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A Review of the Comic Book *Maramunhã - na terra do Wanará*

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This review aims to introduce the reader to the comic book *Maramunhã – In the Land of Wanará* (2024), focusing on the allegory of Brazilian colonisation it embodies. To this end, authors such as Krenak (2018), Tettamanzy (2018), Dorrico et al. (2018), Quijano (2005), Grosfoguel (2005) and Mignolo (2008) are used as a basis for the analysis of Brazilian colonisation and the idea of decoloniality present in the narrative. The aim is thus to demonstrate that this comic book possesses critical and historical potential, serving not only to comply with Law No. 11,645 of 10 March 2008, but also to function as a vehicle for promoting local indigenous culture and as a strong critique of the colonisation process.

Keywords: Comic book. *Maramunhã – in the land of Wanará*. Decoloniality. Colonisation

Introduction

In Brazil, a great deal is taught about the arrival of the Portuguese colonisers in the country, but the focus is usually on the coastal regions. As well as being an excellent allegory of Portuguese colonisation, *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará*¹ (2024) shifts the reader’s gaze to the process of colonial exploitation in the Amazon region, which took place more than a century after the Portuguese invasion in 1500. According to Quijano (2005, p. 119), this was a strategic position for controlling precious metals and other goods through the enslavement of Indigenous, Black and mixed-race peoples.

Created through crowdfunding on Catarse, Brazil’s largest crowdfunding platform, *Maramunhã - na terra do Wanará* is an adventure comic book set in the Brazilian Amazon region. Its characters are humans and animals that act like humans. This comic book was the result of the work of the following team:

- Evaldo Vasconcelos: comic book artist from Manaus (Semana do Quadrinho Nacional de Manaus);
- Ray Cardoso: comic book artist from Manaus (Ray);
- Malika Dahil: Moroccan artist living in Manaus, Amazonas (Quadrinhopédia 2023);
- Izabelle Regina: artist from Manaus (Quadrinhopédia 2024).

The narrator is a bird, who begins by speaking directly to the reader about the Portuguese invasion and the abduction of the heroes, which occurred in the previous narrative *Maramunhã – uma lenda de Manaus*² (2022). This technique transforms the entire following text into a huge flashback, told by the animal and brought to light by its memory so that the reader can visualize scenes and interactions. This device is a beautiful tribute to Mário de Andrade, one of the leading authors of Brazilian Modernism, who uses a parrot as the narrator to tell the story of *Macunaíma: The Hero with no Character*, in his rhapsody of the same name (Andrade 2023). It is known that Andrade was also a great scholar of Brazilian folklore, which proves that this choice was not made at random.

The choice of the word “invasion” by the narrator bird, and also adopted by the other animals in the forest, is not random: new Brazilian History books have preferred to replace the term “discovery of Brazil” with “Portuguese invasion” or other stronger names, which illustrates the

¹ Maramunhã – in the Waraná land, in free translation.

² Maramunhã – a legend of Manaus, in free translation.

new decolonial view that many Brazilians have embraced. An example can be found in the textbook *Araribá mais: História* (Fernandes 2018, p. 5, emphasis added):

In Unit II, we saw that, starting in the 15th century, several European states invested in scientific studies that led to various technical innovations. The development of faster and more resistant ships and more accurate navigation instruments made it possible to explore regions previously unknown to Europeans.

It was in this context that Europeans arrived in America. Most of the territories on this continent became colonies of those kingdoms. Territorial exploration involved the *domination, massacre, and enslavement* of native peoples³.

Tied to trees are the two rival groups from the previous comic book: the Quatipurus, as well as the Jaca-Mole, Camu-Camu, Lama, and Tapioca tortoises. The Portuguese colonizers are angry and promise a great feast using the captives as food. Iaretê, wife of Jambu⁴ (the tortoise leader), wants to gather the other tortoises to rescue the kidnapped members of her people, but they are all too weak to do so. Thus, she needs to propose a truce to the quatipuru Pupunha, who is being held prisoner by the tortoises. Malvarisco, the strategist tortoise, proposes that the tortoises distract the humans while the captured quatipuru frees all the prisoners. This idea is quickly accepted.

