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## “Mother-researcher”: articulations and practicalities in a research on care

*“Pesquisadora-mãe”: articulações e praticidades em uma pesquisa sobre cuidado*

**Daniela Dalbosco Dell’Aglío**

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## “Mother-researcher”: Articulations and practicalities in a research on care

“Pesquisadora-mãe”: articulações e praticalidades em uma pesquisa sobre cuidado

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This article proposes to reflect on practices of doing research on care, from the place of a “mother-researcher”, based on an ethnographic experience in a rural Commune located in a settlement in the rural area of Rio Grande do Sul (BR). Inspired by María Puig de la Bellacasa, we consider that ethics of doing research does not live in a “subjective” and difficult-to-access place, but it’s located in daily care practices, crossed by the possibilities of being “touched”, both in the material as well as affective sense. From scenes experienced in the fieldwork, in which being a researcher and a mother provoke a privileged situation, the concepts of “kin” and “touching visions” are rescued in order to perceive the boundaries between “me” and “other” as blurred, enabling relationships, creating reciprocal connections and articulations between being, whether human or not.

Este artigo propõe refletir sobre práticas do fazer pesquisa sobre cuidado, do lugar de uma “pesquisadora-mãe”, a partir de uma experiência etnográfica em uma Comuna rural localizada em um assentamento no interior do estado do Rio Grande do Sul. Inspiradas por Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, consideramos que a ética do fazer pesquisa não mora em um lugar “subjetivo” e de difícil acesso, mas está localizada nas práticas de cuidado diário, atravessadas pelas possibilidades de ser “tocada”, tanto no sentido material, quanto afetivo. A partir de cenas vivenciadas em campo, em que ser pesquisadora e mãe provocam uma situação privilegiada, os conceitos de “kin” e “touching visions” são resgatados de modo a percebermos as fronteiras entre o “eu” e o “outro” enquanto borradas, possibilitando relacionabilidades, criando conexões recíprocas e articulações entre os seres, sejam eles humanos ou não.

*Care; Mother-researcher; Feminist studies; Tentacular Thinking.*

*Cuidado; Pesquisadora-mãe; Estudos feministas; Pensamento Tentacular.*

## 1. Introduction: “Mother-researcher”, an emergency category

This article stems from reflections from a doctoral thesis, an ethnography in a rural community called Pachamama Commune, located in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul state, in Southern Brazil, more specifically in the pampa region, whose objective was to analyze practices of care in this context. Since choosing this topic, approaching the field and entering it, and by living that space daily for a month, it was possible to evoke and experience the situated position of “mother-researcher”<sup>1</sup> – considering that the researcher was accompanied by her daughter who was then three and a half years old. This hyphenated term, thus, is here elaborated in order to elicit the non-separation of the two categories present in this immersive research on care: researcher and mother.

How could it be possible to separate the researcher “me” from the mother “me” in the daily life of research, understanding that care happens all the time? This topic has also gained strength from comments during the thesis defense, which pointed to this category as an important statement of this work. In her discussion, one of the committee members noted that when she performed her fieldwork, even though she brought her children with her, she could not elaborate on the subject because motherhood was understood there as something that would allegedly “hinder” the research. As Mari Korpela, Laura Hirvi, and Sanna Tawah (2016) point out, ethnographers taking their children, husbands, or wives with them to the field has always been common, but they did not necessarily reflect on their presence and its implications. If we are starting from a situated perspective, as Donna Haraway (1996) suggests, we must take into account the meanings and impacts of being accompanied by children or family, since doing fieldwork also means forming relationships.

It was precisely women ethnographers who began to raise this issue and think about the presence of children and family in a research field (Cassel 1987, Cupples and Kindon 2003), from a feminist, gender perspective. Also, as suggested by Korpela, Hirvi, and Tawah (2016, 14), “the famous feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ can be turned into ‘the personal is data.’” The authors understand that during fieldwork it is impossible to distinguish between professional and personal. Fieldwork happens every day, encompassing friendships, social lives, and shared experiences, and therefore including, in these authors’ case – as well as in the present discussion – children. Realizing how much this theme resonates within the scientific and academic community, including the field of feminist studies, triggers an issue to be explored.

