforming stories and storytelling into learning practices.





Joana: The Tree School is a collective of acting people that defines the “what” and the “how” of our common learning. Living beings have become for us great schools!

Sandi: Our Tree School is a tree in diaspora and a school in exile. The tree does not represent a national territory and the school does not have a national curriculum. It is a school that is moving and producing knowledge through its own dislocation.



Alessandro: In fact, the school should be, first and foremost, a gathering place, a common space, where ideas and actions can emerge through critical, free and independent discussion among participants. A tree school could exist only through the active participation of its members. We call this space *Al jame3ah* (Arabic for university), which literally means “a place for assembly”. We understand *Al jame3ah* as a gathering place, a space for communal learning, where knowledge emerges as a group effort, rather than from only external sources. Hence, the structure, constantly reshaped by the participants, allows for the accommodation of interests and subjects born from the interaction between the participants and the greater social context. For many, knowledge is based on information and skills; *Al jame3ah*, on the contrary, places a strong emphasis on the process of learning based on shifts in perception, critical approaches, visions, and governing principles.



Rafael: In order to imagine this Tree School, one of the conditions is that there must be no pedagogic time measured in lecture hours. In this sense, the pedagogic time expands into our own lives. Just like in *Mujaawarah*, each person added into the group brings a possibility of destabilizing everything. The decision to not have a closed format also opens up the possibility of creating knowledge and building lessons within this destabilization. This means that the lessons don't start at a specific point, such as someone speaking, and they are not necessarily attached to a homogeneous and predetermined time. Rather, they correspond to a sequence of non-linear events that produce knowledge.



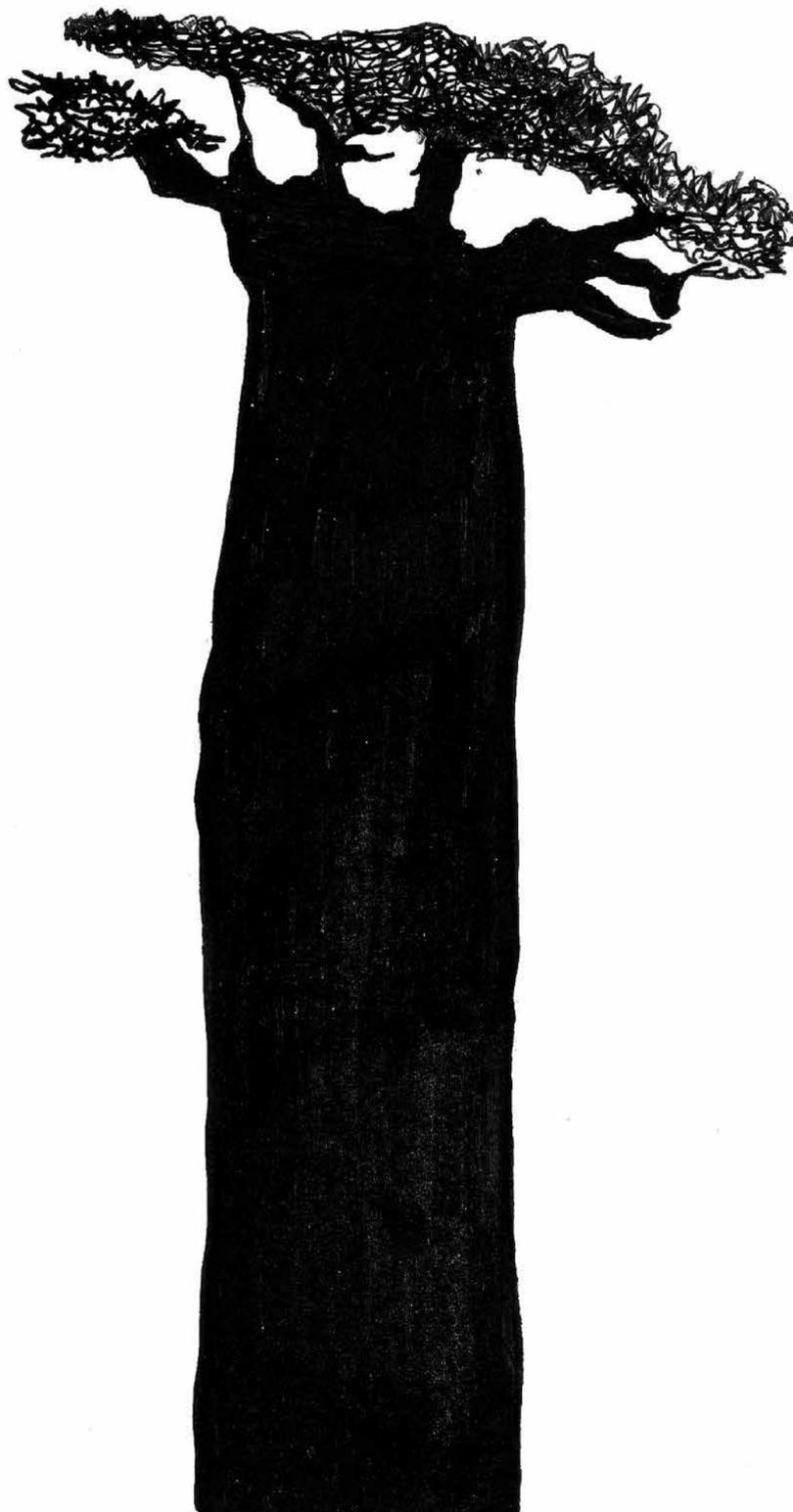
Cibele: We understand that obtaining a “space of collaboration” is significant since it by and large means having access to a “space of freedom.” Games and playing reclaim a kind of *landscape-potency* within the body that has been lost in adults and children. And we believe that it is this same *landscape-potency*, which allows us to imagine and invent our own city, giving way to the unpredictable. Playing is understood as an exercise in smashing down the walls ingrained within ourselves and our society.

Joana: A tree school needs an interventionist character that not only “observes” a certain situation, but activates some “potentially rupturing” element in order to better comprehend the situation: a more pointed understanding of the social component therefore follows the assumption that it is necessary to actively stand in the center of a certain problem and to challenge reality according to the *sensations* it evokes in the body, building a shared understanding of it. Then the intervention occurs as evidence of a symbolic character, by triggering an “element” which, as it synthesizes a shared sensibility, causes the established situation to rupture. The result is ultimately evidence that there is a collective body sharing a new sensibility that makes itself known.

Alessandro: Not-normalizing knowledge production should be one of the principles of the Tree School. It is an important concept and practice in relation to the idea of diaspora and exile. We have to work with what we have and we have to do it now, without getting trapped in the messianic idea of future salvation, being either Communism or religion; we need to accept the idea of a continuous struggle for justice and equality, never being satisfied by the status quo and therefore never being assimilated or normalized.

Joana: What would it actually mean to transform our understanding of essential values, such as beauty, wealth and wisdom? The baobab could be the “great school” because it evokes the dimension of the common, of communication, community, as if it created a territory that isn't necessarily or simply physical, but also a symbolic territory of connection. I ask myself what knowledges are constituted, what institutions are formed “in diaspora.” We do not have to be, as a rule, cured from the diasporas, since they are something that traverses us and can politicize us. What is this thought, school, lesson happening in this action and in this diasporic reality, be it Palestinian, black or Jewish?





the baobab antenna

July 12, 2014

Joana: It's interesting that we have such a strong being, capable of making us imagine so many stories. I wonder if there is one true story. TC, what is your baobab story, how did you first meet it?

TC: I was born with the baobab story inside me. I can't really explain it, but as far as I remember, the fact of being black always made me react to situations where someone felt he or she was better or bigger or more deserving of rights than the next person. I was expelled from kindergarten when I was six years old for manifesting my indignation against acts of injustice and disrespect. The spirit of the baobab was already in me. I have three-year-old twin granddaughters and, the last time we met, one of said: "Voyô looks like a baobab!" I didn't need to get to know the baobab; as my granddaughter said, the baobab was already inside me in the first place. My first physical encounter with the baobab was in 2006, when a friend, Francisco de Assis, a friend who is a "lord of trees", gave me a young tree. I drove to his place in my Beetle, Vietnam, and stuck in a traffic jam near Campinas, I composed this song:

*I'm coming back home
with a young baobab tree
I'm coming back home
with a baobab
Oba oba bah
Oba oba bah
Oba oba bah
Oba oba baobab*

When I arrived at Tainã Cultural Center, a children's steel drum orchestra from Trinidad and Tobago happened to be visiting. Though they only spoke English, they immediately learned my song. Together we planted the first baobab in Tainã's ground. Soon after, someone came from Mozambique bringing me more seeds, so I started drawing the baobab route. When I zoomed in on the map to find the exact line connecting Inhambane, from where the seeds came, to Tainã, I realized the line passed right above the house where I live and the house where I was born.

One day, when I already had two hundred young trees, I was talking to a Senegalese Pan-Africanist, and he asked me why I planted baobabs. "Were you born in Africa?" he asked me. "No", I said, "I've never been there. I carry Africa inside me." He was moved and said the baobab is a symbol of Senegal because when the colonizers invaded African territory, the elders went around the villages saying, "Let's plant baobabs! They can take us from our land, but they can't take the baobabs."

Some time later, another Senegalese friend was moved when he saw the same place. He had come from the land of baobabs but had never seen so many baby trees together. What I want to say is that this goes far beyond what I can explain. The baobab helps me gain access to a place only made possible by the baobab itself. I think it's an instrument that connects us to ourselves, so from there we can transform anything.

I started planting baobabs all over the country. Wherever one is planted, it becomes a key that allows everyone to fit in there. If you plant baobabs, you liberate your territory, opening it up to everyone. By eliminating all borders, the baobab itself does not establish any borders. The baobabs we plant in quilombos and other communities create a network of communication, like antennas.



TC: One of the largest quilombos in Brazil, Quilombo dos Palmares, dated back to 1630 and it lasted almost a hundred years before it was destroyed. There were almost 30,000 people living there and it came to be known as the first democratic republic in the Americas. The quilombo is born out of the phenomenon of people becoming refugees and autonomously finding and choosing a place of their own. Nowadays in Brazil, there are at least three thousand communities remaining from the original quilombos. Most of them are located in rural areas. These are huge territories and there is the possibility of sustainable living because there is only collective land and no private property.

Rafael: It will be interesting to see how, from an experience of extreme oppression and persecution, they have been able to open up a space for creativity and autonomy in a totally austere space that didn't seem to offer any resources.

Peetssa: Since 1993, the greatest dream at the Terra Vista Settlement has been to build a school that can award graduate diplomas or master's degrees. The idea is that, together with the neighboring communities, a child could start from kindergarten and receive his or her full education there. If we can get communities to work together, we can combine knowledge.

Peetssa: Terra Vista, the settlement we are going to visit, aims to become a reference, just like Quilombo dos Palmares or the Zapatista movement. It isn't exactly a quilombo but, like Palmares, the inhabitants are Afro-indigenous. They are an example of the integration of different struggles not only in that they are united against a common enemy, but they also represent a more subtle and subjective form of integration, in the sense that they share their dreams.

TC: Terra Vista is part of the MST, the Landless Workers' Movement, which occupies abandoned, non-productive land. In 1993, about two hundred families occupied this territory and have been implementing techniques for the community's social life. They began producing organic food and reclaiming the land, making it productive again. Today, after twenty-one years, they have the best cacao bean and cocoa production in Bahia.

Sandi: Managing expectations is crucial. What they expect from us and what we expect from them are very sensitive questions that must be kept in mind.

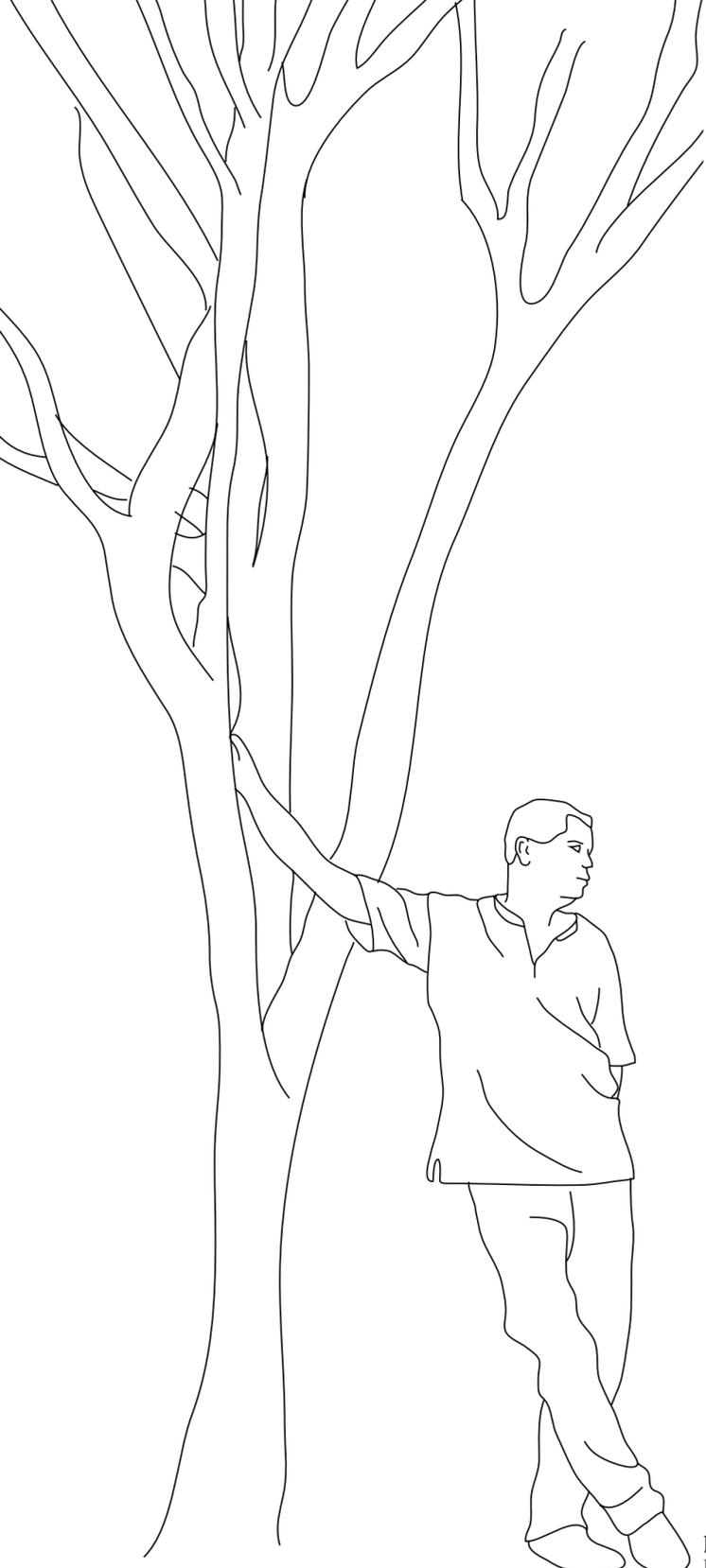
Alessandro: At the same time, we need to be careful not to idealize these experiences, losing our sense of criticality. We must continue problematizing what we are going to see. One of the dangers is to fall into the trap of feeling like an archaeologist from the nineteenth century, going to the jungle, finding interesting things, and showing them in a museum.