The captured quatipuru returns to his people to bring the others to join the ambush group, now formed by both species. The attack begins during a conversation between Lieutenant De Sá, who is in favor of devastating the Amazon to raise cattle in the area, and Sergeant Saraiva. This conversation clearly illustrates the difference between thinking in favor of creating a development colony versus creating an exploitation colony:

³ *Na Unidade II, vimos que, a partir do século XV, vários Estados da Europa investiram em estudos científicos que propiciaram diversas inovações técnicas. O desenvolvimento de embarcações mais velozes e resistentes e de instrumentos de navegação mais precisos possibilitou a exploração de regiões até então desconhecidas pelos europeus.*

Foi nesse contexto que os europeus chegaram à América. A maior parte dos territórios desse continente tornou-se, a partir de então, colônia daqueles reinos. A exploração territorial envolveu a dominação, o massacre e a escravização dos povos nativos.

⁴ At the beginning of the text, there may be some confusion about the name of the tortoise chief. This is because the tortoises refer to him as “Tuxaua”, which in Tupi-Guarani means “temporary chief” or “influential person.” Another jabuti, lower in rank than Jambu, will be called this later on, and due to the lack of diffusion of this word in the Portuguese language, it may cause some confusion regarding names.

– Lieutenant de Sá! Don't you think it would be more prudent to try to learn from the natives how they survive? After all, thousands of them have been living here for centuries. They must know the forest well.

– Sergeant Saraiva, are you mocking me? What could we learn from these savages, if they don't even know how to make clothes?⁵ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 9).

The character of Lieutenant de Sá reinforces the stereotype of the aggressive, arrogant, overbearing colonizer who treats those who are not his people like animals. The words of the turtle leader Jambu about the Portuguese illustrate that, in fact, the despicable beings are the invaders themselves: “I have never seen such savage creatures”⁶ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 6). Before plundering Brazil's riches and committing multiple genocides, the Portuguese removed the very voice of the indigenous peoples, since “the indigenous peoples were deprived of their voice because, as linguist Eni Orlandi explains based on the assumptions of discourse analysis, there is only discourse when there is interaction between speakers”⁷ (Tettamanzy 2018, p. 16).

It becomes clear at this point that the preference was to colonise Brazil in order to exploit it, rather than to develop it. Although not so evident in the text, the Portuguese commercial intention is almost predictable and explicit, given that, according to Quijano (2005, p. 119):

The privileged position gained in the Americas through control of gold, silver and other commodities produced by the unpaid labour of Indigenous peoples, Black people and people of mixed race, combined with its advantageous location on the Atlantic coast—through which these goods necessarily had to be transported to the world market—gave white people a decisive advantage in the struggle for control of world trade⁸.

⁵ – *Tenente de Sá! O senhor não acha que seria mais prudente tentarmos aprender com os nativos como eles se mantêm? Afinal, são milhares a viver aqui há séculos. Devem conhecer bem a floresta.*

– *Sargento Saraiva, estás a fazer troça de mim? O que poderíamos aprender com esses selvagens, se nem roupas sabem fazer?*

⁶ *Nunca vi criaturas tão selvagens.*

⁷ *Os povos originários foram destituídos de voz porque, como explica a linguista Eni Orlandi a partir dos pressupostos da análise do discurso, só há discurso quando há interação entre locutores.*

⁸ *A privilegiada posição ganhada com a América pelo controle do ouro, da prata e de outras mercadorias produzidas por meio do trabalho gratuito de índios, negros e mestiços, e sua vantajosa localização na vertente do Atlântico por onde, necessariamente, tinha de ser realizado o tráfico dessas mercadorias para o mercado mundial, outorgou aos brancos uma vantagem decisiva para disputar o controle do comércio mundial.*

