The Evil Woodcutter and the Amazon Jungle: What Comics Have Taught Me About the Environment

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> The concepts and ideas expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion or position of MAURICIO ARAÚJO DE SOUSA and/or of MAURICIO DE SOUSA PRODUÇÕES.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method that combines autobiography and ethnography to investigate how certain personal experiences relate to specific social and cultural contexts in a given time (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, paragraph 1). The autoethnographer usually presents these experiences either through performative writing, stage performance, or a combination of the two (Spry). The difference between autobiography and autoethnography is that, besides presenting aesthetical worth, autoethnography must use theoretical and methodological tools consulted from research literature (Ellis et al. paragraph 8; Madison 109) and illustrate the researcher's use and understanding of criticality, intersectionality, context, and social justice (Willink, Gutierrez-Perez, Shukri, and Stein 4-5).

Criticality means to uncover history, ideology, identity politics, interests, purposes, and other power-laden factors to interpret the world. Intersectionality (Crenshaw) seeks to evidence the connections between marginalized and privileged positions, such as class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, and (dis)ability. Context links personal to

cultural and social backgrounds in order to describe complex imperfections and possibilities for change. Social justice means giving the marginalized a voice, as well as encouraging oneself and co-performers (people studied, readers, audience) to reflect, criticize injustice, imagine alternatives, and politically act (Ellis et al. paragraph 25; Pollock 78).

Autoethnography aims to highlight silenced or marginalized voices, directly link the micro- to meso- and macro- structures, critically illuminate the multilayered interplay of cultural performance and identity in a given context, and capture everyday embodied experiences, thus overcoming the archetype of the researcher as an objective outsider (Willink et al. 15).

Herrmann argues that Autoethnography and Popular Culture Studies can be combined and explored together because popular culture impacts our identities: "Popular culture helps us define who we are, what we believe, and influences whom we befriend" (Herrmann 7). Likewise, many scholars are less inclined to use qualitative methods in social and personal relationships such as Family Studies and Interpersonal Communication (Manning and Kunkel). The present investigation attempts to combine autoethnography, popular culture, social and personal relationships, and a qualitative approach to understand how comics strongly influence the development of an Amazonian child in her daily relationships with others and herself.

Two decades ago, Browne called Popular Culture Studies scholars to internationalize the discipline, but few academics have followed his advice. In a globalized world, it is urgent for US American scholarship to dissociate culture from the self-contained idea of the nation-state. Popular Culture Studies in the country must not only recognize its diversity within, but also its relationship with other countries, and the existence of relevant scholarship and topics outside national borders. The present article aims to contribute to the internationalization of Popular Culture Studies and Communication Studies in the US.

This article is divided into six sections: 1. An overview of *Maurício de Sousa Produções*, the studio that produces the analyzed comics; 2. A retrospective autoethnography that describes the thoughts and feelings I had at the moments in which I read comics of the character Chico Bento, as well as during the daily situations in which my child-mind connected the stories to real life events; 3. A retrospective autoethnography of me reading comics of the character Papa-Capim as a child; 4. A contemporary autoethnography of how I now read and interpret the comics; 5. An autoethnographic and analytic letter to the cartoonist Maurício de Sousa; and 6. An epilogue to review my autoethnography through a postcolonialist lens. The retrospective autoethnographies are written in italics to differentiate them from the contemporary one. The objective of this paper is to reflect on the implications of the discourses in the comics to an Amazonian child's formation of identity.

1. Maurício de Sousa and the Environment

Maurício de Sousa, a cartoonist from São Paulo, founded Maurício de Sousa Produções in the 1950s with much success. The multi-media studio made partnership with the largest publishing companies in the country: Abril in the 1960s, and Globo in the 1980s. In 2007, the partnership was transferred to Panini, an Italian publishing company that distributes comics and animations to several European countries. According to the official websites, turmadamonica.uol.com.br (in Portuguese) and monicaandfriends.com (in English), Maurício de Sousa Produções sells more than 3,000 products worldwide, as well as being the largest studio and covering 86% of the comic book market in Brazil. It has sold 1 billion comic magazines to date and prints more than 2.5 million issues per month.

Numerous scholars have written about how Maurício de Sousa's comics can be used as a pedagogical tool in Environmental Education

(Lisbôa, Junqueira, and del Pino; Smarra, Lotufo, and Lopes), Natural Sciences (Reis), History (Palhares), and other disciplines. The characters' lessons about plants and animals, folk culture, and farming challenge urban values and introduce an alternative world where people live a simple and fulfilling life in harmony with nature. Moreover, the peasants' hillbilly language teaches children to respect different dialects while learning formal Portuguese. Notwithstanding, the celebratory tone of most academic articles about the use of *Turma da Mônica* in education is worrisome because it assumes that the media is transparent, well-intentioned, and innocent (de Castro).