Korpela, Hirvi, and Tawah (2016) understand this presence of children as “accompanied fieldwork”. They suggest that, in this situation, three dynamics should be taken into account: first, how the child acts towards people in the field, that is, to also observe how the child relates to others; second, how private and professional life merge into one another, that is, being a mother and being a researcher intersect all the time; and, finally, the need to adjust to the conditions of the fieldwork itself, which could involve, for instance, the child being away from school,

1 The terms “mother-researcher” or “mother-researcher” express the intertwining of these two categories. Although both “mother” and “researcher” are nouns, the decision to place them following a qualifier-noun order was taken in order to stress the academic character of the researcher’s work while in the field, in addition to our daily motherhood activities and practices.

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where will they live, what will they eat, concerns that go beyond the researcher herself.

Besides, Hirvi (in Korpela, Hirvi and Tawah 2016) comments that her daughter brought up new and different perspectives when facing people, events and places where she was studying, which had an impact in the process of producing knowledge. At first, Hirvi was afraid that, if she paid too much attention to her daughter’s impacts on fieldwork, this could supposedly undermine her authority and credibility as an ethnographer. However, she later realized that she should embrace the opportunity that emerges from this specific collaboration. She understands that the child would not be a mere companion of the researcher, but rather plays a crucial role in the process of producing knowledge.

In Brazil, it can be seen that the issue of parenthood has already been discussed in the science field. The “Parent in Science” project (Machado et al. 2019) aims to highlight that parents often “fall behind” in terms of scientific productivity, and, for this reason, proposes some demands for equity. In anthropology, the debate on the relationship between motherhood and research practice appears as a reflection on chosen research topics, on possible interference in the field and in writing, and, also, as a debate with roots in the classics of anthropology and in Brazilian anthropology, in order to bring “personal, epistemological, investigative, and political” elements, as proposed by Rosamaria Carneiro (2020).

Alana Verani (2022), when interviewing anthropologists in training who are also mothers, noted that these women’s fieldwork experiences were marked by motherhood, informing their research – which points to gender and its intrinsic intersectional dynamics when doing research. She points out issues that can be understood as “positive” in this interference, such as, for instance, the education received by children during the field experience, when they participated in an Afro-Brazilian dance group and included in artistic performances. On the other hand, some issues raise tension, such as taking children to a place under threat or facing structural problems, such as lack of water, sanitation, and basic health.

However, unlike the proposal of this article, when Verani (2022) questioned her interlocutors if the presence of their children appeared in their work’s discussions, all answered no, also commenting that in their research groups there were no reflections on how knowledge production was impacted by motherhood. Despite efforts to raise this issue and its implications, it is still necessary to restate the non-neutral position of a researcher and mother.

From the perception of the emergence of the “mother-researcher” category, this article raises some questions in order to go beyond the issue, already discussed here, of whether the presence of children can be related to research or not: how is this experience or identity performed and constructed in the research context? Which material relations made up in the field elicit and make this category emerge? To answer these questions, from a theoretical-analytical perspective, this article is informed by a growing interest in studies that have been called neo-materialist feminisms, or, more broadly, those concerned with addressing the materialities and practicalities engaged in the production of realities.

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In a more practical way, this article starts from the perspective that the category “mother-researcher” emerges and is constituted from a multitude of daily tasks which highlight the agency of non-humans, such as: the moment of waking up, making and having breakfast together, making the bed, brushing teeth, washing dishes, organizing for the day’s tasks, cooking, joining the group to bring soil from the woods, milking a cow, fixing a broken fence, playing with children, taking out the trash, sweeping, among other tasks. Coffee, bed, toothbrush, sink, stove, soil, toys, broom, among other agents, constitute material relationalities that render the “mother-researcher” category possible.

In order to elucidate and discuss these provocations, this article will draw on the contributions by Donna Haraway (2016) and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017). In theoretical terms, both advocate for decentralizing the human subject in networks of care, since they understand that care has the potential to reorganize human-nonhuman relationships towards non-exploitative forms of coexistence. After describing the field and discussing some challenges of doing-research while being a mother and researcher, the concepts of kinship and tentacular thinking, as posed by Haraway (2016), as well as touching visions, as stated by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), will be brought with the aim of exploring the relationships created in the field that engage reciprocal connections and combinations between beings, whether human or not.