Ramiro: Is there internet connection?

Gil: Are there chickens and cows in the settlement?

Seba: Mommy, are we going to see the chocolate factory?

Tala: Is it a forest? Will there be snakes?



Joelson F. de Oliveira
Leader of the Terra Vista Settlement.

Terra Vista Settlement

July 13, 2014

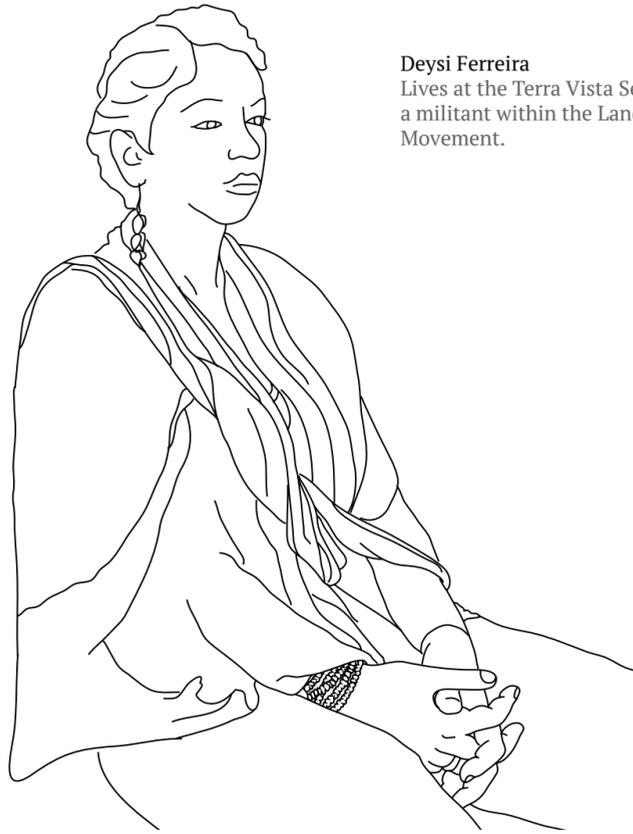
Joana: I've been thinking and have realized that the first thing Joelson showed us at the Terra Vista Settlement were two trees. This is how he welcomed us, not with a formal speech.

Pedro: This is a way of building a new spacial cartography, a new social memory. Yet this doesn't mean that trees are simply inanimate, external objects, which could only be understood as discourse devices. They are also sort of "almost-subjects" that move within distinct worlds. The outside world isn't only manipulated and directed by discourse, because the "almost-subjects" also have their own vitality and capacity of affection.

Alessandro: The first tree that Joelson showed us was a small baobab that the community planted to celebrate their connection with Africa and the quilombola movements in particular. The second tree, a pine tree, has a more ironic story. Joelson said that was given to the community directly from the hands of Yasser Arafat and the tree took his name after his death. It's quite a strange story considering that the pine tree has been used as an instrument of colonization in Palestine ever since the British Mandate. The pine tree was chosen because it grows quickly and does not need much maintenance and, most importantly, prevents other vegetation from growing nearby. This creates a virtual monoculture on the ground level that reduces the variety of wildlife and the possibility of grazing animals. The Jewish National Fund has massively used the pine tree for its forestation programs. In most cases, pine tree forests were used to create "fences" around Israeli communities and their surroundings. Also with the establishment of national parks, pine trees were used to hide the ruins of demolished Palestinian villages.

Sandi: I am wondering why Arafat would have given a pine tree instead of an olive tree, which is the symbol of resistance in Palestine.





Deysi Ferreira
Lives at the Terra Vista Settlement and is
a militant within the Landless Workers'
Movement.

decolonizing chocolate

People usually tell the story of cacao and cocoa production in our region beginning a century ago. They speak only vaguely about the last two hundred and fifty years of cacao production in the south of Bahia. In the years following the occupation, the devastation of the country's hinterland intensified. The whole territory from Porto Seguro to Ilhéus used to belong to the Tupinambás, while the Camacã people and the Pataxó people inhabited the area around Arataca. After much genocide, these people began fleeing and refugee villages were established. These were improvised villages, where today one finds many towns uniting three tribes: the Pataxós, the Hã-hã-hães and the Camacãs.

In order to introduce cacao, the pioneers came and opened up huge areas, colonizing —I wouldn't even say colonizing because, in fact, they came here to kill— and destroying many families who were living in these areas because they wanted to establish villages here, bringing cacao and occupying the space, claiming territory. Many indigenous women were raped; they slaughtered the men and took the women. This happened to my great-grandmother, who was a captive Indian. In the Tupinambá territory where she used to live, not only she but also everyone else was killed. Those who weren't killed escaped and those who were caught or left behind were forced to go to other territories, forced to abandon their indigenous life and identity.

After this turbulent period of conflicts, one hundred years ago the production of cacao beans and cocoa started growing considerably. But the only ones who benefited from it were the *coronéis*, who accumulated plundered land. They were called by this name because they had as much power as the state and the army.

Once cacao was firmly established in the region, the *coronéis* struck the final blow by expelling smaller landowners, indigenous people and quilombolas who lived there with their families. They would send their henchmen to hunt down and destroy indigenous refugees.

Their private militia was even more powerful than the police. Their power was based on cacao. The more cacao they had, the more power they had. At some farms they murdered many employees because they didn't work hard enough. My grandfather wanted to quit farming, but was threatened with death by the *coronel* that employed him. He could either try escaping and end up being killed by some henchman or continue working like an animal until he died of exhaustion.

Then, thirty years ago the witch's broom plague struck the area. There are many theories as to how it was introduced: some say it was a competition among *coronéis*, others believe that it was bacterial warfare

initiated by the United States because Brazil didn't fit in with their project, some claim that it was God's will, while others say it was simply a result of the change in the farming system after the *cabruca*-style farming, a method of scattering cacao trees within the forests, was abandoned. This fungus destroyed the whole area and, as a side effect, ended the rule of the *coronéis*, who lost all their power.

Many of them committed suicide, but those who had already invested elsewhere moved to big cities like Salvador, Rio and São Paulo. Their children had no interest in their lands, since the region was ruined. Suddenly all the big inherited farms were abandoned. The abandoned farms were maintained by *burareiros* or *meeiros*, former employees who took care of them and gave part of the production to the *coronel*, keeping some for themselves. This was the case of the Terra Vista Settlement, formerly known as the Bela Vista Estate, which had been inherited by three sisters living in Rio de Janeiro.

The local population of the area was disoriented and had lost its way. For many, the only alternative was to migrate to the big cities, resulting in a massive rural exodus. During this crisis, the region became vulnerable, not to attacks but to people returning to the land as organized groups like the MST called them back from the big cities. People who didn't identify themselves as farmers anymore, wanted to return to agriculture and to producing their own food.

As part of a very systematic strategy of massive occupations by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the Terra Vista occupation took place in 1992. Its tactic was not simply "to occupy and resist", but rather, it considered the role of the human being, questioning how the territory could be liberated in order to liberate an even larger territory. Two hundred and fifty years later, there was the return to agriculture on the part of people who had lost the practice.

For some time, we tried to reproduce the colonizer's logic since we were used to monoculture and hierarchic forms of organizations. And we failed. But in 2000, our motto became "Start Again", that is, start again with a new perspective of cultural humanity. The settlers who, in the past, would only follow an imposed farming methodology, now understood that they had power. For fifty years they had worked for the *coronéis'* cacao, but now they could work for themselves. They took the tool that the *coronéis* had used to exploit them and used it for their own benefit.

The quilombolas, indigenous and landless people who are familiar with the history of this region know that initially cacao symbolized slavery. This is the only way to name the practice of building empires using cheap or unpaid labor. After the crisis, cacao reappeared using the *cabruca*-system inside the forest. It reappeared with women's and men's hands working the land, without anybody telling them that they could only produce cacao beans. A part of the population understood the process, while another part stagnated. We reinvented ourselves though cacao. Cacao reemerged with the meaning of freedom. It is rebellious chocolate!

TERRA VISTA THE REBELLIOUS CHOCOLATE!



"...it's so nice that kids in the settlement can get the chocolate from their own trees, they don't need to go and buy it from the supermarket."

Arthur: It's challenging for us to adapt the state's policy to the settlement's reality, because the state's educational policy is predetermined. Within the school, we have some flexibility to work together with the settlement's projects, for instance, the chocolate biofactory and the agroecology course. Through them, we can work on a located dimension of knowledge.

Our greatest challenge is that urban students carry the vices of city life, they don't really understand what it's like to live in the countryside. But when we place students in internships and they share practical experience with settlers, there is an exchange and interactions may happen.

Sandi: I can understand that it is a big challenge not to get trapped into becoming a totally bureaucratic project. Even when it is simply translated into the way students sit and teachers lecture, there is a total disconnection with the understanding of what it means to live in collectivity. As the principal, have you ever tried to understand, through minimal things like the organization of the space, how to bring part of the spiritual idea of the settlement into this place without being totally disconnected from the settlement?

Arthur: Here at the settlement, we have many people possessing great knowledge of the land, so we invite some of them to become teachers. Unfortunately, in Brazil, there is a terrible system for hiring public servants. But this is the system. We can only hire settlers who have university degrees. The state is bureaucratic and doesn't recognize the fact that people possessing other forms of knowledge should also be "graduates".

Solange: There aren't so many elders in the settlement. I enjoy listening to them and I've even written down some of their experiences in this region. They are full of stories from the time of cacao and colonialism. And when they die they take these secrets with them. Once an elderly woman, for instance, cured my child with a home remedy. She made a pineapple jam and whenever I gave it to him, I also had to eat it myself. She would tell me, "If you only knew what's inside this jam." The elders mix many things they find in the forest. But they are dying and taking this knowledge with them. My mother knows all the herbs. Every plant has its use.

Cibele: By writing down these stories and making them part of the school's projects, wouldn't this be a way of acknowledging them as forms of knowledge from the land that "graduate" people, as Arthur said? How do these forms of knowledge make their way into the school? How does the school relate to the knowledge of the elders? Some thoughts have emerged from the dialogue with the students. For example, how important is it to benefit from this already existing integration between young people who are from the settlement and young people who come from outside the settlement. Through this connection, can they reduce and reinvent bureaucracy from inside this gathering, *this* school, which comes from a connection "with the land", and not from being "landless".

Cibele: Hi! My name is Cibele, I came with this group to visit your school. We're working on an art project that will become a book and an exhibition reflecting upon issues like land, education, and spaces of collective construction. We come from São Paulo and from Palestine. Some of us live in refugee camps and we are very interested in the experience of the settlement. Do you study here? If so, which courses?

Female student: We study different subjects, some study zootechnology, others agroecology.

Cibele: Do you all live in the Terra Vista Settlement?

Male student: No, most of us come from outside, from neighboring towns.

Cibele: Really? And what is it like to study in a school within an MST settlement? How does it impact your families and the communities where you live?

Male student: It's interesting. Nowadays we feel they respect it much more because this is one of the best schools in the region. But there's still a lot of prejudice. People don't understand what a settlement is. They say we study in "landless" schools, they think everyone here is violent.

Female student: We learn many things about land in Brazil in a way we wouldn't learn elsewhere.

Arthur de Oliveira Neto
Director of the Milton Santos State
Center for Rural Professional Education,
based in the Terra Vista Settlement.

