

The fascination with life

Every month, as a result of one of the neglected tropical pathologies of this region, we meet people who are reincarnated as animals in this immense Amazon region, because they believe that when the body dies, it takes the form of a sacred animal in order to remain present in their community. This belief is maintained above all in isolated rural areas severely affected by these pathologies.

But despite the suffering caused by being a carrier of one of these diseases, they continue to find life fascinating : and they manifest it daily, when they have recourse to their beliefs, in gratitude for being able to carry on despite so many setbacks. For those of us who come from abroad, it is not always easy to understand them, above all because we rebel against what we consider to be unjust. Here, falling ill is part of being a citizen of this region, due either to the fact that they have not been diagnosed in time, or to the inadequate social care given to those who live in this riverside region. But, as I have said, their love of life is such that it makes them resistant to almost everything, although they have almost nothing. We were able to verify this capacity for resilience once again, a short time ago, when we discovered Janaina, whose vital signs were very precarious. She was able to hold out almost two weeks, until she could be brought to the city, thanks to her fascination with life and to a small styrofoam incubator connected to lanterns worked by crank handles, and thanks too to the supportive whispers of her teenage parents, helping her to resist.

Every two hours we took turns, so that these lanterns did not stop emitting heat, and, as the days passed, our thoughts crossed those of her family, expressing confidence, because we knew that despite her young age, her gaze showed her wish to carry on living. In the end we succeeded, rather exhausted, but with the conviction that between all of us we had contrived to maintain the vital signs of our little Janaina.

Perhaps, as one person told us on seeing us succeed : "It has been possible because of the madness of you people from outside, who do not give up, being familiar with the challenge of doing the impossible in a permanently challenging and realistic context."

As a team of health workers, we ask ourselves, "For how long will we witness such human vulnerability ?" The response of those who receive us into their communities is that nature decides ; and we continue to stress with our work praxis that in these communities it is possible to evolve towards a situation where parasites, bacteria or viruses are not present in their lives in a systematic way.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the determinism that guides their lives, since they are above all guided by the influence of the rainforest. In some ways it represents violence : the rains are torrential and can cause much damage. On the other hand, it protects them by isolating them from the outside world. It also provides its inhabitants with a diversity of important knowledge, and this very specific knowledge may be the reason why they are capable of such resistance in spite of appearing extremely fragile in the face of natural surroundings which are always powerful and imposing. Perhaps it is precisely this vulnerability that motivates them to be serene in the face of so many ups and downs in life. Nazinha, the shaman of the black waters igarapé, said of the lives of these people "that if we are enthusiastic about each moment of our lives we will find the meaning of everything we create."

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