## **2. Ethnography and field experience**

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The research that triggered the discussions present in this article was an ethnography in a rural community located in a settlement in the countryside of the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the city of São Gabriel: the Pachamama Commune. The approach to the field took place gradually, involving previous visits and also previous contacts with some of the residents, that took place in other situations. Actually, the interest in this topic and the community itself was raised in an event where there was a conversation circle about “shared care”, in which three women living in the commune participated. At that moment, in 2015, I was pregnant, which already points to how research and motherhood are mutually implicated.

After two visits to the community and some online arrangements, the period of immersion in the field took place in September 2019. I lived there with my daughter every day, 24 hours a day, for this one-month period – which can be considered a “thick” experience, since we were immersed in the field, with very little external contact, carrying out daily activities, sleeping, eating, and experiencing whatever that context provided us with. It is important to highlight how isolated the commune is from the urban environment – which sometimes makes access difficult. It takes about two and a half hours to reach the nearest city, through a bumpy dirt road. Without a car and relying on public transportation, a bus runs around the region twice a week, but getting to the commune still requires a long walk. This distance also limits the stability and reach of internet and telephone

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signals, as well as making the electrical system sensitive and flawed – strong winds are enough to cut the electrical power. Besides, there are no public basic health units, grocery shops, or other services in the vicinity.

The Commune has been in place since the end of 2009 and was formed from a collective proposal brought by members of a political movement. The right to the land where the commune is located has been a political achievement of the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, the Landless Workers’ Movement) that same year, forming a part of a larger settlement called “Madre Terra”. What makes this commune different is how they propose to live as a community, sharing all tasks and production, unlike the nuclear family model that operates in the settlement. The main means of subsistence are honey and rice, as well as smaller crops such as oats, peanuts, cassava, and other vegetables.

The number of people living in the collective territory usually varies. As remote as it is, shifts for days off and long periods away from the community are common. When I lived with the group with my daughter, the residents were seven adults, two women and five men, and three children, who were between five and seven years old at that time. Among these adults, they have diverse life histories. There are those who have had previous rural experiences and those who have decided to join the commune due to its political proposal, coming, therefore, from urban environments.

Politically, this territory is aligned to anarchism, aiming for the construction of a collective life. With this end, the tasks are done in a shared and cooperative way – in which I took part in the period we were in the field. Those tasks include daily care practices, such as preparing meals, cleaning, tending the vegetable garden, milking the cow, taking part in political meetings, maintaining the physical structure, among others. Taking care of children is a structuring element for organizing the activities that happen within the community: each day of the week, an adult is assigned with offering an activity for the children, a practice they call “Ciranda”.

When arriving at the commune, the political position sustained there is easily perceived. As soon as we get there, we are greeted with a sign in which every letter A in “Comuna Pachamama” is written inside a circle, in the anarchist symbol called “A na bola” (meaning “A in a circle”). After passing the anarchist-referring sign and a red and black flag and entering the area of the commune, there is a slope going down toward the agrovillage, along which we find two houses. The first of them is the “collective” house, built on a collective effort called “mutirão”, where two members of the community were living at that moment. A little further down, there is the house called “rosinha” (or “little pink house”), where a couple lived with their daughter. In the slightly flatter region of the agrovillage is the collective kitchen, where everybody meets daily to have meals and hold meetings. Next to the kitchen, there is a tall water tank, about four or five meters high, which, in addition to carrying a red and black anarchist flag, features a green spray-painted “A na bola” symbol, a symbol for peace and “free love”, as well as some drawings of a tree and birds. Behind the kitchen is the vegetable garden, where there are different seasoning herbs, herbal tea plants, and vegetables such as lettuce and

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arugula. Next to it, there is also a shed storing building materials, tools, a rice peeler, some unidentified clutter, and a refrigerator with drinking water. Next to the kitchen there is a structure called Casa do Mel (or “Honey House”), the only brick house in the commune – the others are made of wood.

Furthermore, at the same horizontal level as the collective kitchen area, about 200 steps away, there are two more houses: the “red” house and the “purple” house. The latter had not been painted yet, but was occasionally referred to by that name. Two adult people lived in the red house, and another in the purple one. Two children took turns between these two houses. I stayed with my daughter in the purple house, which is the most recent in the commune.

Regarding bathroom use, habits change according to each house, but the general agreement is that urine can be expelled anywhere, since it is good for plants, and that feces should only be eliminated in dry toilets – which are later dug up and used as compost fertilizer for some crops. Both the pink and purple houses have attached bathrooms, with a specific place for such physiological needs, without need to go outdoors. The red house’s dry toilet, however, sits about five steps away from the building. In all toilets, it is necessary to lay a handful of rice husk, stored in a bag next to it, over the feces after evacuating.

