

B I R T H



This script is part of the B!RTH project managed by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, supported by the Oglesby Charitable Trust and originally commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester.

Please note that the B!RTH plays are available for use only by educational organisations, charities and NGOs (until October 2019) providing no ticket price is charged and no profit is made. All online and printed copy must include B!RTH crediting and branding. Creative requests from theatre makers or similar must be passed to the writers by the B!RTH Creative Director, for their consideration as the writers own all theatrical rights. Please visit www.birthdebate.com for more information and to receive a resource pack and crediting guidelines.

BRAZIL:

THE BIRTH MACHINE

by Marcia Zanelatto translated by Mateus Ciucci

The characters can either be played by one actress or by an ensemble. If the latter is chosen, the narrator should be played by the same actor who'll be playing the mother and the daughter.

Characters:

The Narrator	Between 40 and 45 year old Brazilian woman
The Ancient	Indigenous Midwife - a very old Brazilian woman
The Catholic Midwife	An old Brazilian woman
The Mother	70 year old Brazilian women
The Spiritual healer /grandmother	An old Afro-Brazilian woman
CineBirth	Commercial voiceover
The Sister	35 year old Brazilian woman

The Friend 30 years old Brazilian woman

A historical panorama of the birth in Brazil from the beginning of the 20th Century to the beginning of the 21st Century.

The Birth Machine was commissioned for the BIRTH festival and first performed in October 2016 at the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester UK with the following cast:

Narrator Shobna Gulati

Directed by Natalie Diddams

Prologue: Birth: The Unspeakable Mystery

The Narrator

In the face of the newborn I see
The work of Chronos, God of Time
In solid form pure alchemy
Of liquids soft and smooth

In the face of the newborn I see
The first and last beating heart
Universe and atom at once
A rare dance, nature's art

In it, volcanoes of yonder
And the impenetrable mysteries of the deep ocean

In it, century old forests
And the warm undecipherable womb that put us in motion

In the peaceful rest of this tender face
In a frontier between plain death and overflowing life
Inhabiting one vast and absolute future
Electrical currents able to disable the mightiest strife

The face of that who is born: source connection and finish line.

Hark, Lord, of all the machines
We are yet to learn how to nurture
Shall this be the fullest, the most complete?

1. My parents and my motherland

The Narrator

Within my family's delicate history runs my motherland's colossal past and present and today I will tell you, inspired by my own relatives, how the birth machine works in my country.

Verônica, my great great-grandmother, had her first son in 1903

Sylvia, my great-grandmother, had her first son in 1922

Izabel, my grandmother, in 1945

Regina Célia, my mum, in 1970

And me, I had my first son in 1994

A country grows much like the families in it do.

My great grandma on my dad's side had twelve children.

My great grandma on my mum's side, ten.

My granny on my dad's side had seven children.

My gran' on my mum's side, she had nine.

My mum and my dad, they had six, from which I am the oldest.

I, on the other hand, have only one son.

Maybe, my country is already quite crowded.

Looking at your parents you can see your motherland.

My relatives are descendent from European immigrants that witnessed their dreams trampled by wars during the nineteenth century. They thought it wise to move their

dream-like lives to a tropical continent, albeit not fully developed one, but, still, rich with opportunity.

My paternal ancestors came from the place we now call Italy, in around 1860. One of my great-aunts was born by the sea and was given the name of Marina. Right after my family arrived in Brazil, my granddad's granddad was killed by the indigenous people – who were considered by many immigrants as second class humans, much like said immigrants were seen by the Italian aristocracy way back when. And therein lies the roots of one of my country's biggest political problems: agrarian law reform. My granny told me that her dad, a Spaniard, captured her mum, an indigenous woman, and made her his wife. Sometimes the fury and indignation that I can feel in my woman's body seem to be echoes of her damaged heart.

As far as my maternal ancestors, they came from Portugal to settle at the Southeast region of Brazil, same area the Portuguese Court decided to call home. Unlike the Italian immigrants, these ancestors, coexisted with the slavery. My mother told me that her granddad was lover to a slave with whom he had children. But, unfortunately, for us, we never had a chance to meet that side of the family. The upside of this is that anyone who I see on the street and causes me some empathy, is potentially a distant cousin.

Even after slavery was abolished, Portuguese immigrants passed on the lesson to their children that slaves were second class humans, much like the Portuguese immigrants were seen by the Portuguese Royal Family. And therein lies the root of one of my country's biggest social problems: racism.

I have a secret for you. Countries do not exist. What really exist are peoples - and their cultures, their Histories, their love and their pain.

2. The Ancient Indigenous Midwife

The Narrator

1903

Night. The leaves rustle in the wind.
Nearby, the sound of ever flowing water.
A creature runs in the forest, but we can't see.
The crackling fire lessens the dark evening.

There, in that tiny immigrant village,
Live my great grandparents Verônica e Pedro
She is in labor.

As she suffers the contractions,
An ancient indigenous midwife sings old rhymes, with affection.

An indigenous song softens the atmosphere.

