

Ziraldo's *A Turma do Pererê*: Representations of Race in a Brazilian Children's Comic

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Elements of visual culture from the past are evidence of ideologies that were widespread in their period. Visual representations of race and gender are particularly potent when aimed at a child audience, communicating ideas about social constructs to a particularly receptive population. This article examines racial representations in several stories from the Brazilian children's comic book *A turma do Pererê*, published by Ziraldo Alves Pinto between 1960 and 1964. Based upon a popular figure from Brazilian folklore, Ziraldo's Pererê was a boy residing in a mythical and rural Brazilian landscape, and the comic's stories followed the adventures he had with his *turma*, or gang of friends, an assortment of anthropomorphized animals and indigenous children. Through the drawings and narratives of his comic stories, Ziraldo portrayed race in an ambiguous and contradictory fashion that was in line with the ideology that was embraced by the white elite in early 1960s Brazil.

Brazilian race relations have been the topic of significant study by international scholars, particularly as they relate and compare to race relations in the United States. However, visual representations of race in comics have gone largely unexplored. Produced during a period of social transformation on the eve of a military dictatorship that would endure for twenty-one years, *A turma do Pererê* provides valuable insight into the racial ideologies that were circulating at the time. In this publication, Ziraldo incorporated racial representations that were ambiguous and often contradictory. The comic's central characters are distinguished by the color of their skin, but the social implications of these racial differences are rarely mentioned in the text. In avoiding the narrative of race while explicitly engaging it as a visual tool, Ziraldo produced a comic that reflected the white elite's reluctance to discuss a difficult topic in its desire to avoid social conflict.

Brazilian Racial Ideology in the Early 1960s

Degrees of blackness in Brazil are notoriously difficult to delineate due to the long history of racial mixing and the plurality of racial terminology. In the 1960 census, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística reported that 38% of Brazilians declared themselves to be of a race other than white, divided between

preta, *parda*, *amarela*, and *índia*. Those who referred to themselves as *pardos* (of mixed African, indigenous, and European heritage) were a significant majority of the non-white population (29%), while the *preta* (black) population was only 8.7% and the *índia* (indigenous) population measured at 0.2%. Thus, Brazilians identifying themselves as “non-white” were in the statistical minority at the time of the original publication of *A turma do Pererê*, with those identifying simply as “black” constituting an even smaller set within this minority.

Ziraldo created the *Turma do Pererê* series during a period of change in racial thought in Brazilian culture. Ideas about the function and significance of race that had previously been widely accepted were revisited and reevaluated on both academic and popular levels. In the 1930s and 1940s under the Vargas regime, the idea of Brazil as a nation free of racial conflict was introduced and then popularized, promoting a national vision in which a history of miscegenation allowed whites, blacks, and people of mixed race to operate within a hierarchical and highly integrated social system. In such a system, all Brazilians share a common cultural heritage of *mestiçagem* despite socially stratified boundaries between the races.

This concept was revealed as myth by a series of sociological studies sponsored by UNESCO, initially published in the 1950s. Howard Winant stresses the role that these studies played in the understanding of race relations in Brazil by “dismantling the myth of a non-racist national culture” (“Rethinking” 174). UNESCO approached race relations in Brazil from an egalitarian and universalistic perspective, and the projects that it funded there “stimulated scientific inquiry into racism that would address motivations, effect, and possible ways of overcoming it” through the collection of considerable empirical data that indicated high levels of race-based discrimination (Chor Maio 119). What followed was a tendency towards racial revisionism, in which the idea of racial democracy that had been previously accepted was reexamined by Brazilian and foreign scholars and social scientists. In a time of racial strife on an international scale, Brazil attracted attention as a relatively peaceful nation in which tensions based upon skin color did not appear to produce outward violence and discrimination.

Despite empirical evidence of continued discrimination and inequality for darker-skinned Brazilians, faith in a society without prejudice was widespread among the Brazilian population. The results of academic studies were not likely to have immediate effects upon the racial views of much of the population. Thomas Skidmore suggests this following the invalidation of the Brazilian claim of overarching equality in a “racial democracy.” By denying the marginalization of non-whites, “the elite was able to avoid even considering the possibility that the socio-economic condition of the non-white could be due to anything other than the

society's relative underdevelopment or the lack of individual initiative" (*Black Into White* 217). Despite evidence of significant disparities, for the elite of 1960s Brazil, race became a non-issue that was usually left out of public conversation.