I was not always able to meet the agreement of not urinating in the dry toilet, especially on cold, rainy days. So I ended up improvising other ways of urinating, such as using a bucket on the back of the house, in order to avoid getting out in the cold and the rain. My daughter was then in the process of toilet training – and mentioning this already shows a concern of a “mother-researcher”. For her, it was difficult to urinate where she could not sit, and when she tried, she ended up getting completely wet. I committed myself to, every morning, emptying and cleaning the bucket used overnight. These specific situations, among others, led me to reflect later on my relationship with the field, which intersects with my role as a mother and researcher, and being open to unpredictable, challenging situations.

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### **3. Practices and ethics of doing research**

The place of “mother-researcher” becomes evident as it enabled me to experience and think about care from my own specific experiences, also creating connections to the field. I realize that the position of a “mother-researcher” creates, at the same time, a place for exploring possibilities but also exposes vulnerabilities, since being with my daughter in the field required me to deal with her particularities and wishes. This place of “possibilities” can also be seen in dialogue with Hirvi (Korpela, Hirvi and Tawah 2016). In her reports of her experience with her daughter conducting fieldwork in Indian temples, she points out that the fact that her daughter “was there” allowed for empathy on the part of the subjects present in the field and that conversations about motherhood and children could flow with acceptance. At the same time, the place of vulnerability emerged in moments when the daughter “threw a tantrum” or vomited inside the car of one of the informants.



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In the experience at the Commune, these issues were similarly evident: occasional disagreements, specificities of developmental stages, such as toilet training, rejection of food, and also negotiations, were present throughout our stay there. In addition, since we are used to being just the two of us, she did not always accept experiencing every space collectively, demanding exclusive attention at various moments. At the same time, this allowed me to present myself in the field by showing my own specificities that go beyond being a “researcher”. There, I was a mother all the time, showing my vulnerable moments, my difficulties with negotiating, being open to possible criticism of my approach to mothering. At the same time, I believe that my identity as a “mother”, in a place with more children, has contributed to reaching out in informal conversations, since talking about them can sometimes be an endless subject that brings together those who have had similar experiences.

So I believe that my daughter was not just a companion during this process. She played a crucial role in making research and producing knowledge. I can say, therefore, that in different ways she was an active and present collaborator in carrying out this study. I would not be the same researcher if I were not a mother. It has impacted my research since the beginning, from choosing the research topic, through fieldwork, to the process of writing the thesis and, consequently, this article. Therefore, I understand that I had a privileged position that contributed to entering the commune, as well as it allowed me to have a sensitive and situated perspective when observing practices of care. It can also be said that I would not be the same mother if I were not a researcher, since my way of mothering was intentional about this openness and willingness to experience what we would face together.

Besides its relations to my ways of mothering and conducting research, this approach to analyzing how the place of “mother-researcher” relates to and is a part of fieldwork constitutes an ethical-methodological procedure that expresses my non-neutrality as a researcher. In addition, I understand that the category “researcher” relates to other agents, affiliations and connections, considering what I could achieve and even touch. Therefore, works by Haraway (2016)<sup>2</sup> and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017)<sup>3</sup> are brought here in order to elucidate the connections of materialities in dialogue with ethics and the methods of doing research.

### **3.1. Ethics of doing research, tentacular thinking and touching visions**

Not everything was always a novelty or a challenge. We were also impacted by common daily tasks, such as cleaning the house. Specific shifts and days were dedicated to cleaning, picking up clothes that were lying around the living room, gathering toys into boxes, sweeping, washing and storing dishes, closing and replacing a garbage bag, depositing organic waste in the compost bin located about fifteen steps from the house, folding bed sheets, and moving the double mattress we slept on near the wall, among other daily activities.

Daily tasks such as sweeping, cooking, washing dishes, collecting garbage,

2 A sociologist, philosopher, and historian, Donna Haraway is also a biologist, and this training and perspective permeate her academic life and her concepts. Relations with ecofeminism and the “artificiality” versus “naturalness” binary have been raised since her “A Cyborg Manifesto”, published in 1991, which uses the metaphor of cyborg identity to argue that bodies are built from ideas about them, understanding them as hybrid creatures between animal and machine, which inhabit and occupy both natural and artificial realms (Haraway 2009). More recently, in “Staying with the Trouble” (2016), the author seeks to rescue material issues that would supposedly be closer to what is socially understood by nature, but taking into question this “naturalization” of what comes from the earth, from what is organic.