Communication and Linguistics scholars have written about the stereotypes in these comics, in which an urban-rural binary establishes the reader as a child who lives in the big city, and presents farmworkers as inherent protectors of nature, stuck in the past, and who are naïve and dumb. Even though some have written about the negative impact of these stereotypes in students from the countryside (Villela) and natives (Neves; Rodrigues), nobody seems to have published about such impact on readers from the Amazon and its influence on the formation of our identities.

Despite comprising over 60% of the Brazilian territory, the Amazon Region[1] is hardly represented in the national media. Nearly the totality of news, soap operas, movies, advertising, and magazines are produced in the wealthy Southeast (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and then distributed to the other regions. Maurício de Sousa's comics are no different, and I argue that the under- and misrepresentation of Amazonian characters in the stories are potentially damaging, as Southeasterners are exposed to a harmful stereotypical image of the Other, while Amazonian children could develop low self-esteem and confusion over their identities.

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[1] The Pan-Amazon region comprises eight countries of Latin America. In Brazil, the Amazon comprises nine States: the whole North region, part of the Northeast, and part of the Center-West.

2. Chico Bento, the Countryside Boy

All kids love "Turma da Mônica" ("Monica and Friends")! This year, my mom, uncle, and aunt purchased a subscription for my cousin and me. Every two weeks, we can't wait to get from the mail the little magazines with our dear characters: Magali, Cebolinha, Cascão, and others. My favorite magazine is "Turma do Chico Bento." Chico Bento is a seven-year-old boy who lives in a farm in the countryside of São Paulo. He's dumb, lazy, and a brute, but is also kind, generous, and hard-working when helping his father in the field. Most importantly, he protects the environment against evil woodcutters, scientists, tourists, and other outsiders from the big city. I know my mom feels proud of me when I protect nature, because she keeps a newspaper picture of me holding a sign in a street protest against deforestation. I know my teacher feels proud of me when I volunteer to take care of the classroom's plant. So I want to be like Chico Bento and make people understand that everybody has to defend nature.

The woodcutter is a man with scruffy beard, a beanie hat, a red-checkered shirt, blue jeans, and boots. He looks angrily at a tree and is about to cut it with an axe, but Chico Bento arrives just in time! The young hero reasons with the man and shows how sad a land with fallen trees looks like. A tear falls from the woodcutter's eye, so he gives up and leaves, ashamed of himself. The tree is saved.

Fig. 1: Chico Bento in Privileges of the City
Zeca [Chico's cousin who lives in the city]: Damn, Chico! I don't know how you can survive here, in this end of the world!
Chico: Why do you say it's the end of the world? [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

Mom is a Biology professor. Every once in a while, she needs to collect biological material, so we take a ferryboat and a "popopô"(a small boat that makes the sound "po-po-po") or canoe to Vila do Carmo. There, we stay at Mr. Alderico's palafitte by River Tocantins. I love the long trips by ferryboat, where everybody swings on their hammocks, listening to old people's jokes and stories. I also love Mr. Alderico's house, where I play with his children, grandchildren, and other kids from the community. We run on "açaí" seeds among pigs and chickens, play with the little shrimp the current brings, and jump in the river to swim. In a calm portion of the river, we can see the "boto-cor-de-rosa" (pink dolphin). My friends keep me company and support me all the time, because my mom is "the professor."

There is no electricity or piped water. Women wash clothes in the "igarapé" (narrow riverbank between two islands or between an island and the mainland), we poop in a hole, and use oil lamps at night. The local kids refresh themselves in the river dozens of times a day, but they never use soap or shampoo. My mom always brings Snoopy shampoo, and my friends love it because it smells good and their hair gets smooth. At night, she reads stories to us, and even five-year-olds come by themselves on the canoes to listen. Before we leave, my mom donates the books to the local teacher.

At dinnertime, Mr. Alderico is talking and I comment, "O senhor fala errado que nem o Chico Bento!" (You talk wrong like Chico Bento). My mom pinches me under the table. Uh-oh, I'm in trouble! But what have I done wrong? I have no idea. After dinner, my mom takes me aside and tells me that I should not have made fun of Mr. Alderico's accent. Oh, I didn't know there was anything wrong about talking wrong like Chico Bento!