Solange Brito Santos
Activist in the Landless Workers' Movement and the
director of the Florestan Fernandes school at the
Terra Vista Settlement in Arataca, South Bahia.



return to the sea

July 16-24, 2014

Sandi: Yesterday, during Dona Ana's funeral, and listening to you, Solange, speak about your attempt to collect stories of the elderly, I reflected on the fact that Palestinians try to document as many stories of the past as possible, before the old people pass away. In 1948, Palestinian refugees were forced to leave their villages and cities in what is today Israel, and many lost access to the sea. The symbol of the Palestinian refugee became the key of his or her lost house. It represents the right to return to their homes. Now the key seems to represent only the lost private property. We lost much more that was not private but collective, such as cities like Haifa, Yafa and Akka. And the sea. It is time to think of the return to the Mediterranean Sea as a common right that all Palestinians, refugee and non-refugees, have lost. I'm not a refugee, I did not lose my home, but I lost the Mediterranean. The desire to return to the sea is a common desire among all Palestinians. A sea where your eyes are able to gaze beyond the closure and the borders that are all around us in our daily life. The sea is where all Palestinians go, when they finally have the chance to cross the border.

Solange: When it comes to "return", sometimes I think about my mother, who has a great knowledge of herbal medicine, but she denies her own culture. She is black and suffered a lot in her childhood, because her parents gave her away to a white family who always told her, "Never marry a black man!" So she internalized this and thought that her color was to blame for her suffering. And in order to relieve this pain, she became evangelical and started to deny her whole history. She loathes *candomblé* and drumming, for instance; she thinks paradise is in heaven. And I'm aware that my mother can't return, but I have to understand her own process, because after a certain age, for many, it doesn't seem to make any sense. Therefore, seeing people who were able to return makes me happy. I'm happy when I see Dona Maria Muniz, an indigenous woman from the Hã-Hã-Hãe people, who lives nearby and is the same age as my mother. As a child, she was expelled and had to live in the city with her mother. But recently she has reclaimed her land. She has returned, she had the privilege of returning.

Sandi: Coming from Palestine, when we hear the word "occupation", it's strange for us that you, as the Landless Workers' Movement, are the "occupiers". We consider the Israelis occupiers because they took something that isn't theirs. This is something we reflected upon when those movements in Europe and the US called themselves "occupy movements". It made us feel uncomfortable. You can only occupy something that isn't yours. So when I hear you speaking, I feel it's not an occupation but a return. If indigenous people were in this land before colonization, then re-appropriating the land after so many years is a sort of return.

Solange: You can also use "return", I find it an attractive word, but I also like the word "occupy". Historically speaking, there was an inversion of facts. When you talk about invasion and link it to our movement, it's offensive to us, it hurts, because, in fact, the invaders were the colonizers who prohibited black and indigenous people from having land where they could live.

TC: I feel it's always about a return to the roots instead of considering return as the building of new roots. In quilombos, they do not want to return somewhere else, they feel that where they are is their place already. The quilombo is my place, I am attached to my memory and my roots are here. The process of colonization made us lose the African reference we had. We don't know where we came from so the desire to return to Africa died even if we still carried an African feeling inside us. But where in Africa would we establish ourselves now? The idea of return exists, but it's a different return, a return to a place within us. A return to the indigenous or African cosmic vision, so we can reconstruct our society... It is not a return to a specific place.

Isshaq: In Palestine, return for some people means going back to a perfect past, for others it means going to a perfect future. But in between we say return to the common, return to the Mediterranean Sea. There's a search for identity.

Ahmad: This time... from this dialogue, I feel that our generation, the third generation after the *Nakba*, is like the new generation of the baobab tree. We both were born in exile and we both are trying to redefine ourselves now. We both know nothing about our original context, we both drank the water and ate the food of exile, built our entire lives in exile, so what does homeland mean to us? What does return mean to us? We both are asking ourselves: Return to what?

We both are asking ourselves what to do with our lives that we have been building in exile in the case of return. We both are asking ourselves if we have to take exile with us wherever we go and if exile should return with us.

Maybe the baobab tree in the Brazilian context did not really ask these questions but the Palestinian baobab did.

Eugênio: For me the baobab symbolizes neither a return to Africa nor the formation of Brazilian identity; the baobab is not a tree in exile, it's a world-creating tree.



On listening...



Jerusa: Actually, the most important lesson during this process of participating in the Tree School was that of listening, letting go of all preconceptions, of what I "thought", because I found myself in a place where I couldn't judge anymore. I had to start noticing the differences among all of us, the ways each person receives and processes things. I was totally committed to silence, to being able to see all those reactions or impossibilities of reaction and truly accept all forms of existence inside me.



Sandi: One thing that happens in Palestine, or when you travel abroad and talk about Israeli colonization, is that people, in general, always say that they can only listen. They say they don't know anything about Palestine and, therefore, can't speak. So, Palestinians get isolated within a very local cause, even though the discussion is about the last form of colonization of the twentieth century. But what if you would participate not only by listening? This is something I'm slowly trying to understand. What did we do here? Even if I don't know anything about Brazil or you about Palestine, we kind of participate in each other's lives. We don't only listen to each other. This is a crucial aspect of this school; it asks me to give myself. I'm only part of it if I participate, and not if I expect only to listen.



Joana: We worked for a long time with Fátima Freire, Paulo Freire's daughter, and we learned "void listening" from her. That is, how to empty yourself so that the other may fit inside you, so you don't always only listen and try to fit the other's categories within your own categories. It's very difficult. How can we avoid subjugating or underestimating the other by only listening from a position of guilt? Or even, constantly trying to find an equivalence that doesn't exist, out of the anxiety to participate and build something together, and therefore end up not actually listening to what is happening to this "other". Where is this space where we are neither apathetic nor impose ourselves on the other? What kind of listening is this? In fact, we were always talking about different kinds of listening, because listening has a lot to do with the place we come from. You were talking about some urgency to listen; we about another urgency to listen: you, about not withdrawing from political implication; us, about not imposing our categories on the other's categories.



Peetssa: This process we're experiencing made me think about accepting and listening, it let me open up this empty space. This has to do with letting yourself flow with the wind. We always propose rhythm, situations, and solutions in our urban environment. But many times, it's more important to observe and to be ready for whatever comes our way, knowing how to deal with time without speeding up or slowing down or trying to control everything. If we cannot respect the other and other temporalities, we will suffer and we won't be able to be there, to be present. We always want to be somewhere else. Slowly, we may reach some balance. Because there will never be consensus, only a balance among the elements. We're united in a struggle for space — a space where we can be listened to and where we have time to listen. This goes beyond land and housing, we must create it in our relationships.

On knowledge...



Alessandro: A lesson I feel was relevant for our school is that of always establishing the production of knowledge by including someone who can bring a radically different point of view. This Tree School is not aimed at standardizing knowledge and making people agree on things. Knowledge can only emerge when somebody brings a radically different point of view. People have the idea that knowledge is produced when you congregate and produce similar thoughts together, but I liked when we include diversities. Because these are significant moments when knowledge is added and produced.



David: It was very important for me personally to accept that I don't understand everything, but, at the same time, maintain my ability to be critical and reflect enough to enjoy this thing that I don't understand.



Floriana: A lesson I learned at the Tree School which could be important for its further development is the capacity of enduring the unknown, that is, allowing yourself to become permeable and, for a moment, not judging.

On death...



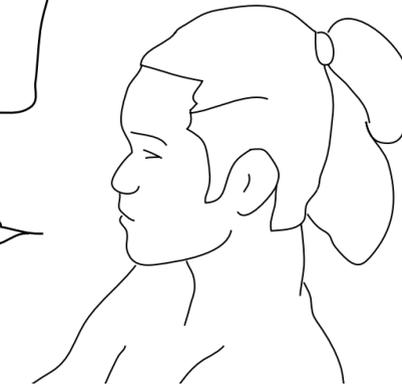
Jerusa: At the settlement, the death of Dona Ana made me question everything that I thought I'd be doing there. It made me understand the place in terms of a non-rational presence. Some things are much larger than specific situations. Death is larger than everything. It is larger than the earth, the sea, and even the baobab. There are irreducible forces and, before them, we must assume a humble position.

Peetssa: This reminded me of our conversations about memory. Everything carries memories. Now, on the seashore, I can simultaneously feel the ships storming Gaza and our roots on the other side of the ocean. And even the memory of the indigenous peoples who perished on this beach. Liberty and death. This memory is a non-negotiable force of the world that is inside each one of us, even if we don't realize it.

Rafael: A thought or a concept that was important to me, and which we use in connection to human rights in Argentina, is the idea of historical continuity. In order to understand the present, you must always relate it to historical processes, and stop seeing them as things. This, for me, was one of the potencies made possible by this journey. When Tala said she learned a lot from rebellious chocolate, I realized that it will be difficult for her from now on to eat any chocolate without remembering what is produced at the Terra Vista Settlement. That goes for the rest of us. It will be difficult to eat any chocolate without remembering all the stories of violence and liberation that it may contain. What used to be a simple gesture, eating chocolate, has become, for us, something with a much stronger historical content.

Alessandro: What we tried to do as a group was to essentially put things together through the act of commoning. I guess this was one of the challenges of this process, because one question that remains is how to stabilize this act of commoning, something that is maybe more related to the public and institutional forms. The common is something other than the public because it is always linked to temporariness. This raises an essential question about how the act of commoning is linked with the public or with institutionalized forms of knowledge. We have to avoid thinking the common just as an alternative to the public, because the price to be paid is isolation, self-exclusion and precarity. So this is my question for the Tree School: Is it just an experience that begins and ends or can it engage the formal system of education?

Joana: Maybe this relationship with all that is irreducible gives us, in fact, the chance to build the common. Now I'm thinking that it isn't possible to build this dimension of the common only on the human dimension that is, only among humans or by believing that only humans inhabit the world.



On commoning...

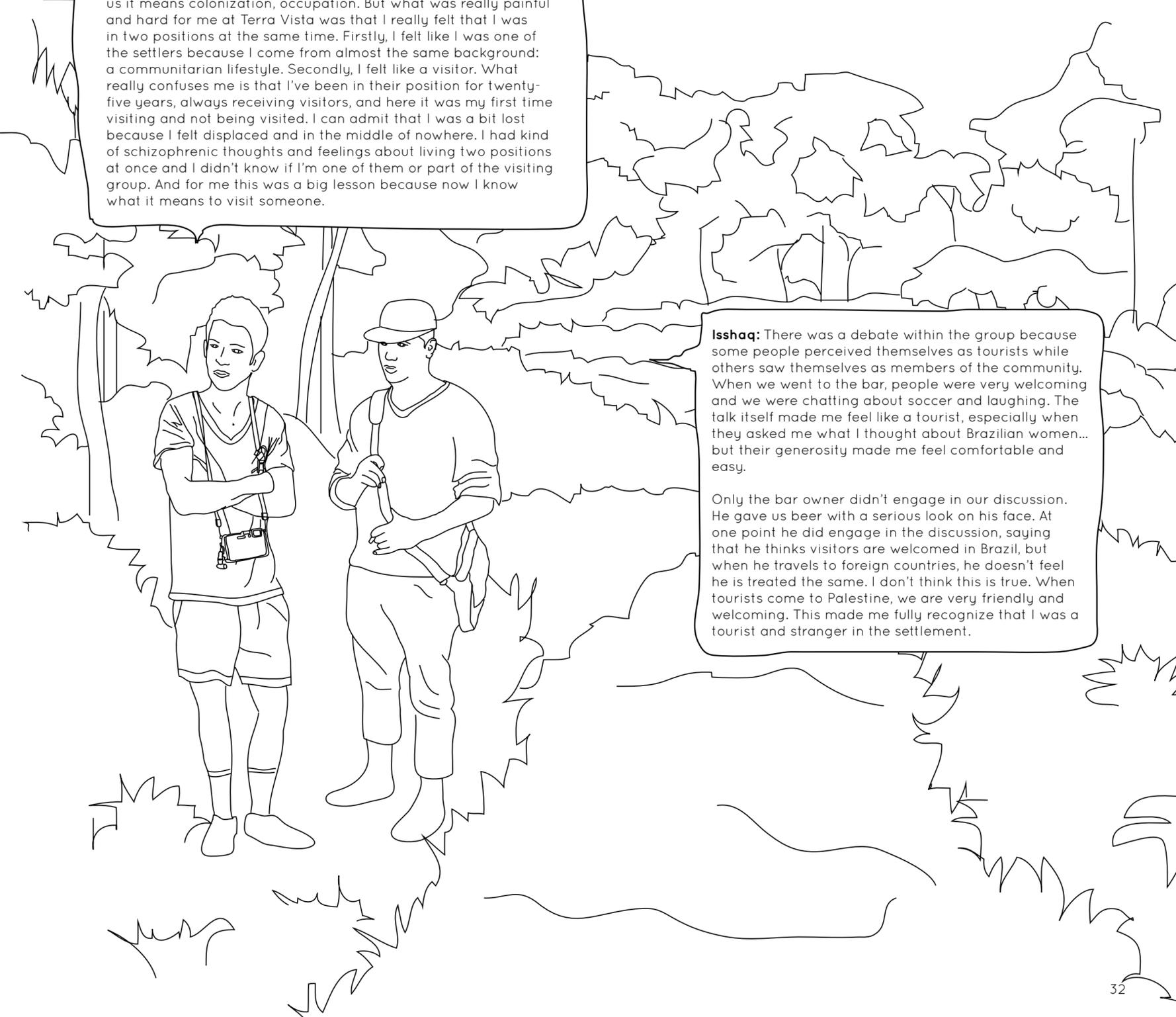


On visiting and being visited...