3 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, a scholar who has dedicated her reflections to feminist studies of science and technology, care policy, and ecological thinking, will also bring great contributions to the reflections that follow in this article. Her most recent work, “Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds” (2017), establishes connections with materialities and ontology, since she understands that the subject is not prior to the relations with both human and non-human agents that constitute said subject.

storing, folding, washing, hanging and collecting clothes were constantly carried out. They were part of our routine while we were in the Pachamama Commune, in a similar way to what would have happened if I were in my house, but following the commune's specific agreements. The daily tasks, the "routine", the crafting of everyday life speak, at once, of care and ways of research.

As a conceptual perspective to think about the category of care, understanding it as more than "human worlds", it is necessary to take into account its relationalities. This is because Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) understands care as a generic making of ontological meaning, as an activity of the species with ethical, social, political and cultural implications, which includes everything we do to maintain, keep, and repair our world (bodies, selves, environments) in interdependent relationships between humans and other living beings.

The author also proposes to understand "care" as an "open-ended" category, analytical or provocative, rather than visualizing predetermined practices. That is, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) talks about how care is researched and understood, more than about how we supposedly "care". She is more concerned about thinking about this category in an analytical fashion – positioning it at the center of any analysis – than about pointing out norms or moralities. To this end, she focuses on three dimensions: maintenance, affective, and ethical-political, in order to expand relationalities of human and non-human things, which challenge traditional ethical limits and, consequently, contribute to specific rearrangements of alliances.

Although there are things we always do "in the same way" – the dimension of "maintenance", as proposed by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) –, I reflect on how I, as a researcher, was acting in relation to my daily tasks, together with my daughter – the ethical-political dimension. In my own house, perhaps, I would let the dishes stay a little longer on the sink or let clothes piled in some corner. In that collective space, I tried to ensure that our presence was not perceived as a nuisance to those with whom I was sharing the house during fieldwork. Therefore, I was keen to dedicate myself constantly to domestic tasks. This does not mean, in any way, that I have achieved some kind of "perfection" in accomplishing these tasks and activities. Unpredictability and poor executions happened often. However, if we are thinking of care as a practice that is not predetermined (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), or, as Annemarie Mol (2008) suggests, that it brings together heterogeneous elements and gives these connections certain contingent stabilizations, this daily work puts into action infinite possibilities for care to act and its ability to engage things.

From this narrative about the daily care of the place, it is possible to draw parallels between the ethics of doing research and the exercise of daily maintenance. Jonathan Metzger (2014), scholar in the field of urban studies and planning practices, calls "caring for place" the ethics of living together. Metzger (2014) dialogues with Puig de la Bellacasa, which leads him to the insight that the place is by no means exclusive to human existence. Drawing from feminist influences from studies of science and technology, the author suggests the expression "caring for place" which, for him, can enable a sensitivity in relation to the connections

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between the care of humans and non-humans, an ethical-political inclination that could lead to good things. For him, thinking about the place, more than focusing on what it is, refers to what it could be or what it can become. Therefore, “place” would not be a “pre-given” collective identity, but rather, the inevitable challenge of negotiating the present time within human and non-human relations – a time that produces and builds things collectively.

Research is also taking care of the place where one is located at a given moment, and “place” refers to a constant collective production. Joanna Latimer and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2013), when reflecting on the practicalities and materialities of doing research, suggest that there is an ethics that permeates daily engagements with care. The authors engage in a dialogue about practices related to bio-scientific research, allowing us to draw parallels with reflections on daily care practices and research in other contexts, such as conducting research in the Commune. One of these questions is how ethics works as a process of situated relationality. By relationality we can think of the engagements, the affections of the people involved and related objects.

Therefore, ethics is composed of agency and materiality. Here, the authors (Latimer and Puig de la Bellacasa 2013) are focusing on agency in situations of change and movement (“moving agency”), where relationships are marked by care. By care, they understand an affective state and also an obligation to “pay attention”. They also take “care” as a practical engagement with the world that reorders, exchanges, and reconnects relationships, and as a place of “continuous experience”, involving a range of material elements lived in de-centered, multi-lateral relationships.