One of the outcomes of the UNESCO studies was a tendency among scholars to attribute social inequalities to disparities in class as opposed to race, which continues to the present day. According to Winant, "Brazilian elites, both right and left, continue to dismiss the significance of the racial variable in political and cultural life. The long-standing tendency to subordinate racial dynamics to those of class is still easily observed across the entire political spectrum" ("Other Side" 85). Those who protest this attitude are often accused of "rocking the boat" or disrupting the racial peace. In the past, the elite consistently followed an argument that the only racial "problems" in Brazil result from the agitation of those who claim there are problems, who are consequently labeled "unBrazilian" (Skidmore, "Race and Class" 108). In the 1960s, the idea that those who questioned racial equality were essentially unpatriotic implied that the notion of racial democracy had been accepted at the time as a founding principle of Brazilian identity.

What were the consequences of avoiding the discussion of race in the Brazilian context? As Anani Dzidzienyo emphasized nearly thirty years ago, "[t]he official Brazilian ideology of non-discrimination achieves *without tension* the same results as do overtly racist societies" (14). Racial discrimination in Brazil assumes formidable power by passing unnoticed, consequently contributing to a system of structural inequality that is just as harmful in the long run as overt racism. While the national discussion on race has obviously evolved significantly since the 1960s and 1970s, the absence of an open dialogue on the marginalization of citizens based on their skin color continues to produce negative effects. In her contemporary anthropological study of a community in a Rio *favela*, Donna Goldstein points out that ignoring historically structured race-based oppression makes it almost impossible to formally address the effects of racism (105). The dominant silence on social inequalities attributable to race is particularly damaging in Brazil in that it essentially denies non-whites the ability to mobilize towards change.

An Introduction to *A turma do Pererê*

Critical analyses of *A turma do Pererê* are limited to a handful published in the 1970s and early 1980s by Brazilian scholars, despite the more recent appearance of collections of the comic that have been produced for a contemporary audience. These texts focus on the publication as a cultural milestone, being the first national comic printed in color and produced by a single author, and they tend not to reach past its historical relevance. Moacyr Cirne published several works on the broader

genre of Brazilian comics, some specifically referring the work of Ziraldo (*A linguagem dos quadrinhos, História e crítica dos quadrinhos*). His writings celebrate the comic as a complete visual portrait of *brasilidade* without exploring its broader cultural implications. In this article, I specifically focus on the representation of race in *A turma do Pererê*, an element of the comic that is unexplored by Cirne.

Essential to this analysis is the fact that the main character was not solely a product of the author's imagination, but rather a figure from Brazilian folklore that he superimposed upon a generic national background and surrounded by an assortment of national "types." Ziraldo drew upon a variety of cultural resources in constructing the series, most important the Brazilian catalog of images of Saci Pererê. The publication *O Sacy-Pererê: Resultado de um inquérito* (1917) and the work of José Bento Monteiro Lobato and Câmara Cascudo are particularly relevant to understanding the way in which this collection of types developed over time in the Brazilian imaginary.

In 1917, staff members of the newspaper *A folha de São Paulo* began the project that was to become the book *O Sacy-Pererê: Resultado de um inquérito*, conducting a series of interviews on the folkloric figure with readers who responded to an announcement in the newspaper. In recording people's accounts, the anonymous authors depict Saci Pererê as a one of the most original and unique Brazilian examples of an international tradition of fantastic characters, created by the storytelling traditions of *o povo* of Brazil. The *Inquérito* attests to the multifaceted view of Saci Pererê held by *paulistas* in the early twentieth century, painting a generalized portrait of a one-legged boyish figure with black skin, dressed in a red cap, commonly introduced to Brazilian children in domestic settings by female relatives or slaves. He is frightened by symbols of Catholicism, the religion that predominated in Brazil, which equated him with the devil. He is a vestige of the agrarian lifestyle of Brazil's past, losing cultural relevance in the face of modernization.

One of the anonymous authors of *O Sacy-Pererê: Um inquérito* later went on to become one of the most widely recognized producers of Brazilian children's literature: Monteiro Lobato. About half of his writing was aimed at a juvenile audience, most of histories taking place at the fictional *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* and involving a group of human and imaginary characters residing in an anonymous rural setting similar to that of Ziraldo's *Mata do Fundão*, also an indistinct rural landscape populated by white landowners and the black servants who are not far removed from the agricultural lifestyle that slavery supported. Monteiro Lobato's children's book later inspired a film by the same name (1951) that emerged from a trend towards a popular national cinema and away from films that portrayed only the white Brazilian elite.

A turma do Pererê was developed not in artistic isolation, but out of the specific cultural context of twentieth century Brazil: as illustrated here, Ziraldo drew on a variety of ideas about the folkloric figure of Saci Pererê that had developed in the Brazilian imaginary over many years. In creating a comic book character that would appeal to children, Ziraldo emphasized certain aspects of the popular figure (his appearance, his mischievous character) while discarding others (his opposition to Catholicism, his frightening demeanor). As such, he updated the character as a national symbol for a new generation based on folkloric tradition.