In the Portuguese class, the teacher often includes comic strips in the exercises: "Mafalda," "Calvin and Hobbes," "Garfield"… Today, she asks us to "translate" Chico Bento's speeches into formal Portuguese. After we do it, she says, "You have to use formal language at school, and you will have to use it at work when you grow up. But this norm doesn't mean colloquial language, accents, and dialects are inferior. You must respect all forms of language." Hmm, I see… Out of here, we can talk any way we want, but in here we need to talk properly. This expectation is why I'm always complimented for speaking and writing good Portuguese, while my classmates are corrected for using inappropriate Portuguese. Sometimes the teacher even asks me to read in front of the class, to make an example for the other students. They're not smart enough to switch from one language to another. I'm smart! I'm smarter than my classmates who make grammar and spelling mistakes.

3. Papa-Capim, the Native Boy

Papa-Capim is an indigenous boy who lives in the forest, in a tribe isolated from civilization. His stories are usually inside "Turma do Chico Bento" magazines. I think it's because they are so similar, always trying to protect nature.

I'm in fifth grade. Now we have a class called Amazonian Studies. We study the geography, history, and problems we see in the forest and in the cities of our region. We also talk about these things in other classes. The History teacher told us that when the colonizers arrived in Brazil, they thought it was India, so to differentiate between the two we must call Indians "indianos" and Native Brazilians "indígenas." The other day, the teacher showed us a documentary about some tribes who live in Parque Nacional do Xingu. We also see many pictures of them in our textbooks, in magazines, or on TV. Each tribe has different appearances, a different language, and different customs.

I'm confused... In Papa-Capim's stories, all indigenous people look the same, speak the same language, and have the same customs...

Papa-Capim is walking around in the jungle, when he sees a family from the city doing a picnic. He hides under a bush and is surprised to note that the man has white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and body hair. Even I am amazed—it's so rare to see white people around here! And who does picnic in the jungle anyway? This family is so weird... Maybe they're foreigners...

In another story, a white boy teaches Papa-Capim to drink soda, chew gum, and eat "quebra-queixo" (a sticky sweet). Papa-Capim is scared because the soda bubbles make his belly tickle, the gum bubble explodes on his face, and the "quebra-queixo" makes his teeth sticky. Papa-Capim distributes the sweets to tribe members, who suffer the same effects. Natives are so funny! They have never seen industrialized food! No wonder they get scared and look so goofy when trying to be like us.

Fig. 2: Papa-Capim in: The Boy in the Mirror
Man: I can't stand it, honey! We are lost in the Amazon Jungle and all you care about is touching up your make-up!
Woman: Jeez! You're so annoying! [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

In my school, most administrators, teachers, and kids look part indigenous and part black. Some kids are Japanese descendants, like my best friend

Kimie and me. There are a couple of Japanese communities in the countryside of the State: Tomé-Açú, Santa Izabel, Castanhal... But most people are brown. Some of them even know that their grandparents are indigenous, but they don't remember from which tribe. Even when people look indigenous, in the city they wear clothes, speak Portuguese, live in houses, and buy food at the market. We are all civilized in the capital.

Today, at school, I learned that the forest in the Southeast is called Mata Atlântica. Does this mean that Papa-Capim lives in Mata Atlântica? I'm so disappointed! I want to see characters from the Amazon in my comics!

Oh, I got a "Parque da Mônica" magazine in the mail! Mônica, Magali, Cebolinha, and Cascão (the main characters, who live in São Paulo) go to Parque da Mônica (Turma da Mônica's theme park, located in São Paulo) and enter the attraction called Amazon Forest. The four friends magically, with the power of imagination, see themselves in the jungle wearing khaki clothes and a helmet. They look like those white explorers in American cartoons who go to India or Africa in search for adventure. In the dense forest, Mônica, Magali, Cebolinha, and Cascão meet two indigenous kids, a boy and a girl, and many friendly animals. Now I see: Papa-Capim is from Mata Atlântica, but now there are two Amazonian characters. I hope they become a success!

The two Amazonian characters never appeared again. In Maurício de Sousa's comics, we're not there. There are no city kids like us, no "ribeirinhos" (people who live by the river), no "quilombolas" (residents of "quilombos," which are communities of black people who fled from slavery). Why aren't we there? Aren't we good enough? It's probably the woodcutters' and hunters' fault. They make a bad name for us.

Now a story says that Papa-Capim lives in the Amazon... I'm confused...