The animals' plan is successful, with the fire arrows of the jabutis occupying the Portuguese to extinguish the fires in their tents. Pupunha and her gang rescue the prisoners and everyone flees, with the Portuguese discovering the rescue plan too late. Upon returning to her people, Pupunha realizes that there is someone else on her throne: Ratatoskr. Pupunha demands her throne back, but Ratatoskr wants to hear about her experience in the battle against the humans. After Pupunha recounts what happened, somewhat embarrassed, Ratatoskr reveals that he knows how to defeat the humans, but this involves extending the truce between the Quatipurus and the Tortoises.

While the Quatipurus are excited and sleep well, Jambu has nightmares at night. The next day, Pupunha arrives at the tortoises' location and wants an audience with the leader, but before they can talk, Jambu uses a flashback to tell how he got there. His origins lie in the territory of the Sateré Mawé ethnic group, “[...] the people descended from Uniawasa’p and his son Anumarehi’yt⁹ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 17). While still a pet of the shaman's son, in one of the oral stories passed down from generation to generation, he learns about the Purantig, “[...] a legendary artifact in the shape of a carved dark wood paddle, on which the first Sateré Mawé graphics were illustrated, telling the story of this people's journey between the past, present, and future” (Maramunhã 2024, p. 17). This artifact was used by the evil spirits of the jungle, called Ahiang Ria, and was wisely stolen by Anumarehi'yt, who later led his people in the battle between the Mawés and the Ahiang Ria, with Anumarehi'yt defeating the chief of the evil spirits, Pigni Ahiang Wato. The shaman Wasiri’pot draws the founding myths of the Sateré Mawé on the artifact, among them the myth of guaraná.

The Sateré Mawé began to cultivate guarana and use it as a bartering item with other indigenous peoples. Anumarehi'yt set out by boat to trade guarana, stopping at various locations to sell his product. Jambu loved to get off the boat and explore new lands while Anumarehi'yt traded guarana, but one time Jambu miscalculated the time and ended up being left behind by the rowers, and fate then brought him together with Iaretê.

Jambu's story ends, and the lesson that the nightmare taught him is that the Sateré Mawé are the ones who can help them. After the quatipurus and tortoises deliberate on who will travel to contact the ancestral people and who will stay behind to defend the people from a possible Portuguese attack, Iaretê finds a good solution: ask his friend Metá, a giant turtle who can carry a

⁹ *O povo que descendia de Uniawasa’p e de seu filho Anumarehi’yt.*

large number of animals on her shell to their final destination, for help. So, some travel on Metá and the others stay behind. A tortoise asks a Tuxaua, a kind of leader of the tortoises, why Ratatoskr said he had a plan, which he soon abandoned after Iaretê's idea. Tuxaua, in good humor, responds to the curious tortoise in slang typical of the northern region of Brazil: "In his case, it's just exhibitionism"¹⁰ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 24), slang that means "arrogance" for northerners.

After a long journey, Jambu and his team arrive in the lands of the Sateré Mawé. He recognizes Anumarehi'yt, who still wears a necklace of teeth, but actually discovers that it is Hywi, Anumarehi'yt's grandson, who immediately recognizes Jambu, thanks to the stories told by his grandfather. Hywi takes them to his home, where they meet Arehun, his wife, and some allies from Nusoken, the land of the Sateré Mawé: a pegasus, a gnome, and a harpy. However, Hywi reveals that the Porantig has been stolen by Portuguese spies, because "the invaders have spies who search the villages for treasures to take back to them"¹¹ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 33). On this subject, Ailton Krenak (2018, p. 28) adds that

The roots of Brazil's history are founded on the war of conquest waged by the State, which consolidated its power over our territories, taking our places of wealth and abundance and reducing us to places that are called parks, reserves, villages, or indigenous lands. This is an absolute reduction of the sense of freedom, sovereignty, and quality of life that our people have always experienced and lived for generations and generations. Losing our territories, losing our tranquility, and losing our peace was the result for our people of the construction of Brazil, with many of our tribes paying with their lives for this process of building the Brazilian nation¹².