Ahmad: The first thing that troubled me in the Terra Vista Settlement was the word "settlement". We Palestinians are very allergic to this term as we connect it to Israeli settlements. For us it means colonization, occupation. But what was really painful and hard for me at Terra Vista was that I really felt that I was in two positions at the same time. Firstly, I felt like I was one of the settlers because I come from almost the same background: a communitarian lifestyle. Secondly, I felt like a visitor. What really confuses me is that I've been in their position for twenty-five years, always receiving visitors, and here it was my first time visiting and not being visited. I can admit that I was a bit lost because I felt displaced and in the middle of nowhere. I had kind of schizophrenic thoughts and feelings about living two positions at once and I didn't know if I'm one of them or part of the visiting group. And for me this was a big lesson because now I know what it means to visit someone.

Isshaq: There was a debate within the group because some people perceived themselves as tourists while others saw themselves as members of the community. When we went to the bar, people were very welcoming and we were chatting about soccer and laughing. The talk itself made me feel like a tourist, especially when they asked me what I thought about Brazilian women... but their generosity made me feel comfortable and easy.

Only the bar owner didn't engage in our discussion. He gave us beer with a serious look on his face. At one point he did engage in the discussion, saying that he thinks visitors are welcomed in Brazil, but when he travels to foreign countries, he doesn't feel he is treated the same. I don't think this is true. When tourists come to Palestine, we are very friendly and welcoming. This made me fully recognize that I was a tourist and stranger in the settlement.



On nature...



Pedro: Since we've been talking so much about trees, I've been thinking that the baobab is not solely a metaphor or a religious symbol; the baobab is a kind of agent, it has its autonomy within that possible world in which it makes sense. Trees cannot be understood exclusively through words because words can't represent everything. But it's important to recall that TC and his network have invented a different baobab that behaves like a being already different from what this tree would be for traditional African societies. This new invention draws upon the background of the baobab in these societies, but it becomes something else. If the idea is for it to be a future device, an antenna, then we need to think about what new being it becomes within this world that is being invented by TC.

Joana: In this sense, it was meaningful to experience a journey where the relationship between nature and culture was subverted at all times. For instance, when people are able to live a decolonization of their own bodies and thoughts by reflecting on the significance of some trees.



Pedro: When Joelson walked with us in Terra Vista, he knew the name of every tree and he had a story for each one; he transformed space based on a new social memory distilled in the trees, which is a living memory, not one stored in computers. Just as the settlement was transformed by the vegetation —and not only by the architecture—, the memory of the previous space still has not disappeared, even within this new reconfiguration of bodies.



Walter: I used to think that a great mobility in terms of diversity of cultural experience and identities was mainly possible through moving between different countries or even continents. But having met so many activists here, who are in a constant transit zone between communities and regions inside Brazil, has given me a new understanding of the density of this country. Also, I feel that identity categories like native, black and european are much less rigid. Their fluidity allows us to play with them creatively. There is definitely nomadism; people circulate extensively between very different places, despite the impression of an enormous unity of exclusively Portuguese-speaking Brazilians with a somewhat homogenous mix of influences from the past. The fact that identities are not given makes the arena of cultural investigation interestingly difficult to represent. One can migrate without ever crossing the national border.

On nomadism...

Peetssa: At the Quilombo Ribeirão Grande, we loaded up five thousand germinating Jussara seeds, ten thousand cowpea seeds, three thousand landrace cornseeds, green papaya, rangpur, and sugarcane. Guadua, giant and moso bamboo rhizomes. With panela in our pockets and a pot of citron jam, we embarked on a journey to our next destination. Four days on the road heading Northeast, through the window we saw the incessantly changing landscape, mile after mile, night and day, across three interstate borders, non-stop. After two-thousand five-hundred kilometers, we finally reach Southern Bahia and the Terra Vista Settlement.

No time to lose, but we have enough time to sow seeds that are already eager to sprout, and give back to the land the rhizomes that are ready to grow. Between lunch and dinner, we share the panela made by Master Penincha. We grab the hoe and plant three trees for Dona Ana.

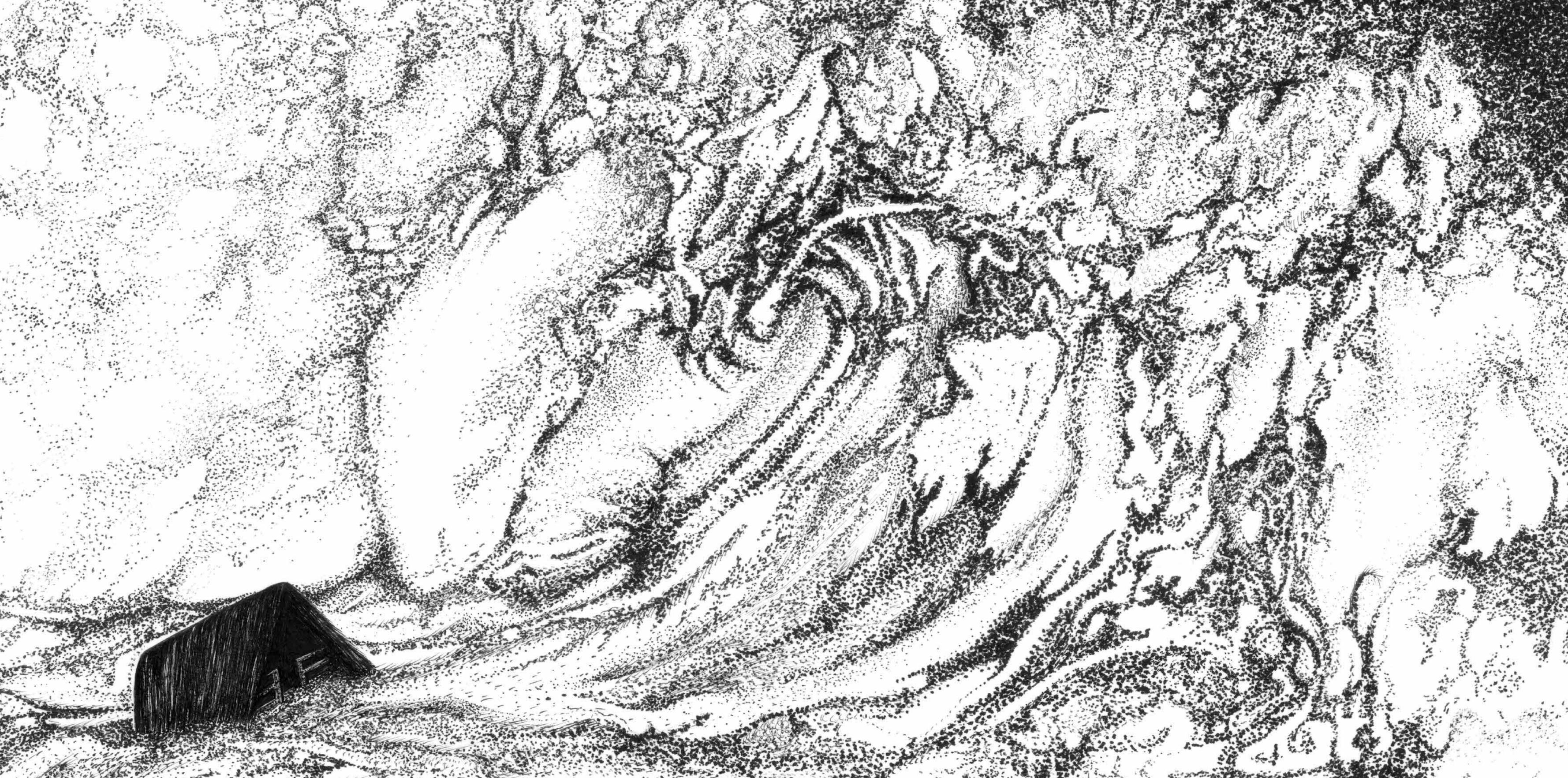
We exchange futures. From Terra Vista we received thirty thousand açai seeds, five kinds of landrace corn, two kinds of cowpea seeds, green beans, inga, brazilwood, roble, timbertree, Senegalese cedar, cucumber, pumpkin, roasted cocoa, cocoa candy, and many dreams for the future. So we can "build the world according to ourselves." The wealth we carried in the back of the truck was immeasurable, and it was heavy.

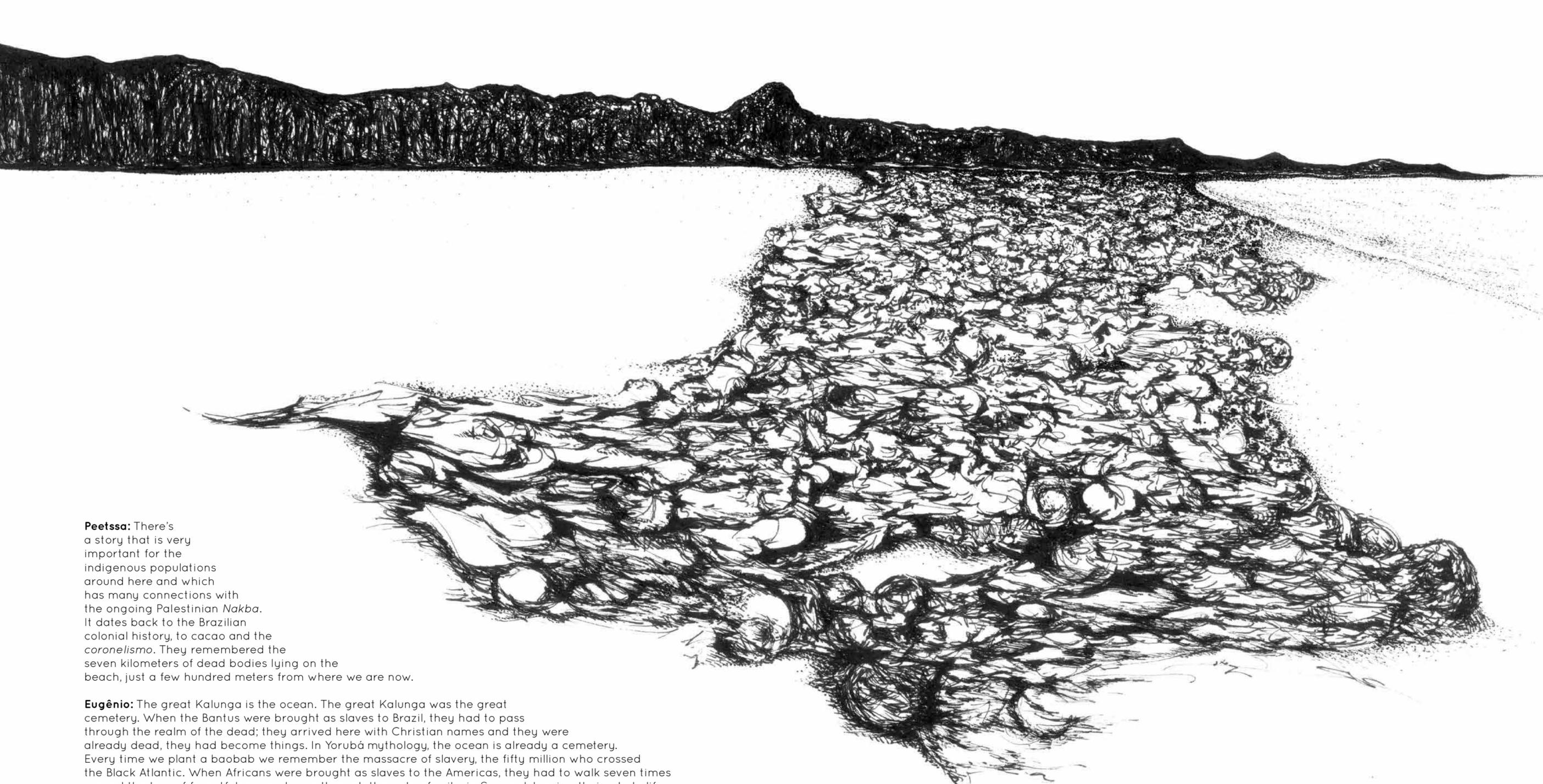
Time to leave. We hit the road to the sound of Fairuz's voice, along with Isshaq and Ahmad, friends who never thought it possible to travel such a long distance by land. They were overwhelmed by the size of Brazil, a continental country, with dense Atlantic forests, a lot of mud, hawks, coatis and kind Brazilians. It took us one whole day to cross the first interstate border. The Cocoa Coast, the Discovery Coast, Tupinambás, Pataxós, Monte Pascoal, Caravelas... We feel history running underneath our feet.

Shortly after crossing the second border, already on the third day of our trip, Isshaq caught a glimpse of Christ the Redeemer. We were still quite far from the statue, about three hundred kilometers, but imagination makes everything possible. After five thousand kilometers and eight days on the road, we reached our final destination, the Quilombo Ribeirão Grande. The quilombolas warmly welcomed the gifts from Terra Vista, including their dreams and similarities.

The waters never ever stop flowing.







Peetssa: There's a story that is very important for the indigenous populations around here and which has many connections with the ongoing Palestinian *Nakba*. It dates back to the Brazilian colonial history, to cacao and the *coronelismo*. They remembered the seven kilometers of dead bodies lying on the beach, just a few hundred meters from where we are now.

Eugênio: The great Kalunga is the ocean. The great Kalunga was the great cemetery. When the Bantus were brought as slaves to Brazil, they had to pass through the realm of the dead; they arrived here with Christian names and they were already dead, they had become things. In Yorubá mythology, the ocean is already a cemetery. Every time we plant a baobab we remember the massacre of slavery, the fifty million who crossed the Black Atlantic. When Africans were brought as slaves to the Americas, they had to walk seven times around the tree of forgetfulness and pass through the gate of exile, in Senegal, leaving their whole life behind. But we don't have to think of the ocean only as a cemetery. It has other dimensions and contains the sea foams, the water under the surface that contains all beings, and the deepest seas, where the cemetery is.