(Reference: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ_MRj_aniQ)

The following poem can be put into music. The narrator's voice becomes a century old, her chant, long and full of repetitions, expresses the patience necessary to the labor.

The Ancient Indigenous Midwife

I.

The woman with child
Needs herbs, herbs to bathe in
And herbs for tea

Swamp smartweed for the kidneys
Pitanga to soothe the bladder
Chicken broth to make her strong
And nettle leaves for the blood, I tell ye

For when the belly shows
Until it is no more
This is what you must know:

Dendê oil
Wetting both hands
Heat it by the fire's amber
Polish the belly as if with sand

If you do it well
As the child grows
Its feet will move up
As the head unfurls

II.

The little one has its time
Made known by pain itself
Softened by a sip of tea and a warm bath
In a trough or a bowl

Nutmeg, cinnamon and ginger
Downed together from a cup
Your gaze observing alert, singe her
Your mind aware, all bring luck

III.

When it's finally time
She'll scream like thunder
Lay Saint John's Wort in warm water
Create a balm of wonder

One portion to drink
The rest to bathe her in
Hurrying up the contractions

Then lay her in a hammock
Of straw and wider bradding
Blood flowing to the ground
Deep into Earth, seeking connections

Sitting, knelt or squatting down
Let her stay as she wills
Just make sure someone has her back
Comforting her, lessening her chills

Once more:
Drip almond oil
Wetting both hands
Heat it by the fire's amber
Polish the belly as if with sand

IV.

When the time comes,
The chrysalis breaks off
Flutters to a life of butterfly
The cord stretches, releases the placenta

The child, like liquid, flows to the ground
Hold it by its head
With hands together, soft and round

A three-fingers length from the bellybutton up
Precise spot where to cut the cord
Warm water with gusto to clean the pup
Make it feel safe, by your hands adored
But if by chance its feet come first
Out the house you go in prayer

The child might have come but not to stay
Death might win against life a dare

Then it's time for the placenta
To be removed and given to father
Outside the house it shall be buried
In secrecy, curious eyes shall not bother

Bathe the mother in warm water with salt
A girdle on her belly to make it new
Then lay her to rest and sleep
In a draft-free bed, for her health to keep

Manioc flour and chicken broth. a feast well deserved
For the mum, the best, chicken thigh and breast
And for the family, well, all that is left
In three days' time camphorweed laxative she must drink
To clean the intestines and erase the stretch marks
Rub the belly well up and down and all around
Then tighten the girdle to reshape the belly, make it new

Every day at nighttime you
Sage all corners of the house you
Light up the oil lamp to
Ward off the bad juju

And so to end the struggle for once
Thank the force beneath the umbilical line
Or as it is called by the ancient
The mother of the body, an entity, divine

3. Hiding the sacred rite that ties the earth to the birth.

The Narrator

Verônicas's boy, Fidélis, was born and stayed alive
He could have been born and have then and there died
In precarious conditions, a matter of public health
Resources were lacking, even for the midwife, her knowledge, her only wealth

Long time later,
Fidélis and Verônica met by the docks
The end result of this meeting, my joy
For his son's son would be my father's father

Now, we are in 1922.

The indigenous persons then not converted
Succumbed to the violence of racial prejudice
On their behalf, indigenous midwives called upon catholic saints
In silence, during the ancient ritual, trying not another soul to miss

The narrator lights a candle and this gesture triggers a voice change, from hers to an catholic midwife, Licinha.

Licinha, a Catholic Midwife

(She sings)

*Antonio, darling saint,
I invoke thee, hear my complaint
Bring forth the Lord's grace,
Let my Redeemer be present in this place!
Antonio, darling saint,
Appease this fervour!*

*(*Prayer for Saint Anthony – reference: video 'The Midwife's wisdom, 2'40"*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JycBeF4JO M \)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JycBeF4JO M))

The Narrator

Licinha used to wear cheap calico dresses
Her house, left-overs of a tent, clay walls and naked ground,
It was one of those midwives
Who brought the mother of my mother Sylvia into light

Licinha speaks with heavy cadence; her use of the language could be described as precarious. Her innocence is clear. She has the voice of the simple people, those that are pure of heart. As she tells her history to the pregnant woman, she twists a white cloth in a bowl with red water. While the woman has contractions, she wets the woman's forehead and body with said water.

Licinha, a Catholic Midwife

Oh, my sweet, don't worry! Patience and force, is all you have to do! The rest leave it to me, I've brought over a thousand children to the world! I will tell to you!

I started little! I was just a little girl. And d'you know who taught me? It was her, that old woman. Same one who delivered me mum, same who delivered me granny. She delivered us all out. My younger siblings and me as well.

One day she comes up to me and says, she says:

'You sa com' here, pup! Now listen, you sa com' with me 'cos I will teach you how to deliver them babies outta bellies so when you is old like me, you be ready to take my place. Cos I is old!', she'd say.