Meanwhile, Sergeant Saraiva is arrested for treason simply for having met an indigenous woman who took him to her village to meet her family.

¹⁰ *No caso dele, é só pavulagem.* The word "pavulagem" is a slang for "exibicionismo", more common used in the Brazilian North Region, mainly in the state of Pará.

¹¹ *Os invasores têm espíões que vasculham as aldeias em busca de tesouros para levar até eles.*

¹² *As raízes da história do Brasil estão fundadas na guerra de conquista do Estado se consolidando em cima dos nossos territórios, tomando os nossos lugares de riqueza e de fartura e nos reduzindo a lugares que são chamados de parques, reservas, aldeias ou terras indígenas. Isto já é uma redução absoluta do sentido de liberdade, de soberania e de qualidade de vida que o nosso povo sempre experimentou e viveu durante gerações e gerações. Perder os territórios, perder a tranquilidade e perder o sossego foi o fruto para o nosso povo desta construção do Brasil, sendo que muitas das nossas tribos pagaram com suas vidas este processo de construção da nação brasileira*

The pegasus then begins to tell his story and how European mythological creatures moved to the Amazon. In the past, mythological beings were welcome at peasant festivals, but they were enslaved to serve the knights who dominated them. Exiled, the magical creatures crossed the ocean and were well accepted in this other region, but the invaders did too. Discouraged, all they can do is fight for the preservation of their own lands, since expelling the Portuguese now seems impossible.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese, armed with axes, cut down the tree where the quatiurus live, who manage to escape and are thirsty for revenge. They unite to throw Brazil nut gourds¹³, while the tortoises launch a surprise attack riding on tapirs, which charge like battering rams into the invaders. The combined attack works and the invaders retreat.

This lack of dialogue, which foreshadows the confrontation, is not merely a display of belligerence on the part of the Portuguese colonisers, but rather an idealised depiction of an indigenous resistance that never actually took place. This is because

There has been no respect for or recognition of indigenous forms of democracy, whether African, Islamic or other non-European forms. The liberal form of democracy is the only one accepted and legitimised. Other forms of democracy are rejected. If the non-European population does not accept the conditions of Euro-American liberal democracy, it is imposed by force in the name of civilisation and progress¹⁴ (Grosfoguel, 2005, p. 77).

Lieutenant de Sá receives news that his troops have retreated and that the forest animals have won the battle. Outraged, he orders Sergeant Saraiva to be released, but he has already been freed by the animals and indigenous people themselves. Surrounded and visibly outnumbered, Sá must accept defeat, gather his soldiers, and return to Portugal, taking with him Ratatoskr, his faithful spy, who had been discovered by the animals. Saraiva is the only one who decides to stay, as he never agreed with the devastation caused by the Portuguese and always showed interest in learning

¹³ An oilseed typical of northern Brazil and neighboring countries. Due to rivalry between states, it may also be called the Acre nut or Amazon nut. To avoid arguments about who owns this food, it is simply referred to as the Brazil nut.

¹⁴ *Não houve respeito nem reconhecimento pelas formas de democracia indígenas, fossem elas africanas, islâmicas, ou outras não-europeias. A forma liberal da democracia é a única aceita e legitimada. As formas outras de democracia são rejeitadas. Se a população não-europeia não aceita as condições da democracia liberal euro-americana, esta é imposta pela força em nome da civilização e do progresso.*

about and respecting local cultures. The Quatipurus are given a large tree near the tortoises' village, as this would complement each other's defenses: the Quatipurus would help with aerial defense and the tortoises would assist with ground defense. In the final scene, we see several characters from Brazilian folklore, such as Boto, Iara, Boitatá, among others, happy to have completed their mission: “Didn't I say I would end the war between the tortoises and Quatipurus?”¹⁵ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 40).