The text of *A turma do Pererê* was intimately connected to its author's socioeconomic position in Brazilian society. Ziraldo Alves Pinto was born into a middle class family in 1932 in Caratinga, Minas Gerais, where he lived until age 19. As was common among young white men of his class at the time, he studied law at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte before moving to Rio de Janeiro in 1957, where he began to publish his cartoons in the weekly magazine *O Cruzeiro*. He had no formal artistic training, but had drawn regularly since childhood and had a great respect for books. By 1959, he had begun to focus his drawings for the magazine primarily on the character that was to become Saci Pererê. Through these initial cartoons, Ziraldo redefined an image of Saci Pererê that previously had been established as menacing and mischievous into one that was benign and playful, which he would continue to develop in the *A turma do Pererê* series first published in 1960.

Ziraldo based each member of the *turma*, the story's set of pals, upon a friend from his own childhood, and as such each character has specific individual traits and personalities. Pererê himself is presented as a sort of boy-myth, maintaining some of the mythical figure's traits while simultaneously emphasizing his likeness to other ordinary boys. His physical character clearly separates him from other children, but he is of similar stature and demeanor, expressing similar desires. He wears no clothing apart from a slouchy red stocking cap called a *barrete*, which appears to provide him with magical powers, but this is never mentioned in the text, further emphasizing his separation from other children through his position in a liminal folkloric space.¹

After four years of publication, the final issue of this series of *A turma do Pererê* was released in April of 1964. Until this point, Ziraldo had seen himself as relatively apolitical, referring to himself as “uma espécie de humanista sem maiores preocupações políticas,” creating humorous cartoons and caricatures of local customs, but the military coup in 1964 marked the “época da [sua] conscientização política” (Campedelli and Abdala 10). He began to work closely with Millôr Fernandes, an author and illustrator whose work had underlying political themes. Ziraldo went on to play a major role in the founding of the politically charged

magazine *Pasquim* in 1969, and during the twenty-one years of military rule was arrested three times on the grounds of being an “elemento perigoso” (12). His experience as a political cartoonist led to the creation of several children’s books such as *FLICTS* (1969) and *O menino maluquinho* (1980) that have become some of the most popular titles published for children in Brazil. Despite the author’s shift towards political cartoons and children’s books, *A turma do Pererê* has been frequently reissued in a variety of collections over the four decades since its original publication.

A turma do Pererê follows the day-to-day adventures of Saci and his gang of friends in the rural yet anonymous setting of the *Mata do Fundão*. The comic strip does not reflect national demographics of the period, in which 62% of the population identified as white: of the eleven principal human characters in the comic, only three are white adults (27%), and white children do not play a prominent role in the series.² While most characters depicted as black or of mixed race in the comic possess obvious racial attributes such as kinky hair, Saci himself remains almost two-dimensional in his blackness, the color of his skin apparently central to his identity. His blackness is integral to his character, serving as an identifying characteristic that originally emerged from his mythic past.

In the stories of *A turma do Pererê*, Saci’s mythical blackness goes unmentioned in most of the text, but his drawn image separates him starkly from the other characters on the page. Tinted a flat and inky shade, bald and habitually unclothed apart from his ever-present red cap, yet without visible sexual characteristics, and with only one lower limb to stand on, he is an anomaly within the story. The human characters are dressed to indicate gender or cultural positions: the girls wear dresses, and Tinimim the indigenous boy is clad in a loincloth and a necklace of shells. The adults in the stories are dressed in non-descript clothing suitable to their age and gender. Other characters take the form of easily recognizable animals, native or otherwise common in Brazil. Saci does not belong to any of these categories, being neither completely human nor animal, positioning him as an anomalous “other” in the context of the *Mata do Fundão*.

Ziraldo’s general avoidance of the topic of race in the comic’s narrative despite its obvious representation in the comic’s drawings can be seen as a reflection of society’s approach to race at the time it was originally published. A variety of skin colors (as well as animal species) are represented in *A turma do Pererê*, representative of the idealized vision of Brazil as a racial democracy. If those who complain of racial discrimination are “unBrazilian,” those who embrace Brazil as a multicolored society with no racial conflict are the utmost patriots.