And she was quite old, well over a hundred years old. I stood by her side, watching her every move. Quietly, of course. She'd get crossed whenever I ak'sed her sum'thing. She'd tell me to shut me mouth and pay attention. And, yeah, I did see a lot. A lot. Holy Christ! This one day, for eg'zample, this woman went into labour and nobody knew what to do, yeah? So they called me. I get there, yeah, I get there and the little thing is out, the ants already crawling over it. Things that happen in a clay house, yeah? So I ak'sed,

I told them to warm up some water that I was going to help! And I Do it since I was a little girl. I must' deliverd over 1088 children by now. Me and my Saint Antonio! You are a luck woman!

I act exactly like her. Bathe the women in warm water; give her tea to calm the nerves! And, when the baby boy crowns, I grabber him and cut the cord right at the three-fingers mark. So I give the string a good knot, I wash the baby with warm water and then I clothe him. And I Do it since I was a little girl. I must' deliverd over 1088 children by now. Me and my Saint Antonio! You are a luck woman!

Whenever I see a woman 'bout-ta-have, I know what is happened. One look at her and I know if she'd deliver it well or with con'plications.

One look and I could say: 'You better pray to God, lassie, and pray fast!'. But you are lucky! You don't have problems! Just patience and force, it is what I say to you.

We hear a baby cry.

Licina, a Catholic Midwife:

Praised be to God! Thanks my Jesus Christ! One more child in his holy world!

(to the audience, in a hushed, secretive tone) - The only thing the women have to do really is push. Whenever I saw a woman that couldn't, I'd take her to the doctor. He'd consult with me: - What do you think she needs? I'd answer: - Strength, it's what she needs. So, he'd give her an injection and out came the child. Then, he started leaving some with me. Injections, I mean. If I felt the woman wouldn't have it in her, I'd give her the injection. I alone was given that right.

(loudly for all to hear) Thanks my Jesus Christ! Thanks my Saint Antonio! One more child in world! God bless this mother!

4. A New Century, a New Humanity, a New Delivery Method.

A piece of classical music (Wagner, for example) makes the transition.

The Narrator

An iron bird flies through the air,
All the war, all the advance!
No longer the anguish before the unknown is felt
From where we came-Where to are we heading
'Cos our future is now certain, pre-defined
A belief we can evaluate, choose and buy.
Or maybe all is nothing beyond an unstable dream,
Created by those envious of what they cannot achieve.
Together with cities filled with hope
Children, children and more children came afloat!
As beautiful as life itself
As only a shot of penicillin would be!
And because never before so many were born
Never were the death of so many so mourned
Everything was suddenly complicated
To be born and grow up isn't enough
Papers, registration, get bureaucratically acclimated!
Pregnancy, no longer a matter of family
Pregnancy, now, a matter of State
Pregnancy, too, a matter for Medicine.
With life now on the assembly line at top speed
Midwives become outdated and out of jobs
Their craft now tied to horror and with the poor in need.
So now in comes the doctor figure, persuasive
Ready to save lives,
Even those not at risk.
When the Second World War was over
The world entered a new dawn

It was the year Bob Marley was born
And the year my mother was born!

The narrator sings a few bars from a Bob Marley song, setting the colloquial tone of the upcoming mother and daughter moment: "Don't worry about a thing/ 'Cause every little thing / Gonna be alright"

The Daughter and The Mother.

Daughter – Mom, when where you born?

Mother – I'm from 1945, biscuit.

Daughter – And how was it, how were you delivered?

Mother – Hm, I know next to nothing. I do know the lights went out on the night I was born. Same thing happened on my wedding day, the lights went out. But then, the cars turned their headlights on and pointed them towards the entrance of the Church and that's how I walked down the aisle.

Daughter – Did you dream of having children?

Mother – Of course, like every woman. Don't you?

Daughter – No, not me. I'm lucky to have a best friend for a son though. Weren't we so close to each other, I don't know if I'd be able to handle being a mother.

Mother – Of course you would. The child would teach you how. You only need want to learn.

Daughter – Truth is true. Where were you born, at a hospital or at home?

Mother – What do you mean? At home, of course.

Daughter – How incredible! What about me? Was I born at home?

Mother – No, I was born at home. When you were born though we had more means, so you, you were born at a hospital. In my time, we were born at home. Except for your Uncle Chico, the youngest of us all, he was born at the hospital.

Daughter – But why wasn't I born at home then?

Mother – Because at home the risk of infection was higher. So was the death rate.

Daughter – Right. But, I mean, it was because poor sanitation, right? Not because of the house itself.

Mother – And how would you know that? Were you there?

Daughter – No, but I read about it.

Mother – Then you know that indoors, more would die.

Daughter – Didn't my sister die in the hospital though?

Mother – When it's time to die, one dies anywhere, biscuit.

Daughter – I just think you accept certain speeches too quickly, mum. You end up believing a lot in made up truths.

Mother – Oh, please!

Daughter – Whose house were you born in? Your mother's or your mum's mum?

Mother – Hm, you got me there, biscuit... I do know I was born at Road of Longing. It was...my mum's...house...yeah!

Daughter – And who helped her deliver you?

Mother – Back then, that was the role of the midwife.