The end of the internal war here symbolises the decolonial thinking that is becoming increasingly prevalent in academic studies. This is because there has recently been a certain openness to critical thinking and, according to Mignolo (2008, p. 291), at that time,

There has been no respect for or recognition of indigenous forms of democracy, whether African, Islamic or other non-European forms. The liberal form of democracy is the only one accepted and legitimised. Other forms of democracy are rejected. If non-European populations do not accept the conditions of Euro-American liberal democracy, it is imposed by force in the name of civilisation and progress¹⁶.

At the end of the story, there is a kind of afterword explaining the intentions of the text: to learn about the Sateré-Mawé culture through “[...] fiction based on the historical and cultural reality of one of the most emblematic indigenous peoples of the Amazon”¹⁷ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 41). Something that greatly helped in the immersion of this narrative was the contact between the creators of *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará* and the Sateré-Mawé community itself, with whom they collaborated to create their comic book.

Although *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará* also seeks to promote reflection on the Portuguese invasion, pedagogy is not the focus of the text, which is brimming with fantasy and creativity. This Brazilian comic book is a good example of what has been produced in Brazil since the end of the last century.:

¹⁵ *Eu não disse que ia acabar com a guerra entre os jabutis e quatipurus?*

¹⁶ *Não houve respeito nem reconhecimento pelas formas de democracia indígenas, fossem elas africanas, islâmicas, ou outras não-europeias. A forma liberal da democracia é a única aceite e legitimada. As formas outras de democracia são rejeitadas. Se a população não-europeia não aceita as condições da democracia liberal euro-americana, esta é imposta pela força em nome da civilização e do progresso.*

¹⁷ [...] *da ficção com a realidade histórica e cultural de um dos povos indígenas mais emblemáticos da Amazônia.*

Brazilian indigenous literature developed since the 1990s is one of the most important political and cultural phenomena in our public sphere and is part of this broad dynamic of activism, militancy, and engagement by minorities that have historically been marginalized and invisible in our society, which assume public, political, and cultural leadership as the core of their reaffirmation as a community group and, as a result, of confronting this situation of exclusion and violence experienced and suffered.

The important thing here, for all of us who study the aesthetic-literary expressions of minorities, is precisely to perceive this correlation between self-affirmation and self-expression with and as a critique of the present, a radical politicization of the context, institutions, subjects, practices, and values in which and from which the political construction of minorities takes place¹⁸ (Dorrigo et al. 2018, p. 11).

The practical nature of this comic book is enhanced by Law No. 11,645, dated March 10, 2008, which states that “[...] the study of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous history and culture is mandatory”¹⁹ (Lei nº 11.645 2008). More than mere compliance with the law, a teacher who decides to apply *Maramunhã – na Terra do Wanará* with proper mediation can do so in a more attractive way than simply transmitting an indigenous canon with excerpts from various literary texts.

The images are very colorful, usually with bright colors, which can represent the diversity of the fauna and flora of the space where the narrative takes place. Such diversity of colors also reflects the joy and hope of the peoples who resisted the invasion, a beautiful chromatic metaphor for the resistance of the Manauara people, despite a series of negative historical episodes. Although the characters appear to be aimed at a young audience, the critical and reflective potential of this

¹⁸ *A literatura indígena brasileira desenvolvida a partir da década de 1990 é um dos fenômenos político-culturais mais importantes de nossa esfera pública e se insere nessa dinâmica ampla de ativismo, militância e engajamento de minorias historicamente marginalizadas e invisibilizadas de nossa sociedade, que assumem o protagonismo público, político e cultural enquanto núcleo de sua reafirmação como grupo-comunidade e, em consequência, de enfrentamento dessa situação de exclusão e violência vividas e sofridas.*

O importante, aqui, para todos/as nós que estudamos as expressões estético-literárias das minorias, está exatamente em percebermos essa correlação de autoafirmação e autoexpressão identitárias com e como crítica do presente, politização radical do contexto, das instituições, dos sujeitos, das práticas e dos valores nos quais e a partir dos quais se dá a construção política das minorias.