National and Folkloric Myths of Origin in *Um pai para o Saci*

Ziraldo's commitment to portray Brazil as a society free of racial conflict is apparent in the series sequence *Um pai para o Saci* (*Turma 2*: 3–13), in which Saci Pererê's racial and mythical origins are explicitly revealed. The story portrays Saci as the imaginary offspring of *o povo brasileiro*, influenced in turn by native Brazilians, African slaves, and Portuguese colonizers. In the narrative, the *turma* gathers with the presents they will give to their fathers on the impending Father's Day holiday.³ This is the only mention of paternal connections explicitly made by any of the characters—while they apparently have biological fathers with whom they maintain contact, their fathers do not play a role in the everyday lives of the characters depicted in the comic. This previously unrepresented relationship of father to child is rewarded with brightly wrapped packages on this occasion. Saci hops along a path ruminating on the perfect gift for his own father before realizing that as a folkloric character, he has neither a mother nor a father. Meanwhile, Saci's friends have gone to ask Professor Nogueira, the sage and bespectacled owl, about the identity of Saci's father. They are informed that Saci was born in a completely different way than his friends: "O Saci é filho da imaginação do povo brasileiro!" (5), going on to enthusiastically recount Saci's myth of origin:

Antes do Brasil ser descoberto, os índios brasileiros já conheciam um passarinho chamado Iaci Iaterê! Era um passarinho preto que pulava de árvore em árvore, e pousava nos galhos, com uma perninha só! Ele tinha a cabeça vermelhinha e era ventríloquo! Assim ele fazia o índio caçador se perder na floresta . . . e com isso o índio não conseguia caçar direito! Para o índio o Iaci Iaterê era um diabinho protetor da caça! Depois vieram os escravos negros . . . e aí, quando aprenderam as histórias da terra, misturaram tudo . . . e transformaram o pássaro num negrinho de uma perna só! Sua cabecinha vermelha, numa cabeça de fogo! E já que tinha recriado o Iaci Iaterê com o seu jeito, o velho escravo contador de histórias botou um pito igual ao seu na boquinha dele! Depois foi a vez do português, que transformou a cabeça de fogo do negrinho num gorriño daqueles dos pescadores de Nazaré! . . . E aproveitando que o escravo, na sua língua diferente, já tinha arrevesado o nome do Iaci Iaterê todo, batizou-o com o nome de Matinta Pereira! Depois, reorganizaram tudo e, do português, do negro e do índio Guarani, nasceu esse menino mágico que hoje nós todos chamamos de Saci Pererê! (7–8)

In this creation myth, Saci's origins generally follow the formation of the Brazilian nation with some minor adjustments. At its foundation is an indigenous interpretation of animal behavior, in which the existence of a bird with unusual characteristics is understood as the embodiment of nature's collaboration in the face of human interference. Through the iconic "velho escravo contador de histórias," slave culture transforms the mischievous bird into a boy, recreating him "com o seu jeito." Last comes the Portuguese influence that outfits the character traditional accessories from the Old World maritime culture and reinterprets his

title. The “menino mágico” results from the *reorganização* and blending of the three cultures, much as the “magic” of Brazilian culture springs from its miscegenation.

Saci’s creation does not adhere strictly to the historical chronology of Brazil, however: here the black influence precedes the Portuguese. In the creation of the Brazilian national myth, the Portuguese colonizer is the primary influence in both appropriating the land from the natives and enslaving and forcibly importing the African population, but in the story of Saci Pererê, the European influence seems tacked on as an afterthought. In the comic’s interpretation, the Portuguese influence seems to be added on at the end out of spite, for the purpose of facilitating the colonizer’s control over the imaginary realm that its subjects have created.

In the story, the group is stymied by Saci’s apparent lack of a physical father figure, but Alan the monkey spells it out: “Será possível que essas três raças viraram hoje uma raça só? Três que são apenas uma, entenderam?” (9). The “father” of Saci is *o povo brasileiro*, the Brazilian people, who are shown on the final page of the story waiting in an enormous line to receive wrapped presents in honor of Father’s Day. *O povo* are drawn as men, women, and children of (literally) all colors (Fig. 1) and in a variety of combinations: a brown-skinned country man with straight hair emerging from underneath his hat holds the hand of a small child with blond hair and the same skin color. A pink-skinned man with curly hair shakes Saci’s hand. A woman painted light blue holds a similarly colored bald and smiling baby. Behind them stands a man painted bright pink with lines for eyes, clearly meant to be interpreted as an Asian immigrant. A tall, thin mustachioed *caipira* (country bumpkin) type has his arm around a portly woman with massive breasts with dark green skin. All of the figures here included in *o povo brasileiro* are smiling, pleased to receive a commemorative gift from their imaginary creation. This image exudes interracial peace and harmony, the visualization of a multiracial egalitarian society in which all members give value to a national folkloric creation.