TC: When I touch the ocean's water, I pay homage to all my ancestors who died crossing the Atlantic.

July 16th, Gaza beach.
Israeli army kills four children playing on the beach.

GAZA CITY — *The four Bakr boys were young cousins, the children of Gaza fishermen who had ordered them to stay indoors — and especially away from the beach. But cooped up for nine days during Israeli bombardments, the children defied their parents and went out Wednesday afternoon, the eldest shooing away his little brother, telling him it was too dangerous. As they played on and around a jetty in the late-afternoon sun, a blast hit a nearby shack. One boy was killed instantly. The others ran. There was a second blast, and three more bodies littered the sand. One was charred, missing a leg, and another lay motionless, his curly head intact, his legs splayed at unnatural angles. The Israeli military acknowledged later that it had launched the strike, which it said was aimed at Hamas militants, and called the civilian deaths “a tragic outcome.”*
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/17/world/middleeast/gaza-strip-beach-explosion-kills-children.html>

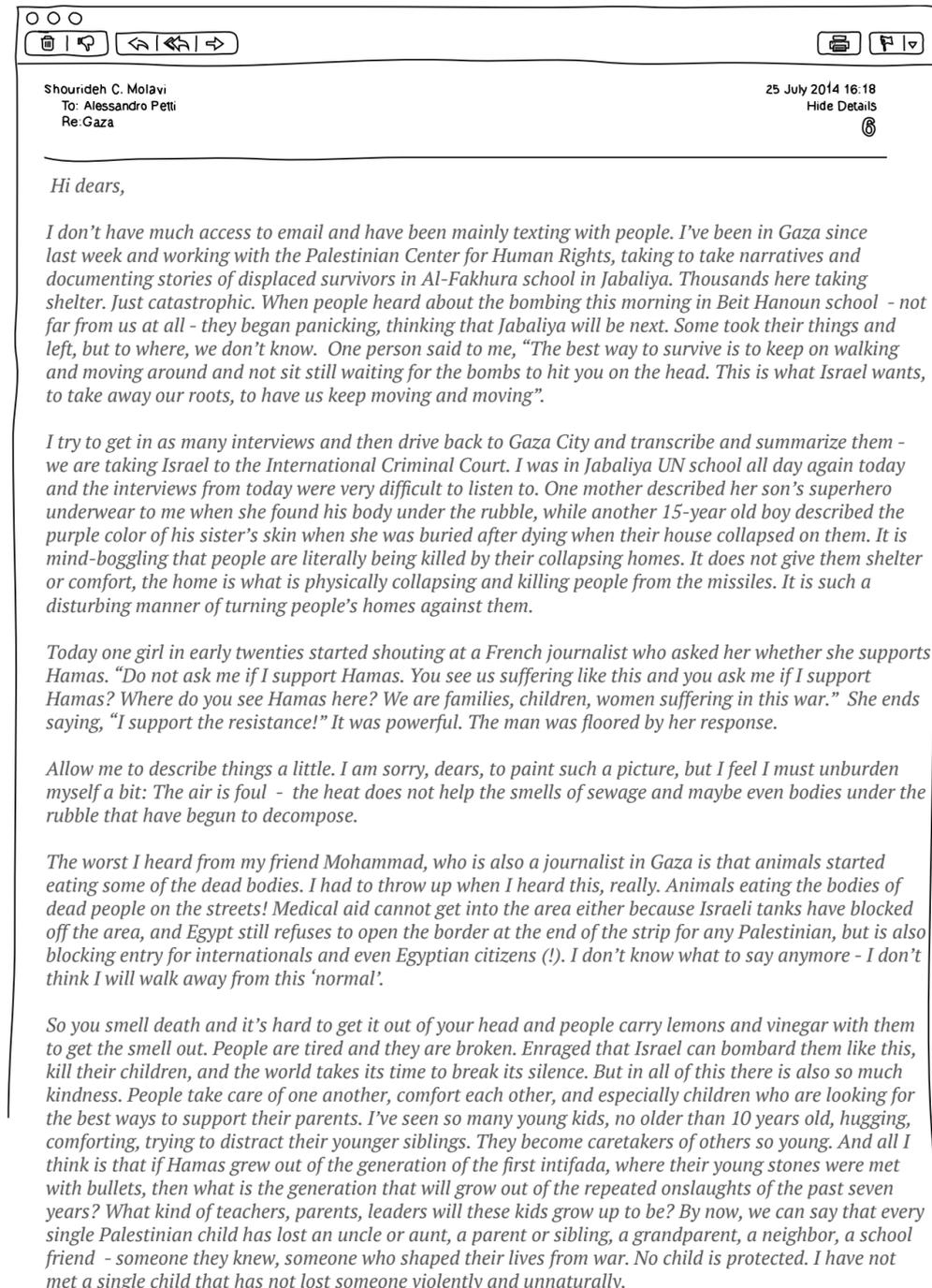
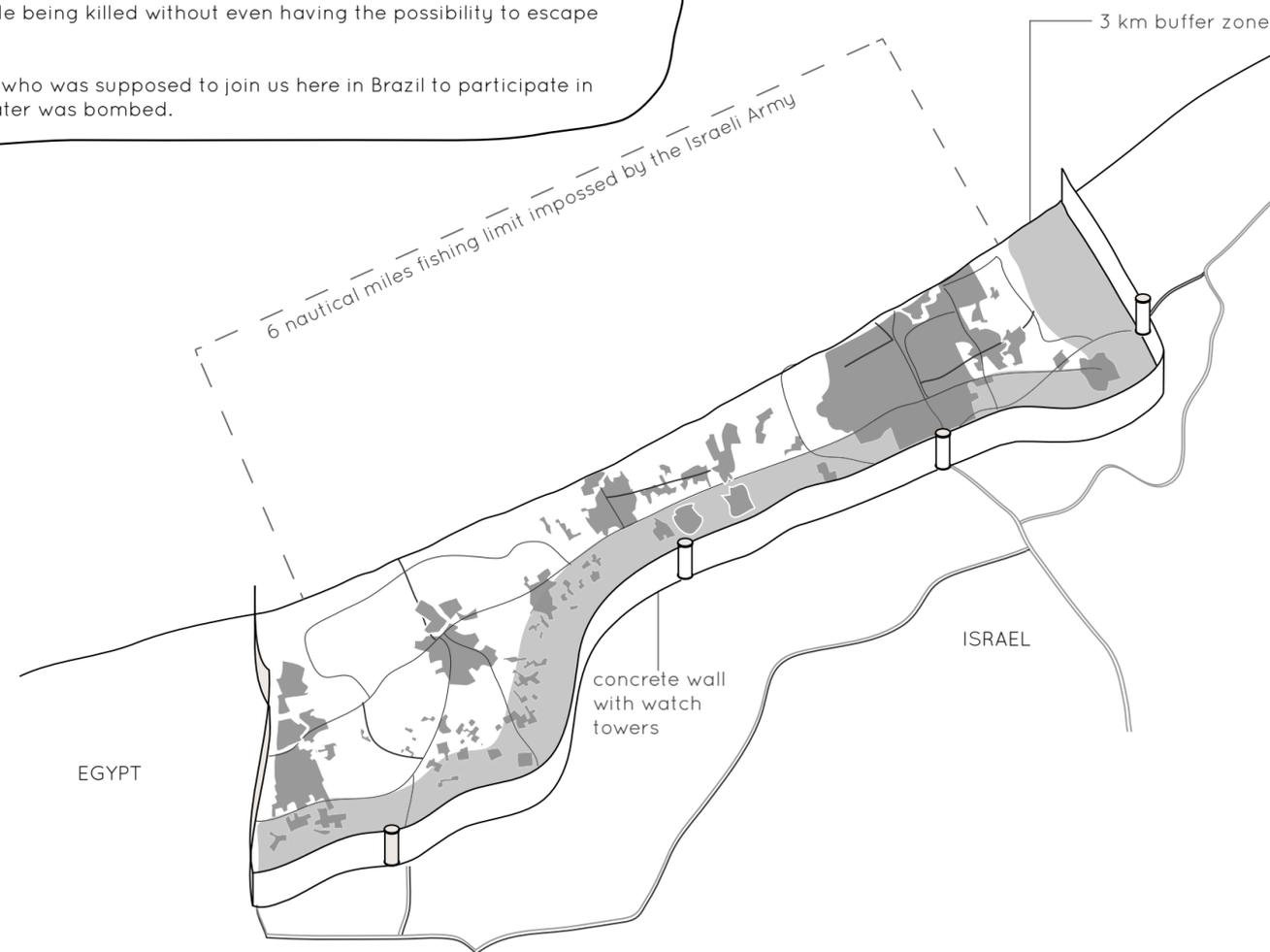
Alessandro: It is tragic that at the moment in which we are discussing the Tree School as school in exile and place of refuge, six schools in Gaza have been hit, forty-seven people killed and hundreds wounded. UNRWA (United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees) schools in time of violence are usually transformed into safe havens, sanctuaries, where people can take refuge. However this does not prevent the Israeli army from bombing and killing innocent people there.

We always thought that our long-term task in Palestine is to not be following news of mainstream media production; not to make our own work just a reaction to military violence. But in front of this devastation I feel paralyzed, incapable of continuing, frustrated not to be in Palestine...

More than 1.8 million people live in Gaza, the majority of whom were displaced between 1947-1950. They are originally from villages and towns very close to their site of displacement and refuge. Starting in 1948, their homes and villages have been destroyed by the state of Israel which has tried to erase them from the earth and from memory, in some cases covering the ruins with forests in other cases building new Israeli towns on top of them. This last assault on Palestinian refugees in Gaza is part of an ongoing attack against refugees, an ongoing *Nakba* that began over sixty-six years ago. For the Israeli state, Palestinian refugees are the worst nightmare, as their very presence problematizes the existence of a state based on ethnic cleansing and expropriation. Throughout all these years, Palestinians have not given up their right to return to their original houses nor their right to live in dignity. Israel is presenting their attacks and the killing of innocent civilians as a necessary evil that we need to accept. They want to convince the world that these horrible events are like a natural catastrophe, like a tornado or a tsunami, that we cannot stop and we must only endure, as cycles, one war after another. On the contrary, they are politically planned and executed by the military.

Gaza is a strip of only 360 km². Imagine a rectangle measuring 40km x 9km, surrounded by walls, fences, checkpoints and military blockades on all its sides. Israel has erected concrete walls to the north and the east and crossing this border is only sometimes permitted for humanitarian cases. In the south, the current government of Egypt collaborates with Israel to keep the strip isolated. To the west, out to sea, Israel blasts Palestinian vessels if they dare to fish over 8 km from the coast, infringing Palestinian sovereignty. During the last bombardments, Israel has been "warning" the population to move. But move to where? There is no space in Gaza; no escape and no possibility to open the borders. At the time of this writing, almost two thousand Palestinians have been killed (the majority civilians). How is it possible for us to accept a situation of people being killed without even having the possibility to escape from the war?

I have just received this email from a very dear friend, Shourideh Molavi, who was supposed to join us here in Brazil to participate in the writing of this book. She just was in one of the schools in Gaza that later was bombed.



Shourideh C. Molavi
To: Alessandro Petti
Re: Gaza

25 July 2014 16:18
Hide Details

Hi dears,

I don't have much access to email and have been mainly texting with people. I've been in Gaza since last week and working with the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, taking to take narratives and documenting stories of displaced survivors in Al-Fakhura school in Jabaliya. Thousands here taking shelter. Just catastrophic. When people heard about the bombing this morning in Beit Hanoun school - not far from us at all - they began panicking, thinking that Jabaliya will be next. Some took their things and left, but to where, we don't know. One person said to me, "The best way to survive is to keep on walking and moving around and not sit still waiting for the bombs to hit you on the head. This is what Israel wants, to take away our roots, to have us keep moving and moving".

I try to get in as many interviews and then drive back to Gaza City and transcribe and summarize them - we are taking Israel to the International Criminal Court. I was in Jabaliya UN school all day again today and the interviews from today were very difficult to listen to. One mother described her son's superhero underwear to me when she found his body under the rubble, while another 15-year old boy described the purple color of his sister's skin when she was buried after dying when their house collapsed on them. It is mind-boggling that people are literally being killed by their collapsing homes. It does not give them shelter or comfort, the home is what is physically collapsing and killing people from the missiles. It is such a disturbing manner of turning people's homes against them.

Today one girl in early twenties started shouting at a French journalist who asked her whether she supports Hamas. "Do not ask me if I support Hamas. You see us suffering like this and you ask me if I support Hamas? Where do you see Hamas here? We are families, children, women suffering in this war." She ends saying, "I support the resistance!" It was powerful. The man was floored by her response.

Allow me to describe things a little. I am sorry, dears, to paint such a picture, but I feel I must unburden myself a bit: The air is foul - the heat does not help the smells of sewage and maybe even bodies under the rubble that have begun to decompose.

The worst I heard from my friend Mohammad, who is also a journalist in Gaza is that animals started eating some of the dead bodies. I had to throw up when I heard this, really. Animals eating the bodies of dead people on the streets! Medical aid cannot get into the area either because Israeli tanks have blocked off the area, and Egypt still refuses to open the border at the end of the strip for any Palestinian, but is also blocking entry for internationals and even Egyptian citizens (!). I don't know what to say anymore - I don't think I will walk away from this 'normal'.