Why is this notion of care connected with that of ethics? Precisely because care is never done alone: a network of relationships and belonging is needed for it to happen. Also, because attention to care has the particularity of distributing ethical responsibility among the practical materialities that are active in the processes of care. Here, this is not about an ethical subjectivity, but rather a set of material engagements that make up ethics. One example is a day in which I had allegedly not participated in any “directly collective” activity, but instead spent the day arranging the house where I was staying with my daughter. I had been relating to a set of objects and practices that make up the Pachamama Commune. Performing routine and collective tasks also means relating to people and things, and taking responsibility with and for them.

Therefore, research ethics here does not live in a “subjective”, hard-to-reach place, but is rather located in the material practices of daily care. These are concrete situations that make ethics evident: acts of maintenance and subsistence. Doing research does not rely on a “eureka” moment or an event that looks fascinating. The act of research is precisely in the attention to daily life (Latimer and Puig de la Bellacasa 2013), in caring for the place (Metzger 2014). I consider these reflections important in order to highlight the practice of daily care as a relevant research topic when taken together with a situated and attentive analysis of these practices.

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The ethics of doing research also implies recognizing my situationality (Haraway 1995), my connections with the field that go beyond that of a researcher, and rather encompass a broader set of practices such as those linked to being a mother, a feminist, with a previous experiences in anarchist movements, a white woman, from a family with rural roots, but living in the urban environment, with a specific way of cooking, taking care of the house, playing with children, among other social markers and elements that can emerge and have an impact on research. Objectivity is situated and informs which paths I have taken and am taking to establish myself as a scholar, mother, and researcher. Here, I understand these identities not as "fixed" ones, but as constitutive of the subjects, so I understand that doing research also constitutes me and makes me, throughout this process, closer to the "researcher" category than when I started this endeavor.

A research work is not only a way of understanding and framing a particular experience, but a report on a journey. This journey is not made alone: support is needed, whether from human or non-human agents. For it to be possible, it was necessary to form affiliations (to "make kin"). As proposed by Haraway (2016), "making kin" goes beyond conventional ideas of kinship, including other bonds and affiliations. In this case, what Haraway (2016) proposes is that we join not only humans, but also more-than-human agents, and that these affiliations, or kinships, produce social relations beyond blood ties. In addition, regarding the way of doing research, when we allocate "care" as the core of the analysis, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests, we can understand that these arms or tentacles set where the researcher can reach to give meaning to the category – that is, what are the relationships between humans and non-humans that care builds in the context of research? The category discussed and built in this article – "mother-researcher" – presents itself as one of these tentacles ("kin") that we can explore in this investigation.

In addition to the constant relationship with my daughter, people in the field and with non-human agents, I could also count on the support of friends, family, colleagues, as well as the theoretical assistance of those I had been reading and with whom I related academically in this process. Therefore, I understand that this research, focusing on the category and discussion of care, from the situationality of a "mother-researcher", engages in a dialogue with tentacular thinking (Haraway 2016) as a way of doing research.

As a methodological and epistemological background, tentacular thinking suggests creating extensions, tentacles. Haraway (2016) invites feminists to exercise this imagination, theory, and action, in order to unravel these connections which go beyond ancestry or genealogy. By making these connections, we would create a strategy of the Chthulucene<sup>4</sup> to imagine a world of multispecies eco-justice, that is, where these relationships, connections, kinships, go beyond the human category and embrace everything we can reach, touch, and think.

Haraway (2016) is proposing new ways of living in the world, in an ethical way that respects processes without providing answers prematurely. She understands that we can live collaboratively in order to be able to have experiences that em-

4 Haraway (2016) proposes the concept of Chthulucene in order to challenge the centrality of "man" in the idea of Anthropocene, and understands that it refers to the past, present, and also to what is yet to come, believing that this nomenclature could account for a grand history or theory, while at the same time leaving an open space for new and old connections that may be surprising. The Chthulucene would be the interweaving of temporalities and spatialities, human and non-human, gathered to allow multispecies sets to bloom. Seeing the Chthulucene as something open-ended and unfinished is precisely being able to see the process and propose new worlds.