Despite the fact that research and the realities of Brazil had debunked the concept of Brazil as a racial democracy, this concluding drawing demonstrates that it was still accepted and promoted by a portion of the Brazilian population—at least by the portion to which Ziraldo pertained. The UNESCO-funded research of scholars such as Charles Wagley, Marvin Harris, Florestan Fernandes, and Thales de Azevedo had demonstrated that there was indeed significant social stratification between the races, which they attributed primarily to the influences of class. In Ziraldo’s depiction, not only do Brazilians of all colors willingly embrace their roles in the creation of a figure from national folklore, but they display no visible markings of class distinction. In the world of *A turma do Pererê*, Brazil is represented as a smiling multicolored nation whose members all stand on the same economic and social ground.

Bicho-de-pé and Afro-Brazilian Female Sensuality

The principal female adult character in *A turma do Pererê* is Mãe Docelina, Saci Pererê's adoptive mother, a rotund brown-skinned woman reminiscent of the mammy figure in North American culture. Perpetually in the kitchen creating her famous sweets and Brazilian snacks, she is typically dressed in a housedress and frilly apron with a scarf tied around her head. Obviously of humble rural origins, she speaks in a markedly accented and often grammatically incorrect Portuguese. In the picture book *O segredo de Mãe Docelina*, published by Ziraldo in 2002, the connection between her exaggerated size and her Afro-Brazilian heritage is portrayed as one of her greatest attributes: "A impressão que se tem é que Mãe Docelina sempre existiu. O que se sabe—e é certo—é que a avó e avó da avó de Mãe Docelina eram também gordonas e roliças e que sua avó mais antiga veio da África, no tempo dos escravos" (7). Mãe Docelina first appeared during the comic's original publication in the early 1960s, but the recent release of this picture book demonstrates the continued relevance of the mammy figure in Brazilian culture.

In her oversized glory, Mãe Docelina is a modern representation of the *mães pretas* described by Gilberto Freyre in the 1930s, who were female slaves that had been freed and invited to take up residence in the *casa-grande*: "granted their freedom, they would almost always round out into enormous black figures . . ." (369). These *mães pretas* often served as surrogate mothers to white children growing up on plantations, sometimes serving as wet nurses and frequently assisting with day-to-day childcare activities. This relic from plantation slavery idealized by Freyre has persisted to the present day, as many Afro-Brazilian women still work as caregivers in middle and upper class homes.

While *The Masters and the Slaves* changed the way many Brazilians approached race, it was not necessarily based upon a universal experience of race relations in the country. Jeffrey Needell has suggested that much of Freyre's contribution to the construction of a Brazilian national identity was in fact based on a search for his own personal identity and an attempt to reconcile his own inner conflicts. "Much of Freyre's celebration of miscegenation derives from an evocation of the sexual relationship between privileged white boys and mulata servants. It is now evident that Freyre was generalizing from a crucial experience of his own" (69). *The Masters and the Slaves* today is held up as a portrait of the mixed roots of Brazilian culture, but stemmed in fact from the experience of a single individual. Freyre's personal history looms large in passages such as his description of the black influence on Brazilians, speaking of

the female slave or "mammy" who rocked us to sleep. Who suckled us. Who fed us, mashing our food with her own hands. The influence of the old woman who told us our

first tales of ghost and *bicho*. Of the mulatto girl who relieved us of our first *bicho-de-pé*, of a pruriency that was so enjoyable. Who initiated us into physical love and, to the creaking of a canvas cot, gave us our first complete sensation of being a man. (255)

Here the black woman cares for the physical needs of the offspring of the white master, nourishing them presumably at the expense of her own children. In addition to introducing them to an imaginary sphere of fantastical stories, she removes his parasites and later fulfills his sexual needs. Women of color service the white child's body in every way. Eventually, "the white male child learns to look to servants of color for sensual gratification and sadistic pleasure. Power, penetration, and punishment are naturally arranged from the top down"(Needell 70).

These are Freyre's own personal memories of his formative interactions within the domestic sphere with people of color, and while they are likely shared by others of similar culture and social stature, they reflect his specific experiences with slavery. Nancy Scheper-Hughes has criticized Freyre's focus on the *casa-grande* for neglecting the reality of the *senzala*: "The world that the Brazilian slave master fashioned consisted of more than the bedroom and the nursery: it also encompassed the sugar fields and the boiling house where both Indian and African slaves sickened and died in great numbers" (40). In glorifying a miscegenation that for the most part occurred between indigenous and slave women and their Portuguese masters, Freyre largely ignored the social history of men of color.