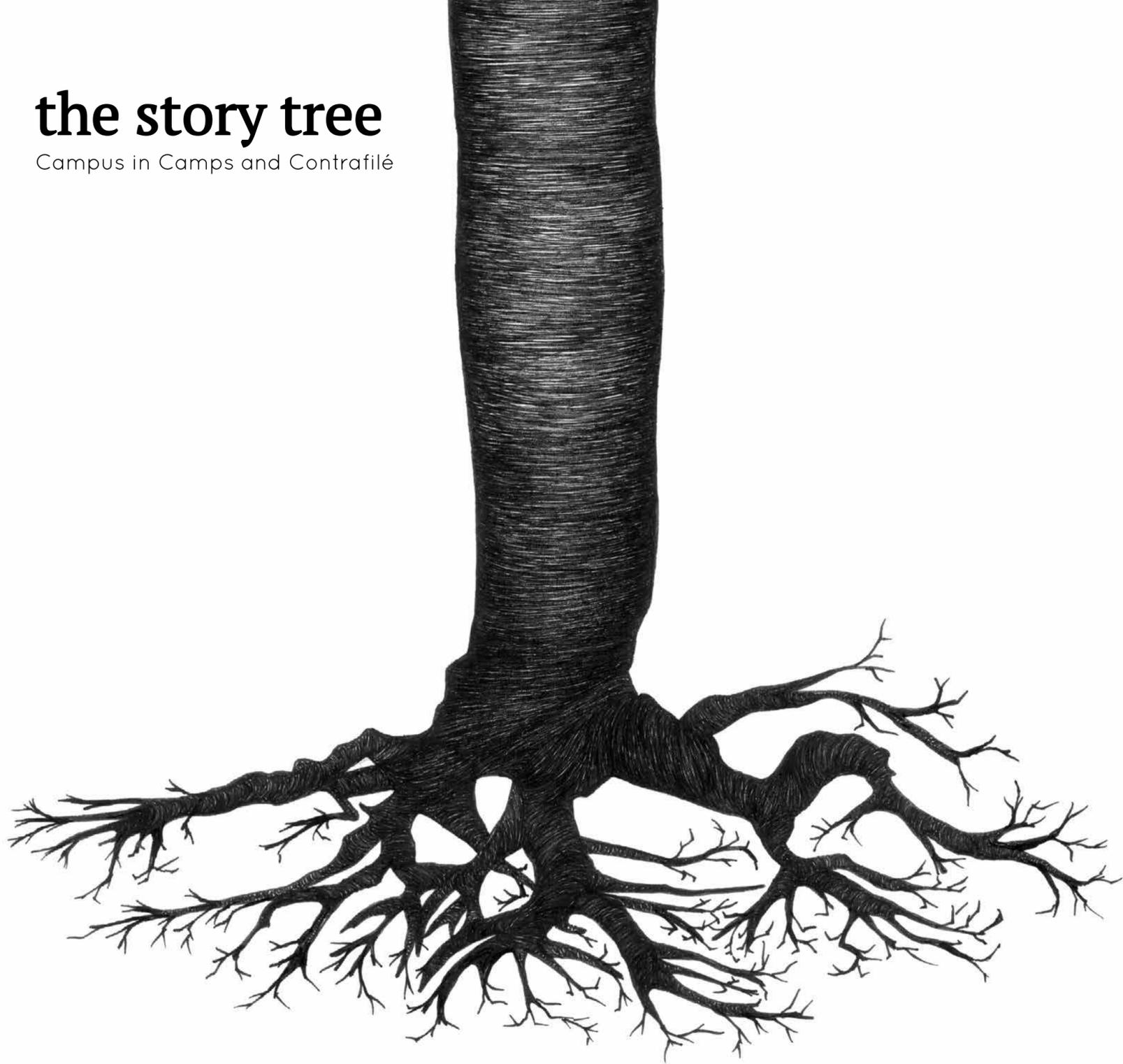
So you smell death and it's hard to get it out of your head and people carry lemons and vinegar with them to get the smell out. People are tired and they are broken. Enraged that Israel can bombard them like this, kill their children, and the world takes its time to break its silence. But in all of this there is also so much kindness. People take care of one another, comfort each other, and especially children who are looking for the best ways to support their parents. I've seen so many young kids, no older than 10 years old, hugging, comforting, trying to distract their younger siblings. They become caretakers of others so young. And all I think is that if Hamas grew out of the generation of the first intifada, where their young stones were met with bullets, then what is the generation that will grow out of the repeated onslaughts of the past seven years? What kind of teachers, parents, leaders will these kids grow up to be? By now, we can say that every single Palestinian child has lost an uncle or aunt, a parent or sibling, a grandparent, a neighbor, a school friend - someone they knew, someone who shaped their lives from war. No child is protected. I have not met a single child that has not lost someone violently and unnaturally.

I send you my hugs. I think of you often and wonder how differently the summer would have turned out if Israel had not launched another biennial war.

Love,
Shouridehh

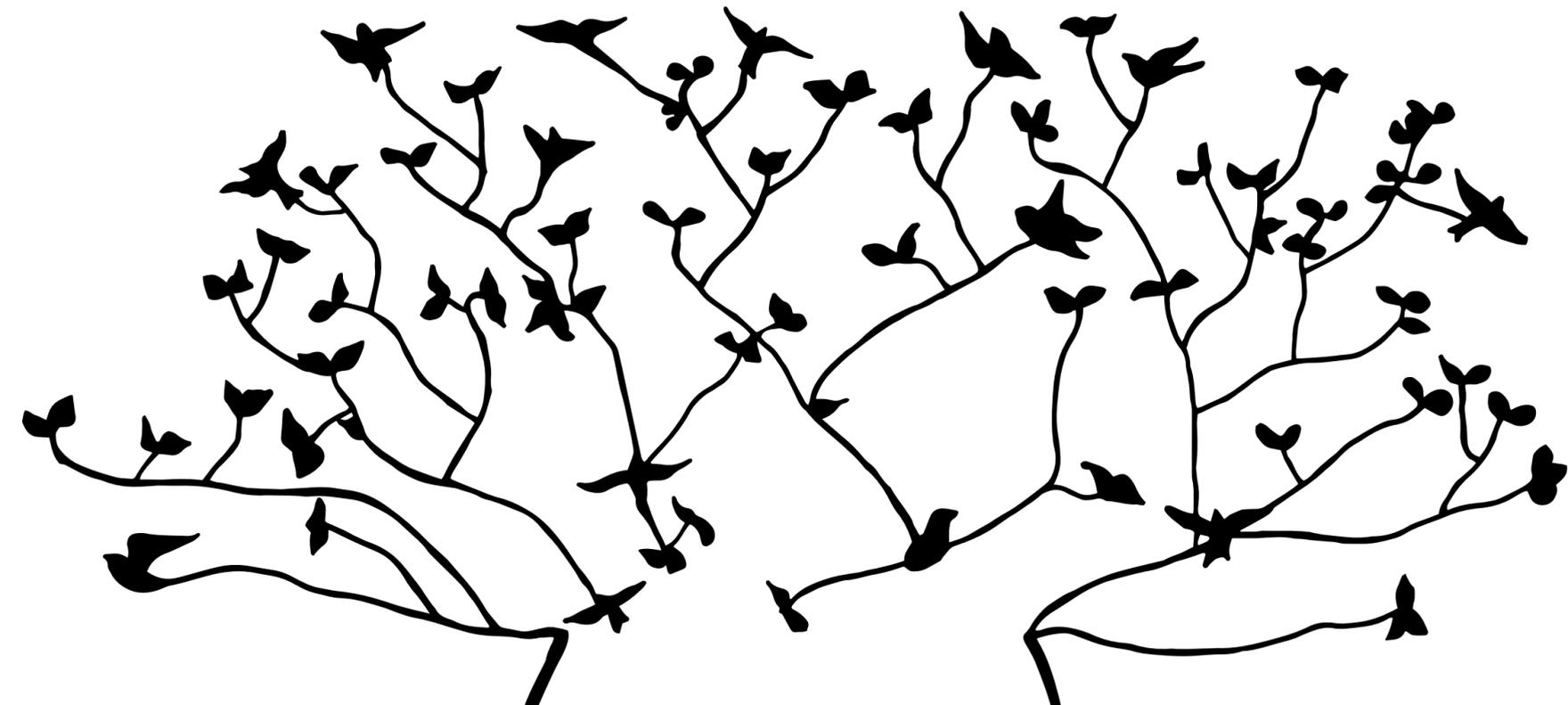
the story tree

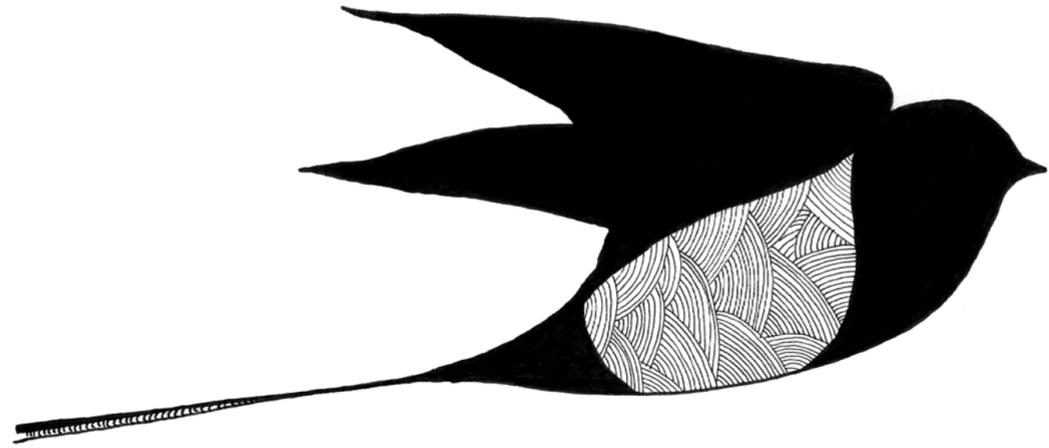
Campus in Camps and Contrafile



What do baobabs dream about?

Written and illustrated by Cibele Lucena





To fly like a bird you must be good at doing tricks, like flying low over thorny fields and steering away from windless weather, getting around in somersaults... This is just bird's talk!