Daughter – And do you remember her?

Mother – No! How could I, if I was being born?

Daughter – Not even her name?

Mother – Well, I do remember one name, yes... Miss Licinha?... but I'm not sure if she was the one who aided in my birth.

Daughter – And who called on her?

Mother – It must've been my grandmother.

Daughter – Granny Sylvia?

Mother – That's the one. My mum's mum.

Daughter – Wasn't she a blessings-woman?

Mother – She'd give blessings, spiritual healing, My great grandfather wasn't too keen on the idea of having my granddad marry her, solely because she was a spiritual healer.

Daughter – I remember her. She used to sit on a small wooden stool, all dressed in white. She'd have a glass of water and hold a branch of rue. She'd cross our foreheads three times.

Mother – Her faith was from the Umbanda.

Daughter – Did you meet your black half-grandma?

Mother – (hushed tone) Pst! Lower your voice!

Daughter – But we're the only ones here!

Mother – (whispering) Pst! And no, I don't remember. I can only recall about your grandfather Antonio and your grandmother Sylvia.

Daughter – Was she a midwife as well or just a spiritual healer?

Mother – Just a healer.

Daughter – But weren't midwives also spiritual healers?

Mother – Yes, they used to be.

Daughter – Why wouldn't you choose a midwife instead of a doctor?

Mother – Midwife is a thing of the past! Back when doctors weren't an option.

Daughter – So you think doctors are better?

Mother – Aren't they?

Daughter – Doctors are for when we get sick. Is pregnancy a disease?

Mother – No! No. But we do become very exposed. It is dangerous!

Daughter – Did your mother feel exposed in her own home and with her midwife? I guess I'd feel exposed in a hospital, filled with sick people! Too bad I didn't ask gran before she passed. What would she think about having her babies in a hospital!?!
(drastic change) Did you use to think about going to college?

Mother – I used to think about studying typewriting. I thought it was pretty!

Daughter – Did you ever fear having children?

Mother – Who doesn't?

Daughter – Did it hurt too much?

Mother – It isn't really pain, I mean, it is, but of the good kind. You and the baby working together so it can be born...I like it! That damned pain comes, you push, you feel like you won't make it, like you will die.

Daughter – So where does the strength comes from?

Mother – From nature, biscuit! Nature does it all! The trick is not wanting to be bigger than nature, the trick is to respect its greatness!

Daughter – That's quite beautiful, mum!

Mother – And the child will give you strength. There's nothing prettier than seeing your child's face for the first time! It's scary, of course, it's nature's force – when you hear a thunder, don't you get scared? Problem starts when people is afraid of being afraid.

(Daughter laughs a lot. Mother laughs too)

Daughter – Mum, will you do me a favor? Would you write me a letter telling me how I was born?

Mother – A letter? But isn't me telling you enough?

Daughter – No, I'd like a letter. You like writing letters, don't you?

Mother – But what for, biscuit?

Daughter – I had an idea. I'd put it in a play of mine. Like I'll do with this conversation.

Mother – Me, in a play?

Daughter – You, in a play.

Mother – Who would I be in this play?

Daughter – The mother of the young woman who's writing it.

Mother – But isn't that the truth?

Daughter – And why must all plays be make-believe?

Mother – You had told me this was called fiction.

Daughter – Nicely learned, mum! The pupil has corrected the master.

Mother – I see where you're going with this. Theatre of the real life, right? Wouldn't miss it for the world!

Daughter – Wish I could, mum, but this play I'm taking to England.

Mother – To England? How high and mighty have we become, huh?

Daughter – (laughing) Quite far, right?

Mother – Seeing as I never even left the neighborhood I was born in...quite quite far, biscuit!

(They laugh)

Daughter – So you'll write it, the letter?

Mother – Alright, I'll write it. After supper. No, after I fix your father his supper. And tidy up the kitchen.

Daughter – Always leaving yourself for last, huh, mum?

Mother – What's a woman to do?

Daughter – Run away!

(Both laugh again)

Mother – You're one biscuit! When they're all in bed, then I'll write you your letter.

5. Hospital Birth

A change of atmosphere. Now, the narrator is the mother. She is alone, in a penumbra by the kitchen table, writing a letter as promised.

Narrator

Dearest daughter

Now you think of nothing but childbirth. And you asked me to write to you about your own birth. So, I'll tell you everything as if you did not know anything. You are really funny, my sweet. So, let's go!

You were born in the city of Petrópolis, in Rio, on 11 September 1970 at 4:30 in the morning, along with sunrise, at Saint Luke's Hospital. It was Winter back then and it was quite cold. I had lost my baby, Adriana. She was born and passed right after that. It was all very sad. How beautiful she was.

I made a promise to Our Lady of Fátima so I could get pregnant again. Everybody kept saying I wouldn't have another child. I had the last laugh though. Because I had six other children. Not counting the other three God took from me, that is. So, yes, I made the promise to Our Lady of Fátima and I also did hormone treatment.