¹⁹ [...] torna-se obrigatório o estudo da história e cultura afro-brasileira e indígena.

work is evident, which remains a challenge that comics still need to address. This is because, according to Turnes (2009, p. 5),

The comic book is a controversial medium: it seems it is never fully accepted as art, yet at the same time it is criticised for being seen as childish, immature and even backward. With the publishing industry's attention, the concept of the medium has changed significantly, and it is this process that presents new challenges and new risks: the emergence of the graphic novel as a prestigious cultural object, yet at the same time as a radical tool for reading and constructing meanings that elude the (not so) original intention of selling books. The graphic novel is a battlefield, and reading it is an exercise that involves becoming aware of this situation, of its possibilities and limitations, not merely for the pleasure of reading, but through it²⁰.

Some spelling errors can be found throughout the narrative, such as “viajem”²¹ and “recomendo vos”²² (Maramunhã 2024, p. 21), which do not interfere with the flow of reading. However, a more thorough revision could remedy these grammatical errors, many of which are quite basic. Often, due to the layout of the letters in the speech bubbles, it is not possible to know whether certain words have been accented or not, leaving the reader with the task of reading them correctly.

The comic book *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará* also serves as a starting point for readers to learn more about this and other stories that children from the project create on their Instagram page @quadrinhossatere. Another “use” of this comic book is to introduce readers, mainly in a graphic way, to elements of local culture, such as the pan flute that a Quatipuru wears around his neck on a necklace (Maramunhã 2024, p. 10) and the guarana fruit (Maramunhã 2024, p. 20), used to make the traditional indigenous drink known as sapó. Finally, *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará*

²⁰ *La historieta es un objeto incómodo: parece ser que nunca termina de ser aceptada como arte, y al mismo tiempo se la ataca por ser algo pueril, infantil y hasta retrógrado. A partir de la atención de la industria editorial el concepto del medio ha cambiado significativamente, y es este proceso el que presenta nuevos desafíos y nuevos riesgos: la aparición de la novela gráfica como objeto cultural de prestigio, pero a su vez como herramienta radical de lectura y construcción de significados que escapan a la intención (no tan) original de vender libros. La novela gráfica es un campo de lucha, y su lectura es un ejercicio que implica la toma de conciencia de esa situación, de sus posibilidades y sus límites, no más allá del placer de la lectura, sino a partir de ella.*

²¹ A very common mistake in Portuguese, since the verb “viajar” (to travel) is spelled with a J, while “viagem” (trip), the noun, is spelled with a G.

²² In the example above, the use of pronominal enclisis requires a hyphen before the word (“recomendo-vos”).

offers a creative take on important tourist attractions in the region, such as the Meeting of the Waters, “[...] the place where the great black river met the yellow river”²³ (Maramunhã 2024, p. 20).

For those who are not yet interested in Brazil's ancestral culture, *Maramunhã – na terra do Wanará* can be an interesting introduction, as it provides readers with a simple story, based on a wealth of information and research, which will certainly enrich their knowledge of one specific culture among the hundreds found in the Amazon region. Since the damage was done more than 500 years ago, “it remains [for indigenous peoples] to be listened to with the depth and respect they deserve”²⁴ (Tettamanzy 2018, p. 17, our additions) and to learn, through this violent intervention, not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

²³ [...] o lugar onde o grande rio negro se encontrava com o rio amarelo.

²⁴ Resta [os povos indígenas] serem escutados com a profundidade e o respeito devidos.

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