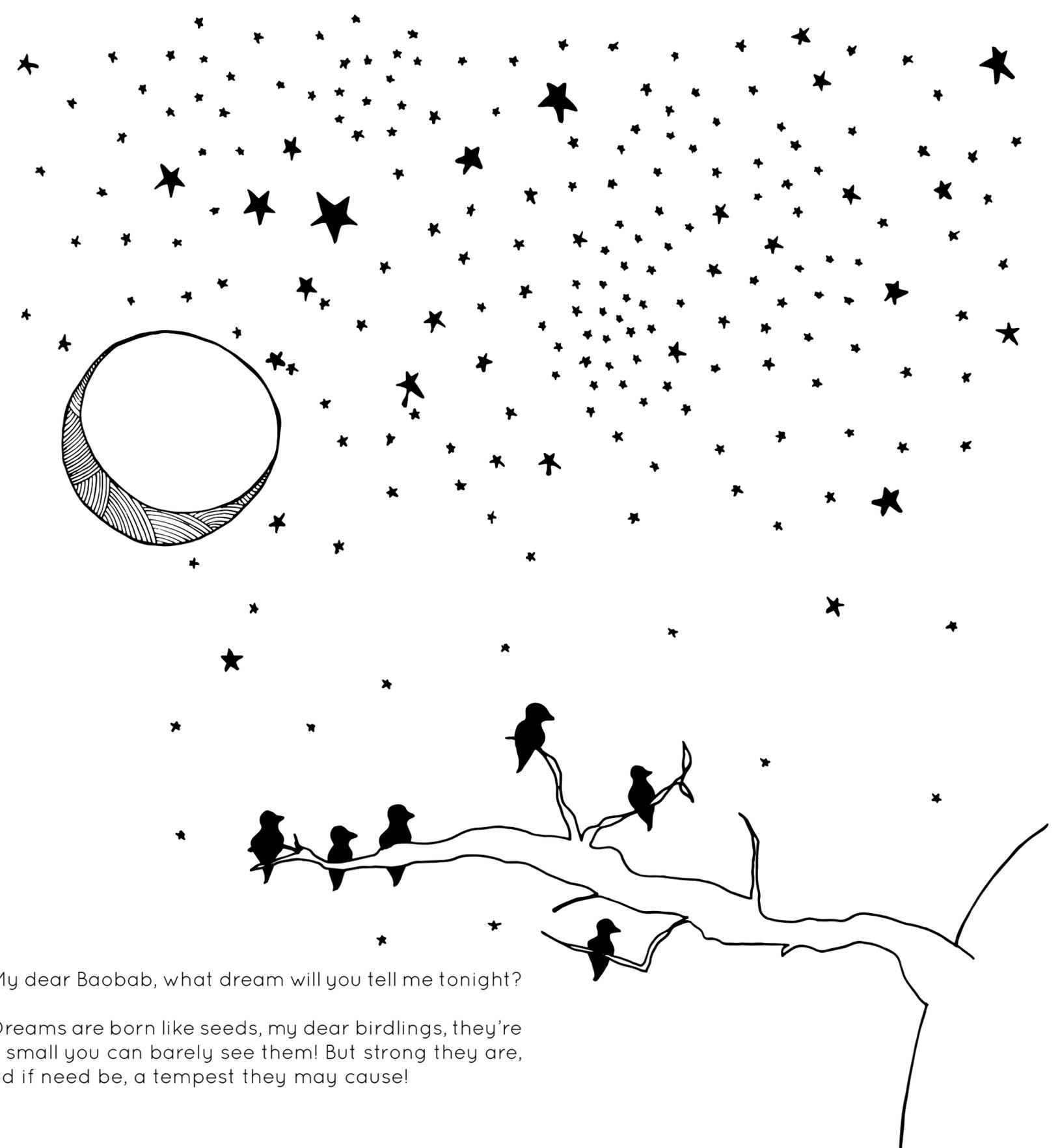
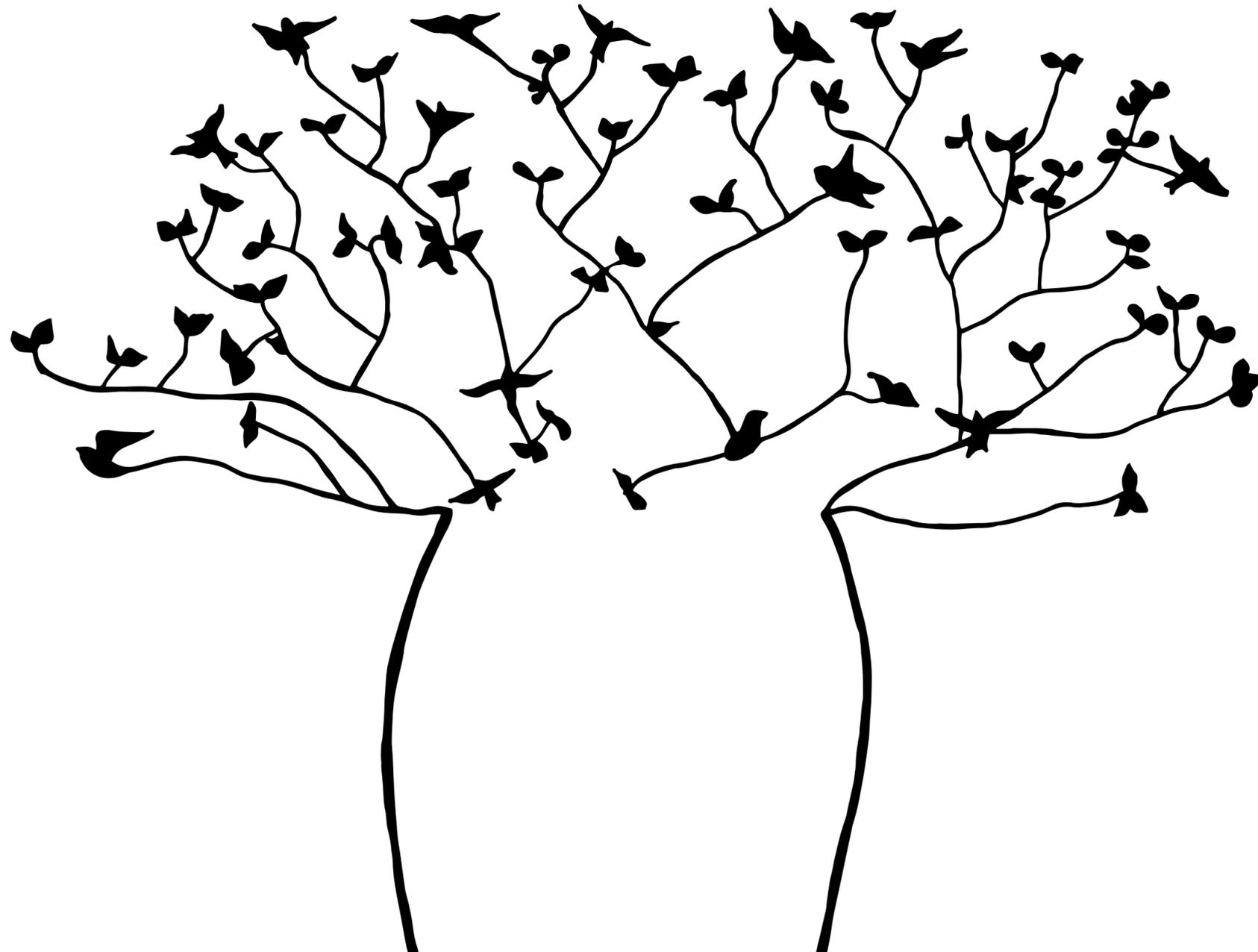


We're always many, always in flocks. When we soar it's like a song, we dance in pulsing steps, we sing in strident tweets, our gestures are vibrating waves of sound.

Yet we know silence...

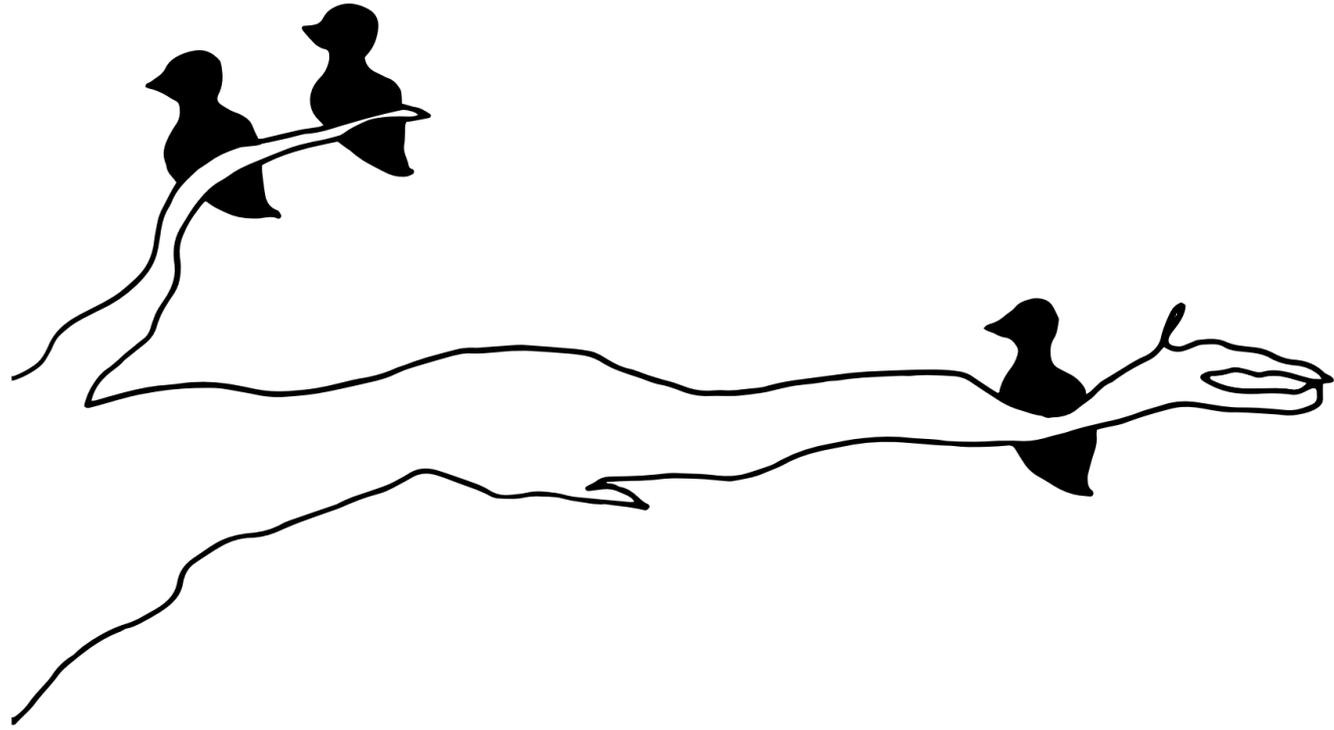
Silence is a special kind of action, and it's always at our service. It's a way of being, of moving from place to place.

At these moments, these quieter moments, just before sunset, we can listen to the most beautiful dreams.



- My dear Baobab, what dream will you tell me tonight?

- Dreams are born like seeds, my dear birdlings, they're so small you can barely see them! But strong they are, and if need be, a tempest they may cause!



The dreams the Baobab told us were not only his own, but also dreams that he had heard. Sometimes the tree would even tell our own dreams before we had dreamt them!

- I'll tell you a fresh little dream I just heard. It's a poet's dream. It was born in the thoughts of a grandmother. Her name is Mauri and she spends her life combining words. Such was the dream:

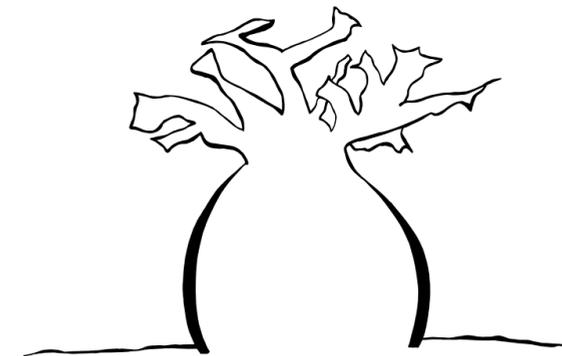
*Once there was a tree that looked pregnant
with many babies to give birth to while standing upright.
One of her creations were offspring with roots
That gazed back at the maternal sky.*

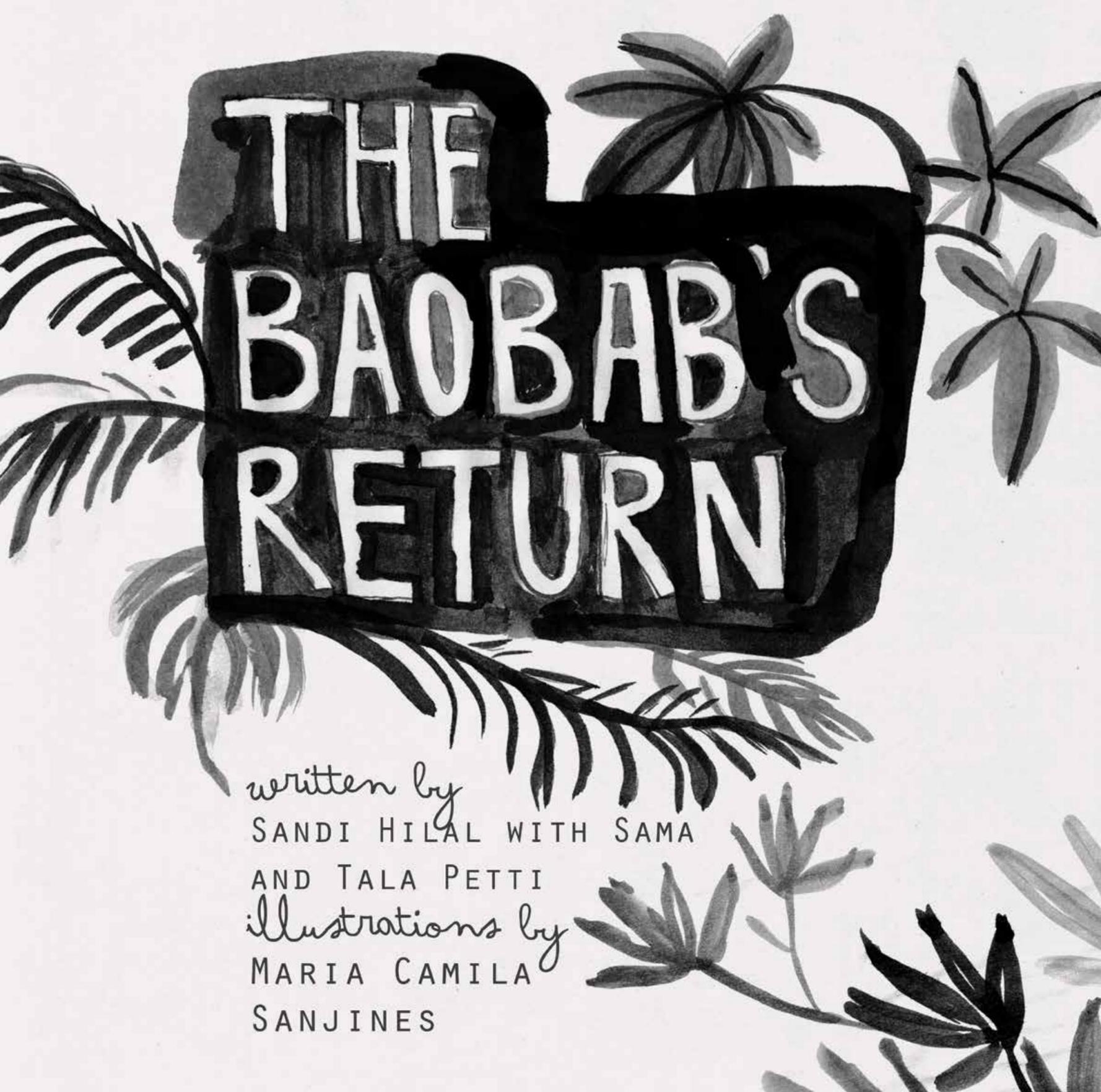
Things, inventions, resemblances of Mother Plant.

(poem written by Maurinete Lima)

- That's beautiful, Baobab! Won't you tell us one more dream?

- Mauri's dream also made me fly! Fly like a bird, like you birdlings fly! This morning, I dreamt a summer breeze, its windy voice whispered to me about all things that have the privilege to land, from the moment of taking off. It told me in the language of birds: plant your feet and swing, Baobab, and by doing so, you'll blossom.