And so I got pregnant with you. During those years, the procedure was different. We used to do the pre-natal with the same obstetrician at a health clinic. When the time came, they would send us to the hospital and the delivery was then made by a different doctor, whoever was on call.

That night I didn't want to have dinner. I just gobbled down a huge bowl of corn pudding and went to bed. It wasn't until the middle of the night that I woke up with a feeling that the time had come. I wasn't in pain at all, but I simply knew you were coming. So I woke my brother up: - 'Joãozinho, wake up, the baby is coming!'. The poor thing, he jumped out of bed, almost completely out of breath, threw something on top of his pajamas, put me in the car and off to the hospital we went!

Once we got there, the doctor took one look and said: It's time! You were crowning already! Once I went to the delivery room, all else happened very quickly. No anesthetic or anything! The doctors were all serious I can't recall them saying anything. It did feel like something was bursting out of me, tearing me apart – I could barely pay attention to anything else. It was literally tearing me apart! But, oh, it was always so exciting for me! The thrill of hearing the baby's first cry – so exciting!

After it was done, the doctor looked at me and said, relieved: Quite the work you two! I almost lost both the mother and the daughter!

I for once did not notice if anything had gone wrong, but he explained that you were born with your umbilical cord tied 'round your neck. Ultrasound was not a thing back then, so these things couldn't be predicted. He had to push you back in, remove the cord and then pull you back out! You were born twice, biscuit!

I'm grateful to that doctor, he was really careful. Had he been in a hurry, you would not be here with me. Quite the large baby you were too. Close to eight pounds you weighed! I was very thankful to Our Lady of Fátima! And you grew strong and I... Well, I never stopped having more children.

I hope this little letter came out well enough to help you with your play!

Much love from the mother who loves you!

6. Child birth as surgery, the mother as patient.

The Narrator

In this moment it became clear

My grans, my mum and I.

We were the characters I sought

We were the ones behind the statistics

And, modesty allows, also quite bold, artistic!

The common Brazilian women, seen born by the 20th century
Beneficiaries of the public healthcare system,
Were not so poor they couldn't survive giving birth,
Nor so rich they could afford installations of the highest quality.

Born in 1945 and starting motherhood in 1970,
My mother's generation lost the prayers, teas, Saint Mary herbs and such
To be given anesthetics, analgesics and asepsis via a clinical touch.
Even so, she lost more babies than her ancestors.

In many cases, indeed, lives were saved.
But when is the grand majority we talk about, false needs were installed.
No more the house filled with family waiting for the newborn.
No more the maternal presence by our sides.
But nurses, with their syringes in the OR, clinical lives.

1994.

By this time, the doctor earned less to make a normal delivery
Than to do a C-section
And convince the mother that surgery is better
Does not require a long letter

The Narrator

On the day my son was born, my belly was so big, round and liquid that I felt like a full moon. He was 40 weeks old and I couldn't go 'round the block without stopping for air while holding on to the light posts for support.

I was afraid. Very much afraid. Not only of the pain, but of not being able to be a good mother to him. Afraid of not being able to support him with my work as a writer. Afraid the world would be cruel to us, to him, specially, and I wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Afraid because from the moment he'd come out from inside me, I'd never be a single person anymore, I'd forever be me plus him. But then again, that was

exactly what fascinated me. To be able to experience such a profound and timeless connection to another person.

At the exact moment my son was born, he would make me part of a lineage, a lineage in which I had until then been the end tip. The infinite line in which I stood right after my mother, that stood right after my grandmother, that, in turn, stood right after my great-grandmother who stood after my great-great-grandmother and she after...you get where I'm going with this, right? He, now, would be the end tip and I would await patiently his decision to either keep it that way or continue to stretch it with a new being, be it a product of his own flesh and blood or simply of his will. In the mysterious instant he began, I floated in outer space. Shooting stars with tremendously long shining tails ran passed my eyes. I saw planets floating in space. A space as comfortable as dark. Maybe just like my mother's womb. This place I was in was the closest idea of God I could ever conceive. God may be a great uterus, feeding all that are born from it.

In forty weeks, I was standing still at Street of Laranjeiras, holding on to a street sign, gasping for air. My body seemed unstoppable in its will to dilate. I was on my way to the maternity for one pre-natal consultation. The obstetrician had a trip scheduled and when she saw me, she promptly asked if I had brought my baby bag. Of course not, I wanted my contractions! She examined me and said I had no dilation whatsoever and that I had two options: to wait until I went into labour and have some other doctor deliver the baby or have the baby that very same day and undergo a C-section. I felt so insecure! She told he was too large a baby for a natural birth. I wanted my son to come on your own time, but the idea of delivering you with a doctor I had never seen in my life was deeply unsettling.

For the first time in my life I stepped into an operating room. I trembled I was so nervous. The gown I wore seemed to be made from the thinnest paper and had a big opening on the front. The cap and slippers were made from the same material. A costume that had nothing to do with the beautiful scene I had pictured your arrival to be, but I had no more options. Those were the conditions I found myself in. I

remember the anesthesiologist punctured me with the needle and asked me to count to ten. I went as far as three.