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brace the complexity of what happens in the air, in the waters, in the rocks, in the oceans, in the atmosphere. She seeks to see the world in a way that respects what is yet to come, understanding that humans, non-humans, vegetables, fungi, bacteria share the same space, live together, are part of the same sociability. The author gives us numerous clues so that we can think, from the problem, from the present world and what is to come, about care practices, which connect us to the possibility of thinking about the place of a “mother-researcher”.

The tentacular body, for Haraway (2016), is not only defined by its form, but also by the specific and circumstantial conjunction between the body and everything it touches. Thus, we can imagine that the tentacular body refers not only to the body, but also to its extension, to what it makes contact with. This refers to the importance of knowing what we are relating to and, consequently, thinking and co-building worlds. We are not individual beings, and these tentacles are bound to us as an extension of the bodies. This non-individuality impacts our way of doing research: according to Haraway (2016), what we think matters, and so does what we “choose” to compose our thinking: knowledge, relationships, worlds, stories.

However, as says Haraway (2016), we do not think alone; and to “think-with” is to stay with the “*natureculture*” trouble of multispecies on earth. The author thus understands that it matters which stories tell stories as a practice of care and thinking. For Haraway (2016), it is in the exercise of thinking that we form bonds with those we choose to think with. That is, we think with things. According to her, by establishing connections, creating tentacles, we are building practices that go beyond thinking, and this is “staying with the trouble.”

The tentacles also make me think about the image of the “octopus mother”, the one that represents a mother whose arms are connected to caring of children, work, affective and sexual relations, domestic work, physical activity, self-care, among others. It is implied that for a mother to handle these many tasks, many arms would be needed. Considering that I am situated in a position of “mother-researcher”, as explicitly stated here, I believe that, by engaging with Haraway’s (2016) ideas about tentacular thinking, we can propose an analogy showing that, for research to be possible, we need to connect ourselves to different supports, with many arms, legs or tentacles – which leads to an overlap of tasks and even exhaustion.

In addition, in dialogue with Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), it is possible to draw a connection between research methods and the idea of “touching visions”, which means to pay attention to what can touch us and be touched, deepening perception, affection, and thought. Contact with touch, for Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), intensifies a “co-transforming” sense, that is, it creates reciprocal connections between beings, whether they are human or not. Touch is where boundaries between the “I” and the “other” are blurred, allowing an immediate relationality. For the author, the idea of touch does not only imply a physical sensation, but also involves an affective sensoriality, in the sense of being touched/affected by the experience.

More than a “vision”, the haptic, or what is related to touch, gives strength to research by giving meaning to politics that cannot be perceived otherwise in

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everyday practices, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests. This reflection leads us to a scene that I have experienced in the field:

### 3.2. “Embracing touch” in a research on care

*It was the first day of rain, after a very warm day, and the power had already gone off. We were in a wooden house, with wooden floors, two adults and four children, one of them my daughter, three and a half years old then. This house is the latest one built in the community. It seems to have approximately 64 square meters, being formed by a bedroom with a double bed, a wardrobe, and a television, and a large room divided into three areas: the office, with a wooden bookcase against the wall, storing many books, a wooden table, with a black chair, and some boxes filled with toys; the living room, with a sofa, a wooden chest storing sheets and blankets, a large carpet on the floor, and a record player; and the kitchen, equipped with a stove, refrigerator, electric oven, sink, cabinets, and a table with four chairs.*

*It was still morning, the children were full of energy running around the house, playing with toys they took from the boxes near the office. Among the toys there are many superheroes, such as spider-man and warriors, as well as some stuffed animals, swords and some school supplies such as scissors and pencils. They had already scattered lots of toys on the floor. All of a sudden, the oldest of them, who was six years old, takes a pair of scissors and cuts a bit of my daughter’s hair. When I see that hair on the floor, I feel sad about the whole situation: her hair was cut without her consent, while I, as a mother, had never cut any bit of it. Soon after, she is hugged by another five-year-old, a very strong child. She then feels suffocated and cries. Feeling exhausted by the situation, and also being in the most intense day of my period, I feel a physical, bodily need to lie down, and go rest on the bed. At some point, the children enter the room. They begin to jump over me and try to pull me out of the bed. Maybe I would want to scream, but I felt like I couldn’t utter any word and I just started crying. The children looked scared at the situation and stopped. Later on, my daughter starts looking through the door, to the tree about 20 steps away, where a swing was attached. She starts crying, asking to go to the “playground”, referring to that part of the community. Because of the rain, I do not allow her to; very frustrated, she cries a lot. Then, I reflect on the limits between “inside” and “outside”: in that situation, there was no way to “escape” from inside the house.*