THE BAOBAB'S RETURN

written by

SANDI HILAL WITH SAMA

AND TALA PETTI

illustrations by

MARIA CAMILA

SANJINES

ONE NIGHT SAMA, TALA AND THE CHILDREN
OF THE TREE SCHOOL WERE SITTING AROUND A
CAMPFIRE AT THE BEACH SINGING ALONG TO
BEATING DRUMS.

estou voltando pra casa com um pé de laolá, estou voltando pra casa com um laolá, ola ola lá ola ola lá





estou voltando pra casa com

um pé de baobá, estou voltando pra casa com um

baobá da da lá da da lá da da lá

SAMA AND TALA SANG ALL THE WAY HOME...

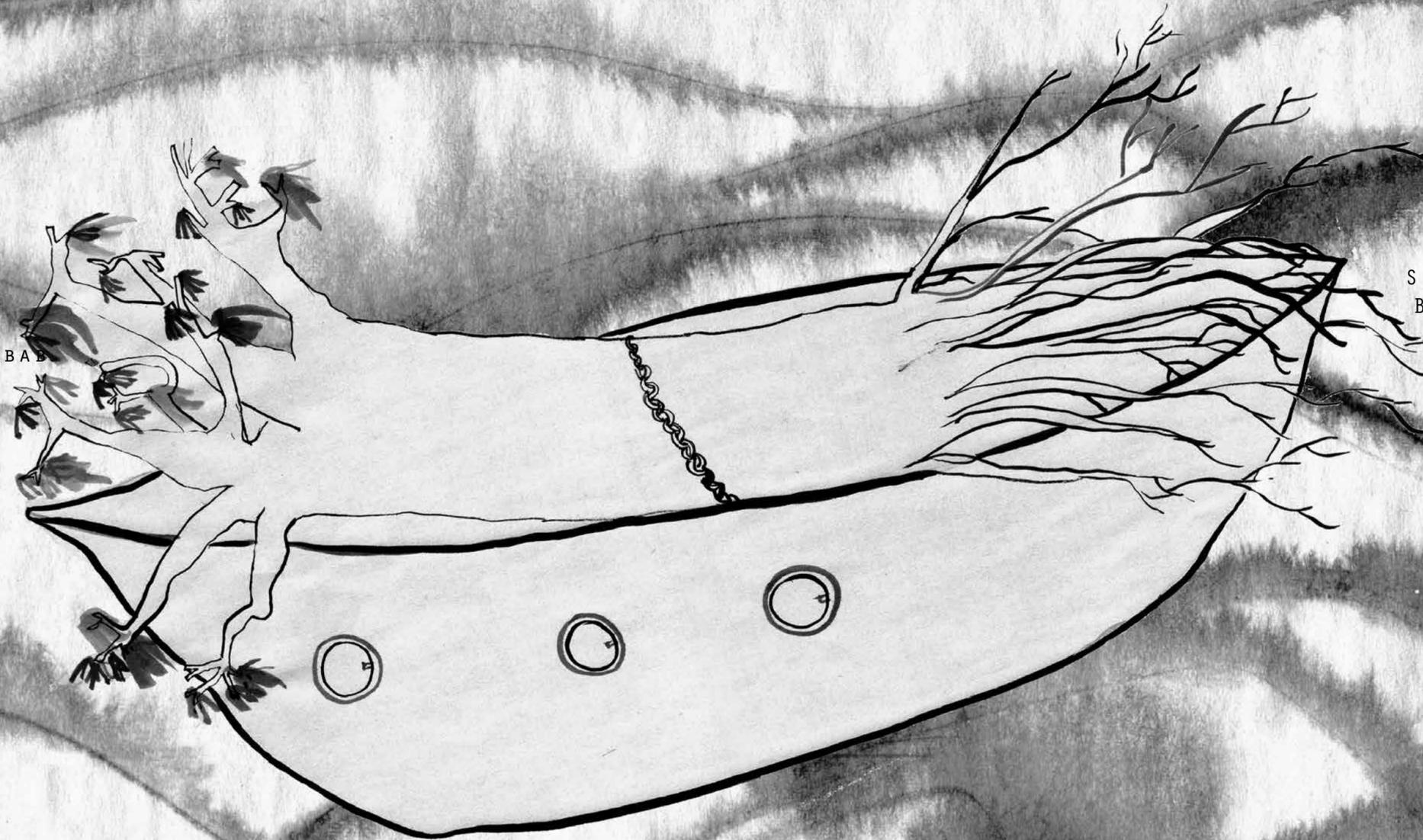


ONCE TALA AND SAMA WERE IN BED THEY ASKED THEIR MOTHER: "mama can you tell us the story of the baobab tree?"

"i do not know the story of the baobab but i can try to invent one" THEIR MOTHER ANSWERED.

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A BAOBAB TREE THAT WAS
FORCED TO LEAVE HER HOME IN AFRICA AND WAS SENT TO
BRAZIL ON A VERY BIG BOAT.

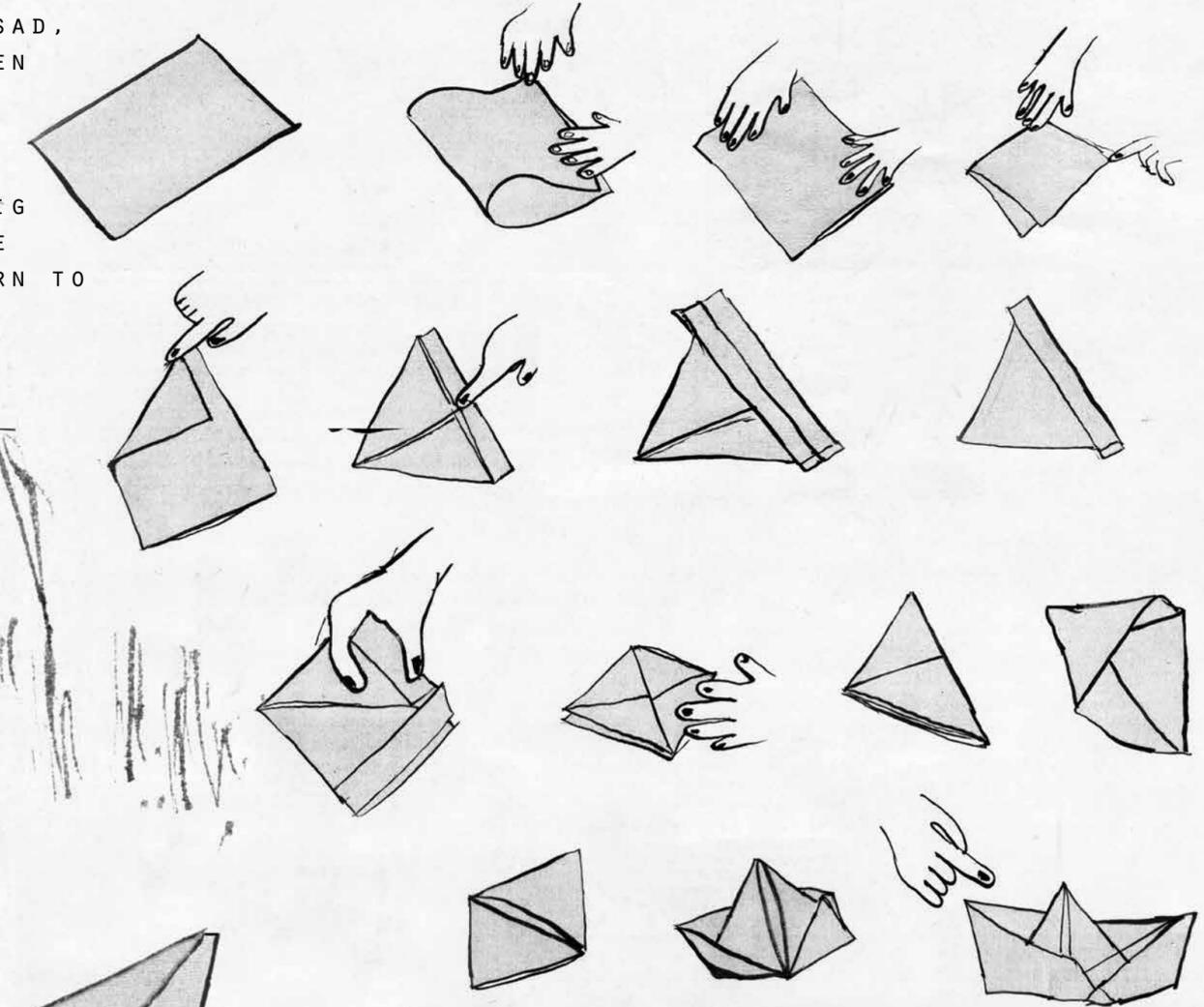
IN BRAZIL
THE SOIL WAS VERY
DIFFERENT, THE WATER TASTED
WEIRD AND NOTHING WAS FAMILIAR. THE BAOBAB
WAS VERY SAD.



SLOWLY SLOWLY THE
BAOBAB MADE FRIENDS
AND LEARNED TO LIKE THE
TASTE OF THE WATER, TO
ENJOY THE SOIL AND WAS
HAPPY AGAIN. HOWEVER
EVERY TIME SHE WENT TO
THE SEA IT REMINDED
HER OF AFRICA.

ONE DAY, THE CHILDREN OF THE TREE SCHOOL, TALA, SAMA SEBA, GIL AND RAMIRO, WERE PLAYING DRUMS UNDER THE BAOBAB TREE SINGING

SEEING THE BAOBAB SO SAD, THE CHILDREN DECIDED THEY WOULD BUILD THE BAOBAB A BIG BOAT SO SHE COULD RETURN TO AFRICA.



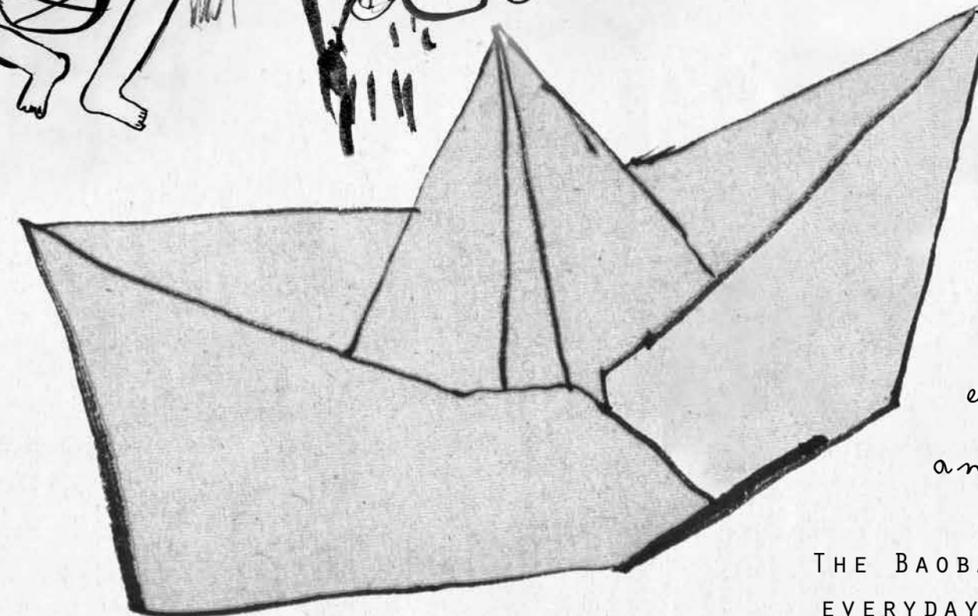
"estou voltando pra casa com um pé de baobá, estou voltando pra casa com um baobá"

THE DRUMS REMINDED HER OF AFRICA AND SHE WAS MISSING HOME.

THE BAOBAB SAID TO THE CHILDREN: *"i miss africa"*

AFTER THINKING A LONG TIME, THE BAOBAB TOLD THE children: *"i am very thankful that you built this boat for me, but if i leave to africa i will miss you all. i prefer to stay here. i even now like the taste of the water, the soil and i have many friends"*

THE BAOBAB STAYED IN BRAZIL BUT STILL MISSED AFRICA EVERYDAY. THE END...





TALA LOOKED DISAPPOINTED AND SAID:

*"mama i don't like this ending!
the baobab should go back to africa!"*

SAMA SAID:

*"i have an idea, mama will
invent a new ending"*

THEIR MOTHER SAID:

"i will try"

LOOKING AT THE BIG BOAT THE CHILDREN HAD
MADE FOR HER, THE BAOBAB SAID:

*"i will miss the soil, the water and all of
you, but i will come back home to africa"*

WHEN THE BAOBAB ARRIVED TO

AFRICA, SHE DISCOVERED THAT THE
SOIL WAS DIFFERENT, THE WATER
TASTED WEIRD AND SHE DID NOT
HAVE ANY FRIENDS.

THE BAOBAB WAS SAD AGAIN.

THE END...

THE GIRLS WERE DISAPPOINTED AGAIN.
THIS WAS NOT THE ENDING THEY HAD HOPED FOR.

"i don't like this ending either!" SAID TALA.

AND SAMA SAID: "i have an idea, mama invents another ending"

THEIR MOTHER SAID: "i am sorry girls but there is no other ending.
you have to choose, either the baobab stays in his home in brazil
and misses africa or the baobab goes to his home in africa and
misses brazil"

TALA AND SAMA WERE AGAIN DISAPPOINTED



"i have an idea, let's ask
other children to invent
different endings to
the story, they might
come up with an
ending that makes
everyone happy"

THE END!

THE END!

THE END!