When I came to, I noticed four or five doctors behind this blueish, or maybe greenish, cloth that extended vertically from my breasts up, high enough that I could only see their faces, not the procedure. They were talking about chocolate cake and having a laugh. But then one of them pulled the baby up with both hands and I saw my son for the first time in my life. His skin had a soft golden tone, he was completely round and, like a little angel from a water fountain, he weaved a silver arch into the air! I think they all laughed. I saw your umbilical cord. It seemed to be made from mother pearl, round and slightly flattened much like a finger except it twirled up all the way inside my belly. I remember watching the thick and quick scarlet blood slide through the cord's mother pearl spirals. The whole scene seemed to happen in slow motion before my eyes... Not even in my wildest dreams had I seen such vivid and brilliant colours as those your body displayed on the moment you were born. Or maybe I was tripping from the anesthetics...

I asked the doctors to bring me my baby: it was my baby, I had to feel him! I didn't mind the blood and goo, but they insisted in cleaning you up beforehand. My arms were tied down they shook so much from the anesthetics so I couldn't hold him. A torture! I wanted to keep the baby by my side at all times, but the nurses wouldn't allow it because of my stitches. I had had over thirty due to the C-section. And so they took my baby to the nursery while I lay there, in the company of other women.

What an experience. Poor, black women, suffering. Most of them had had their babies alone, no significant other, no family. I remember this one woman being in the hospital for weeks, having nowhere to go, her father having threatened to kill her for becoming pregnant. Another woman was suffering from a violent postpartum depression and had a manic episode.

Some were sad for their unborn children or for their children that had come into the world with complications. Other, content with the fact all had gone as planned, kept it to themselves, exercising a reserved happiness so as not to deepen those mothers'

sadness. Most of them had undergone C-section without really knowing why/ And just now as I wrote this piece, I could understand that I too had undergone a complex and exhaustive surgery ... only because my doctor was going on vacation. Oh, my God...

7. Child birth as a material good

The Narrator

Y2K. Technology in full ascension.

Life style, necessity, compulsion.

For a self-made man

Whose life before went from bad to worse

Love equals material goods, economical plans,

Equals spoiling someone, abandonment in reverse.

Aunt

We arrived in São Paulo and met my sister-in-law in a high-class hospital, one of those you get intimidated by, like a five-star hotel. In her room, circa 30 square meters, two bathrooms, a small kitchen area, a mini fridge and a 25-inch screen HD TV with hundreds of channels. Sofas, chairs and armchairs. I didn't know where to sit. The name chosen for the baby had been embroidered on the pillowcase, on the hand and bath towels, even on the cotton serviette. And on the souvenirs! Yes, there were many and all so filled with details, all for the guests. Oh, and all the candy and delicious hors d'oeuvres.

On the first floor, was the hospital cafeteria. There, a screen was used like a flight information display screen you find at the airports. In each line, blue or pink, the name of a baby followed by blank spaces to be completed with weight, height, time and date of birth, and room number. The ones already born had their pictures posted. Amidst the hush-hush in the cafeteria, a jingle would at times be heard, something like the jingles used by the department stores during the Holidays. When the jingle came, people would stop and listen and something like "Welcome, Carolina!" along with a picture of the newborn's face and the OR in the background. Some people couldn't

control their disappointed sighs once they realized the baby announced wasn't the one they've been waiting for.

This, however, was the common use area. The direct family had the right to a plasma screen TV. That was our case. In a closed hall beside the OR, my mum and I waited. Suddenly, the curtain behind a glass window opened. Inside, the operating room where my sister-in-law was being operated. Of course! I saw it with my own eyes the several layers of thick and white fat from under her cut flesh when the baby was pulled out from inside her. The baby was born beautiful and strong! My brother, dressed with an apron, green cap and mask, recorded it all with a digital camera. He looked a little pale. I, even from the outside, confessed that I had a little pressure crush.

After the umbilical cord was cut, the nurse took the baby and brought it to his mum so she could kiss his little face. They was beautiful and truly excited. When my brother came close to the glass window, my mum and I cried, seeing in my nephew, the features of my brother, who in turn, had the traits of my father! Soon after came the nurse and closed the curtain without even waving bye-bye. Outside, no one but us, thrilled with the privilege of watching the birth of my nephew in real time. Not for a minute did it dawn on me that the glass window was the beginning of a process that would turn the birth into a show.

A typical TV commercial vignette follows the enthused voice to come.

The Character of CineBirth Commercial

"Turn your child's birth into an unforgettable moment! The CineBirth! We transmit it in real time, using last generation video equipment through a plasma screen TV of up to 25 inches, installed in a comfy air-conditioned room with armchairs for up to 12 people. You will be able to watch your child's birth on YouTube as many times as you wish! And there's more: So your party becomes even more unforgettable, we also have decoration and personalized souvenirs with the baby's chosen name in the following motifs: Manchester United, Liverpool, Frozen, Peppa Pig, Barbie and many others. For a slight extra fee, we also serve liquor, party candy and delicious hours d'oeuvres. Promotional

packages start at 3 thousand quid, paid in up to six installments. All the best credit cards accepted!"