This scene evokes various elements previously mentioned in this debate. One is the unpredictability of crafting care. There were many rainy days in that rural environment in which it was not possible to go outdoors, making us create ways to care for the children in that indoors environment and without using any electric power. Visualizing care, thinking with Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), does not happen as something that exists a priori, but takes place from the material relations that are established in the scene. In this case, a kid’s hair being cut, which resulted in a bad feeling, was possible because of the things available in a box, together with the rain falling outside. The children used the tools that were around them, as well as the adults. Also, the scene shows the vulnerability of the “mother-researcher” exposed to people in the field. Not feeling well, having conflicts about the rela-

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tionships between the children, not knowing how to limit a desire, among other movements entailed by that, did not stop me from being “researching” at that moment – which leads us to a reflection on the bodily relationships of a “mother-researcher”: the touch.

In Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2017) understanding of the category of “care”, it is possible to take care as the core of the analysis, since the author understands it as omnipresent, even if by the effects of its absence. Therefore, it can be understood that care can be good, as well as it can oppress. This point of view deconstructs the idea that care would be in some way related with moral or a supposedly “good care”, since any notion that care is a warm and pleasant affection is connected to a moralistic attitude about feeling good.

The analysis of this scene, applying the concept of care as proposed by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), dialogs with the idea of a tentacular method (Haraway 2016) and of situated knowledge (Haraway 1995), together with another suggestion by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017): “embracing touch” needs to be a part of our way of doing research if we are to take into account the relationships involving care. Unlike seeing, which allows us to only look without being looked at, touch creates an inherent reversibility. Therefore, engaging touch in doing research means to understand situations beyond the metaphor of vision, but rather involving exchanges of mutual affection.

Still, it is necessary to highlight that touch, as well as care, is not a harmless affection, nor is it intrinsically good or pleasant. The reported scene happened on a rainy day when I felt unwell and went to rest. The children did not respect my alone time and “climbed” me, making me experience pain and at the same time sadness for feeling that I was somehow unable to escape. Having a research experience in which I felt “suffocated” shows that being willing and open to touch can bring both pain and pleasure. Touch somehow reduces the distance in a relationship, which can also be uncomfortable. Therefore, touch requires limits, as well as relationships that take place in the field while doing research. The body requires limits, barriers, and consent. When talking about limits in the field, it is necessary, in turn, to have “tact”: to show sensitivity and attention to the demarcations imposed. Not everything is possible or allowed, not even when it comes to my own accounts. Touch expresses, thus, the ambivalence of caring – present in the “mother-researcher” category.

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#### **4. Bringing back the “mother-researcher” category, and conclusions**

By recapitulating the experience in the field and the main category discussed in this article, by “mother-researcher”, I realize that during the time we were in the Pachamama Commune we were intensely present in that space. My daughter and I participated in collective activities, that is, in the care networks proposed by the community. The ways I dealt with attitudes and actions there emerged while writing the thesis, since, as a mother, I was experiencing the context while at the same time I was taking care. Being willing to do so was challenging both for me,

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as a “mother-researcher”, and for my daughter, who was used to an individualized and urban way of care.

It was possible to realize that being available to the unpredictability of the field was part of an ethical procedure that makes it possible to be in genuine touch with the environment. Haraway (2016, 1) warns that “to be truly present” is a prerequisite to staying with the trouble, it is paying attention to the process of building places, times, subjects, meanings. This shows that processes are never “finished”. Living intensely that day to day life, a “thick present” (Haraway 2016), contributed to my immersion in the field and to the construction of the category discussed here, of “mother-researcher”. This category is still under construction, as it is “open-ended” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 6). Therefore, less than trying to define what the concept of “mother-researcher” would be, this was an ethical and methodological exercise on how a category is constructed from practices and their relationalities.

“Mother-researcher” emerged as a situated position that contributed to entering the field, from the understanding that I shared roles similar to those of the people living in the community – blurring possible boundaries opposing “researcher” and “researched”. I was not just a researcher in that context. I was a mother. Because of this, I was open and available to the unpredictability and vulnerabilities of an intense day to day life. The present discussion, therefore, reflected on the implications, practicalities and engagements that reverberated from this category, which can be considered a necessary ethical-methodological tool for feminist studies and for research on care.

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