Kia Lilly Caldwell points out that the *mãe preta* is frequently held up as evidence of racial and cultural fusion in Brazil: the fact that many white Brazilians were cared for as children by black women supposedly prevents them from having racist tendencies, contributing to the myth of racial democracy (73). How could they possibly harbor negative feelings towards blacks, having spent so much time in the company of a black woman who fed and clothed them? In addition, she emphasizes the *mãe-preta*'s position as a symptom of "intergenerational patterns of economic subordination" (74). The black woman as caregiver in the white home substitutes the legitimate white mother, and it is ultimately a relationship of economic exchange, a vestige from the period of slavery. Prior to this 1975 republication of the *Turma do Pererê* comic, Anani Dzidzienyo pointed out that the *mãe preta*'s relationship with their employers is inherently problematic:

Although mutual affection might have existed, her role was firmly fixed and there was no question of her ever improving the unequal basis of her [relationship with her] master and his peers. The existence of the *mãe preta* cannot, therefore, be said to confirm the absence of racial discrimination in Brazil—particularly when one remembers that, in this role, her instincts and feelings as mother to her own children, and to her own family life, were deliberately stifled. (10)

In serving as Saci Pererê's adoptive mother, Mãe Docelina fills the traditional *mãe preta* role of surrogate caregiver, yet turns the cliché upon its head in accepting a mythological figure from Brazilian folklore, with skin darker than her own, into her home. With his mythical origins, Saci does not have biological parents at all, as opposed to being the offspring of white plantation owners, yet as a child still seeks out the reassuring warmth of a maternal figure.

Mãe Docelina appears infrequently in the stories of *A turma do Pererê*, and only plays a minor role in the narratives in which she is featured. With her head wrapped in a brightly colored scarf and her feet in modest slippers, her function in the stories is typically the production or serving of food. In the written balloons through which she expresses herself, she speaks in a rustic vernacular distinct from other characters, leaving letters off the beginning and ends of words and switching letters. This way of speaking further connects her to the stereotypical image of the *mãe-preta*, a slave woman who undoubtedly had little or no access to education that would polish her speech.

She does play a prominent role in the story "Pé-de-moleque" (*Turma* 1:7: 31–37, Fig. 2) as the producer of this traditional sweet. With a cloth-covered bowl in hand, she complains of Saci's absence to Geraldinho: "ô minino danado, esse meu fio! Toda vez que eu preciso dele, ele some!," asking him to bring the sweets she has prepared to Compadre Paulim José's store for him to sell. Here the sweets are a means to a more profitable end: "Compadre Paulim vende os doce pra mim! Dá pra eu ganhar uns dinheirinho!" (32). Her speech is exaggerated and peppered with popular expressions such as "Virge Maria!" and she often refers to herself in the third person.

She offers Geraldinho, a rabbit painted a distinctive color of red, a carrot as a reward which he accepts with disappointment—he was expecting *pé-de-moleque*, the sweet that Mãe Docelina had prepared for sale. *Moleque* is a derogatory term for a young boy, which Câmara Cascudo defines as an "homem sem dignidade, que não satisfaz seus compromissos" (405). *Pé-de-moleque*, literally "boy's foot," is a kind of peanut confection, with a molasses base in southeast Brazil and incorporating manioc flour in the northern regions. Noticing his dismay at the healthy snack of carrots, she gives him a bag of *pé-de-moleque*. The story goes on for several pages to show Geraldinho, initially reluctant to give some of his reward to his friends, learns the value of sharing.

Saci Pererê, Mãe Docelina's charge, does not appear in the story, positioning her as a neighborhood figure with a general motherly attitude without a surrogate child to project it onto. As is the case with most of her appearances in the comic, she is tethered to the domestic sphere, shown literally steps away from both her kitchen and the line where clothes are hung out to dry. Although she fulfills the image of the

doting *mãe preta* in her dress, manner of speaking, and physical form, she does so independently of a white patron, making the sale of sweets necessary to her livelihood. In making *pé-de-moleque* for sale, in a way she is capitalizing on another negative image of blackness, that of the mischievous, “no account” young boy. Saci, her one-legged charge, is nowhere to be found as she creates a candy named after the (missing) foot of boys who physically resemble him. As a symbolic icon of blackness in Brazilian culture, Mãe Docelina has absorbed and reprocessed another derogatory representation of blackness, suggesting a multileveled portrayal of racial stereotypes in Brazilian culture.

Several of the stories that feature Mãe Docelina tie her explicitly to an element of the image of black womanhood that was acknowledged by Freyre, but is seldom discussed in scholarship on Brazilian culture. Mãe Docelina has a great interest in a certain Brazilian rural parasite, the *bicho-de-pé*, immediately recognizing the signs of the parasite and eager to share her extensive knowledge about its acquisition, symptoms, and eventual removal. In the previously cited quote from *The Masters and the Slaves*, Freyre waxes nostalgic about “the mulatto girl who relieved us of our first *bicho-de-pé*” (255), who occupies a developmental space between the black wet nurse and the *mulata* who is responsible for sexual initiation. The *bicho-de-pé* is a small parasite that burrows into the human foot to lay its eggs, and is typically picked up by those who walk barefoot in rural areas of Brazil. It causes an itching sensation, is notoriously difficult to remove once it has installed itself in the foot, and has a rumored connection to the habitats of domestic animals, especially pigs.