8. Child birth and misogyny

The Narrator

Meanwhile, on the other side of the family

We watch it happen in real life

The slogan of the activists:

No more violent normal delivery

To sell cesarean delivery

22 August 2016. Quarter past midnight. I interrupt my reading about violence against women during child birth and I text my sister through WhatsApp.

A ding announces each text message received, underlining the dialogue that might be projected or be played as voice-over.

- Hi, cupcake!

- Hello, love! Would love to hear about Mariana's birth again. So I can put it in the play.

Do you mind?

- Tomorrow, maybe?

- Tomorrow it is. I'll send you a voice message.

- Great!

We hear the voice message recorded by the sister, her voice weary.

The Sister

Hi, love, I'm so tired, but I can't deny you a thing, so I'll tell you real quick.

At the time, the doctor expedited the procedure a wee bit because it was around carnival. He scheduled it maybe three or four days before the seventeenth. Thing is I was afraid of giving birth...so I pretended that...I forgot (laughs). But around the date, 17 February, he scheduled the procedure. And I went, it was during carnival. I got there, no

contractions, with nothing. Then they gave me some medicine to stimulate labour. Then I stayed waiting in the room and the pain and the contractions, I didn't feel them. He'd come to the room from time to time, asking if I was feeling "the pain" and I wasn't feeling the pain. So he decided to leave the hospital, be absent, have some coffee, go home...Who knows what he did. Thing is, during that break, I started feeling the contractions and then they happened one on top of the other, real close. So then, when he arrived, I was going nuts with pain...I don't remember if I started bleeding, I don't. Not sure if mum will remember, 'cos mum was with me. So he rushed me to deliver...and at the moment of that little cut, I think it's perineum how it's called, not sure if this is the name...that makes that cut to help in the delivery, during natural birth. Episiotomy? Yes, episiotomy. There was no need for that cut, but he said it was the only way he knew how to do it. Anyway, then he made the cut towards my leg and it has to be towards the anus. During my recovery period, I felt a lot of pain, I had to walk with my back curved, something that didn't happen after I delivered my first child, Ju, which went pretty alright. I felt it for quite a long time...heavy, isn't it? I couldn't stand straight...too much pain...That was it. Oh, forgot to mention that Mari was born with spikey hair.

8. Natural birth: the fight for the lost right

The Narrator

Stop! What's happened with us?

Oxytocin, episiotomy

Forceps, Kristeller manoeuvre

Names that are not taught to us, women.

Resources not made known or available to us

Radical decisions about our bodies

In spite of ourselves are made.

And so in Brazil now

C-Birth is the new normal

Many women believe they need surgery

Not to save yourself or your babies

But to remain sexually attractive

However, the story does not finished
Here this is where it begins.
Other women demand sovereignty, enough they have paid
They've been facing good and evil
For the right to a natural birth, the right primeval
An example, my friend Maria.
Listen her voice.

The Friend

My first child was born in 2010. From early on, since I was a girl, I wanted to be an opera singer. But deep, deep down, what I really wanted wasn't a career, a happy marriage, a husband. My biggest dream was to have a child. And I thought I would have my child at a hospital, much like my mum. She had never complained about having children at a hospital, so I didn't think it strange. Until I read a book called "Women Who Run With The Wolves", by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. I, then, realized the importance of being a woman, of experiencing the rites of my body, of owning my own body, owning my going into labour, of letting it flow! Let motherhood flow.

When I got pregnant, however, I walked in the same path as all others. I looked for an obstetrician. But as my pre-natal went along, I started to feel there was a great difference between the way I felt my pregnancy and how the doctor treated it. Before him I was...a patient! It was as if I were ill. He'd prescribed behaviors and drugs and I went along with it while he in turn barely looked at me. Every time I tried to tell him what I had in mind for the delivery date, he wouldn't lend an ear, wouldn't show much interest. Until this one day, he told me: "-Maria, we should hurry and schedule your delivery date because your baby will be 39 weeks during a holiday, so we should book an OR in advance just to be safe. I usually work at that hospital by..."

I was baffled! Schedule the birth of my son?! Because it might happen to be on a holiday?! It was as if the doctor were talking about a birthday party! No! I wanted a ritual! You don't have a child a year every year of your life. That moment was unique, special and the only one who should have a say in when it would happen was the baby

itself. Not some doctor yearning to take a trip during the holidays without first having to go through the unpleasant situation of interrupting his vacation to deliver a baby! Everything was backwards! His priority wasn't me or my son. It was himself!

I started feeling sadder with each new consultation. And I started to understand what it meant to have a child in a hospital, without being able to leave, waiting for a doctor to release me, as if I had contracted some infectious disease!

That couldn't be the only way! I started researching the internet and read many testimonials by women who also felt bad. Women that had been treated invasive procedures with no indication, such as, for example, having their perineum cut for the baby to come through before the natural process of dilation is completed, have their bellies squeezed so the baby would come out, taking oxytocin... A hormone naturally released during childbirth. When you take the synthetic form, you are telling your body it is not capable of producing it, that it is a broken machine – I think it is all very aggressive! It is hard to accept, but these things are quite common and at times mandatory in Brazil nowadays!