In the story “Tinimim, o solitário” (*Turma* 1:2: 23–36), many pages are dedicated to the *turma*’s attempts to discover what is wrong with Tinimim, who is only interested in sitting alone on a rock, gazing dreamily into space, and absent-mindedly scratching his big toe. After members of the group attempt to spy on his activities with the aid of elaborate costumes that will disguise them from view, Saci approaches Mãe Docelina for advice (Fig. 3). What he initially believes are symptoms of loneliness or depression (spending hours in an isolated location, sighing, and groaning) are immediately recognized by Mãe Docelina as indicators of the presence of the parasite. “Escuta, meu fio . . . Você reparou se o Tinimim tá com o dedão do pé muito redondo? Ele fica esfregando o dedão na pedra e depois fica soprando o dedo com o zoinho fechado?” (33). She whispers in Saci’s ear the secret of the *bicho*’s removal. Bearing this knowledge, Saci returns to the *turma* to inform them: “segundo a Mamãe Docelina, esse bichinho é um trenzinho muito bão . . . mas, quando azanga no pé é um perigo!” (34). The details of the ailment are unclear, we only know that the parasite is good until it is bad, and therefore it must be removed. Tinimim is resistant, apparently still in the “good” phase of the *bicho*’s occupation.

"Não faça isso, Saci! É tão gostosinho . . . uma cocairinha doce . . . puxa, Saci, não tira!" (34). Tininim has been seduced by the *gostosura* of the itch that the animal causes, his face fixed in a mysterious expression of pleasure. Saci performs the operation, removing the insect with a pair of tweezers, which is illustrated as a small dark spot on the page (Fig. 4). He proudly declares Tininim's "freedom" from the animal, to which his friend responds, "e quem te disse que eu escolhi a liberdade?" (35). The story ends with a drawing of the *turma* frolicking in the mud puddles of the pigsty where Tininim originally picked up the pest, in the hopes of experiencing the *cocairinha gostosa* for themselves (Fig. 5).

Here, Mãe Docelina maintains the traditional knowledge that allows her to identify and remove, or instruct others how to remove the parasite, presumably learned from her own experience and the stories of her family members. Saci implicitly knows that she, as a maternal black woman, is the one to turn to for advice on the treatment of an ailment that links the body to its natural environment. In its physical and somewhat sensual nature, the solution to this problem lies outside the domain of a character such as Professor Nogueira, the brainy owl who usually advises Saci and his group of friends. In passing her understanding of the *bicho* on to her adoptive son, she perpetuates the informational chain of black knowledge of a parasite that simultaneously provides sensual pleasure and pain.

Mãe Docelina again refers to the *bicho-de-pé* in a later story that was published in the second *Almanaque da Turma do Pererê*, "Telejornal" (1991, 29–35). The story is written in the style of a television news journal, "Jornal Mata do Fundão," a direct reference to "Jornal nacional," the long-running national news program on TV Globo. Each character plays a different role, with Saci acting as the main news anchor, Tuiuiu and Boneca acting as intrepid girl-reporters interviewing a variety of subjects, and a series of commercials and public service announcements. Mãe Docelina appears in one such announcement, warning her "amigas dona de casa e mãe de família" (33) of the dangers of the *bicho-de-pé* (Fig. 6). Once again, the presence of the parasite is made known by a "dedão do pé muito redondo" and a pleasurable itching sensation. "COIDADADO," she warns, "tem que tirar! Se não, azanga!" For Mãe Docelina, divulging this knowledge of the parasite's behavior is of utmost importance to prevent later pain and suffering.

Mãe Docelina's presence in the comic series over four decades of publication is evidence that certain caricatures of the black female continue to resonate in Brazilian culture. While the black mammy who serves as a conduit between sensuality and knowledge of the natural world for society as a whole is hardly the sole model of black femininity in Brazilian culture, her image continues to resonate in these comics.

The character Mãe Docelina reflects and reinforces several myths pertaining to black women in Brazilian culture, most noticeably those that refer to the figure of the *mãe preta*. Loving, motherly, and constantly devoted to all things food-related, she selflessly cares for Saci Pererê, subverting her historical position as caretaker of the white master's children. Her preoccupation with and knowledge of the *bicho-de-pé* can be seen as a reflection of the black woman's perceived connection to nature and sensuality in Brazilian culture.

Through both image and narrative, Ziraldo alternately demonstrated an acceptance of the racial ideology of the period and subverted its message, creating a more complex portrait of Brazilian racial categories and interactions.

Notes

¹ The *barrete frígio*, or Phrygian cap, was initially worn in Brazil by Portuguese fishermen and later came to signify involvement in the Republican movement in the late nineteenth century, inspired similar hats worn by participants in the French Revolution.

² Two of the characters are identifiably black (Saci and his love interest Boneca), three are indigenous, and three are of recognizably mixed race (including Rufino, Saci's perpetual rival).

³ This story was published in a reissued story collection prior to Father's Day in 1975, which in Brazil falls on the second Sunday in August.

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Figures



Figure 1—O povo brasileiro receives presents from Saci Pererê in honor of Father's Day. From “Um pai para o Saci” (*Turma 1:2* [1975]: 3–10).

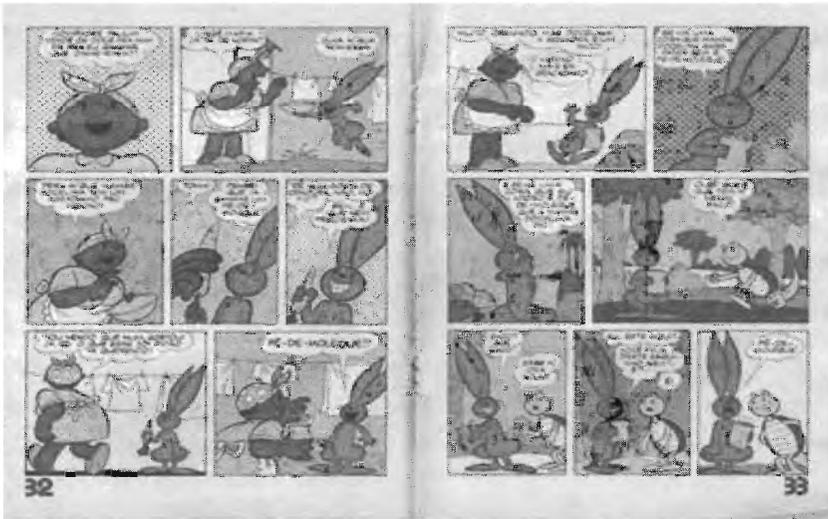


Figure 2—Mãe Doceiina rewards Geraldinho with a carrot, then a bag of pé-de-moleque. From “Pé-de-moleque” (*Turma 1:7* [1976]: 31–37).

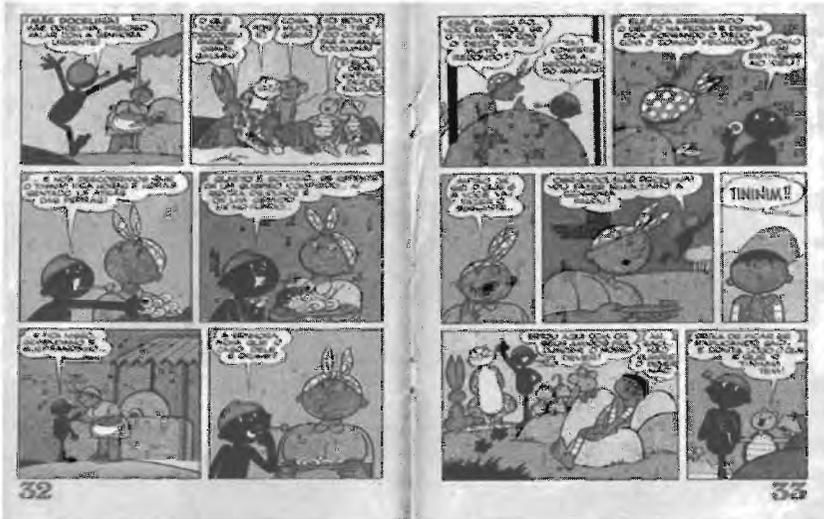


Figure 3—Mãe Docelina diagnoses Tinimim with *bicho-de-pé*. From “Tinimim, o solitário” (*Almanaque* 2 [1991]: 32–33).



Figure 4—Saci removes Tinimim's *bicho-de-pé*. From “Tinimim, o solitário” (*Almanaque* 1 [1991]: 34–35).



Figure 5—The turma attempts to attract their own *bichos-de-pé*. From “Tinimim, o solitário” (*Almanaque 1* [1991]: 36).



Figure 6—Mãe Docelina's public service announcement on *bichos-de-pé*. From “Telejornal” (*Almanaque 2* [1991], 32–33).