When the baby is going to be born, it goes through the process of colonization – which is when it receives the bacteria and its immune system start to build up. When the child is born of natural birth, it absorbs the bacteria from its mother. When it is delivered through C-section, it absorbs the bacteria...from the hospital! It is proven that said baby will have more respiratory problems and will be the most susceptible to allergies and to congenital diseases...Why would I do that to my child?! The hospital was so automated and cold that it looked like a factory. What were they trying to suggest? That I had my baby in an assembly line?! Numb the mother, cut through her stomach, pull the baby, clean the baby, sew the mother and bring in the next...

My family thought it all too odd when I said I'd look for a midwife. They were prejudiced, thought it to be a crude practice, unprofessional and ignorant, a possible risk to the baby's life. It was being risky already!

My husband agreed with me and we decided to follow through. We looked for references, talked with quite a lot of people until we met a midwife from Rio, who had delivered over a hundred babies. Heloísa. She was the one I was looking for! Natural birth was her goal, she didn't even talk about C-section! Of course! There was no reason to. I was healthy and so was the baby! To talk about C-section in a situation like that was the same as talking about fixing an arm that is not broken.

Very well! I delivered my baby in my own house, a house I myself had prepared to receive my son. It was clean, it smelled good, it was filled with sunlight and filled with flowers! I wore beautiful comfortable clothes while in labour. My husband was by my side the entire time, we danced together slowly through my contractions. When the pain hit hard, I'd squat on a four-inch-tall stool and he'd sit behind me and hug me making me feel incredibly comfortable. It would still hurt, of course, but having him with me made it all bearable. I did all I wanted during labour! I danced, sang, walked around the house, I showered and ate...When the contractions became stronger, my midwife would come and stay with me. She too likes to sing and so we'd sing together, letting our voices go in between contractions! She taught me to sing the songs from the midwives of the Northeast of Brazil and when we'd sing in my bathroom, we'd harmonize and it echoed through the house! And that is house my son was born! In happiness, in the comfort of my own house, with my husband, in a ritual of love and peace! Exactly how I intended it to be and how he deserved.

The Narrator

Before we end, I need to talk to you about something that is happening now in our country.

The mother figure in Brazil has many faces, but one thing only sets them apart: social class.

The mothers that suffer the most are those descending directly from slaves and the indigenous people. It is common that these women live in places with serious basic

sanitation problems. And it is exactly in those places that a mosquito-turned-legend procreates. Scientists have named it *Aedes Aegypti*. The hateful from Egypt. The story goes that it was one of the seven plagues told about in the Bible. But the fact is that a mosquito so small with a life cycle of a few days is the vector of three highly dangerous viruses for the human body, one of them being the Zika virus. Records of infections caused by the Zika Virus show it is present all over the world. But, in Brazil, specifically in the rural Northeast, the Zika virus has been present in the lives of 90% of the population. Including the mothers who have had babies with microcephaly. Write that name down: microcephaly. One of the most devastating neurological syndromes humankind has ever met, it causes a tragic misstep in the fetus' development, closing the skull before the brain is fully formed. The damage traps the brain and impedes its development forever. In most cases, the baby's head remains small for the rest of its life, making it highly disproportional to the size of its body. But why doesn't it happen in other places around the world attacked by the Zika Virus? The global scientific community is in distress over this syndrome and there is still no consensus on what is going on. Among the experts I could interview, that are strong suspicions that the Zika virus is not the only villain in this tragedy.

Malnutrition, poor sanitation, several infectious diseases simultaneously in play and an extreme exposure to pesticides are all factors that still wait to be studied in depth. In those places where the syndrome attacks with more violence, the people came in contact with toxic pesticides that have been banned worldwide, but which have been cleared for use and used indiscriminately in the same northeast of Brazil, just before the microcefaly outbreak. And the studies exploring these connections came to a stop due to a lack of government support or interest. Why? You can guess.

While money swirls behind the problem, babies with microcephaly are frequently abandoned by their fathers. Even in the face of such a grave situation, the Brazilian government hasn't made any efforts to direct a portion of the national budget to these children who will demand full time care from their mothers for the rest of their lives. The Brazilian penal code forbids abortion and foresees severe punishment and incarceration of the woman who choose it, including in cases such as this. the same

state that does not give the mother the right to make a simple test that can detect the disease by the sixth month of pregnancy, punishes that same mother in the case of abortion.

The Christian churches discuss the matter but remain undecided about it.

The result of this, it is always the woman who pays the price. Alone.

(with irony) Maybe it is the woman who is guilty.

Microcephaly is the heaviest and hardest stone that has ever passed through the delicate cogs of the birth machine in Brazil.

Men and women of science,

We need you

Says mother Earth

While the babies cry

Every discovery is a sign

A sign of compassion

You can hear the silent voice

Of the great force that still wants us alive.