Fig. 3: "The Amazonians, happy in their untouched paradise." [My translation]
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

A white, fat hunter is searching for a present for his mother: panther fur, alligator skin, bird feathers, etc. But Papa-Capim shows the hunter that killing animals is wrong, and teaches him to make a pot for his mom. The mother says it's the best present she's ever received, even though her house has a bear fur carpet, a deer head on the wall, a snakeskin purse, etc. Well, that's strange—there are no bears in Brazil, and I've never seen animal skin carpets or heads on the wall.

Why are hunters so mean? I know that in the small towns of my State, people hunt animals to eat, not for fun. I've never heard of anyone in my city that hunts. Who are these white hunters who appear in Chico Bento and Papa-Capim's stories? Whoever they are, they're evil. They are the problem.

Chico Bento's girlfriend Rosinha and Papa-Capim's love interest Jurema do nothing. Their lives seem to revolve around the boys' and they

never help to protect nature. In Papa-Capim's tribe, men and boys walk around with weapons (bow and arrow, or a spear), while women and girls walk around with jars on their heads. Men and boys expel hunters and woodcutters, fight alligators with their bare hands, and rule the tribe! They're strong and courageous. We know almost nothing about the female characters. Well, I don't want to be like Rosinha and Jurema. I want to be brave and do stuff!

4. Contemporary Autoethnography

Now I am a confident woman, proud of my Japanese-Brazilian heritage and Amazonian upbringing. I am aware of my disadvantages as Asian, Latina, female, lower-middle-class in the US, and coming from a poor region where the primary language is not English. Most importantly, I am aware of my privileges as Japanese (when compared to other Asian groups such as Cambodians or Vietnamese), middle-class in my hometown, institutionally educated, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied. At home, having a highly educated mother gave me access to formal Portuguese in daily conversations, books, magazines, a computer, help in doing homework, and many other advantages that my schoolmates did not have. Moreover, because the national language standards are dictated in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, the fact that my maternal family is from São Paulo gave me the privilege of talking to them in official Portuguese, outside of school.

I flip through the pages of my old *Turma da Mônica* comics and get angry. I used to have an idealized image of Maurício de Sousa, with his benevolent face and speeches about the environment, respect for different cultures, as well as the importance for children to play outside with friends instead of watching TV and playing video games. But at this point in my life, I can see the silenced voices of Amazonians, women, LGBTQIA, and

other subaltern communities. Maurício, how could you do this to me? How could you do this to us?

Turma da Mônica comics can influence children in the Amazon who read them, but the comics affect me differently. Like Cherríe Moraga in her late self-identification as a Chicana, the difference lies in choice (28): I can choose to call myself Amazonian, whereas most Amazonians cannot. Growing up, I could "pass" as a genuine Japanese girl from São Paulo. Since college, I have had numerous opportunities to tell foreigners I am from the Amazon, and hear an enthusiastic "Cool!" rather than a contemptuous "Oh." In contrast to my privilege, Amazonian children generally do not receive enough positive messages about their identities to compensate for negative ones and to make them proud of who they are.

When I reread my old comics, I feel ashamed of myself for believing in those stereotypes: the lazy farmworker, the native who lives in harmony with nature, the woodcutter, and the hunter. I feel ashamed for thinking that I was smarter than my classmates because of my proficiency in formal Portuguese. I feel ashamed for thinking that Mr. Alderico spoke "wrong" Portuguese. Even worse, I feel guilty for being at a US university while most Amazonians live in poverty.

I look at Chico Bento, and he is the archetype of a *caipira*. *Caipiras,* or *sitiantes*, are people who "survive precariously in niches between the monocultures of the Southeast and the Center-West, in small properties where they develop agricultural activities and raise cattle in small scale, whose production is for family sustenance and the market" (Villela 7013). In contrast to *caipiras*, people from the countryside in the Amazon are known as *caboclos*. As a child, I could not clearly distinguish between *caipiras* and *caboclos*, as Chico Bento comics portrayed all countryside communities in Brazil similarly. This assumption has created some conflict in my early encounters with *caboclos*.

Fig. 4: Papa-Capim: Are you crazy? How can you kill a poor jaguar to make a coat? Can't you see this costs more than you can imagine?
Hunter: I don't know why! Now I'll have so search for another gift [for my mother]!
Papa-Capim: Sigh! I can see I'll have a lot of work to do here!
Hunter: Yay! I found it!
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

I look at Papa-Capim, and he is the archetype of an indigenous child. He has brown skin and black straight hair cut in the form of a *cuia* (bowl made of calabash). Skin painting is reduced to parallel red lines on the

cheeks. The tribe sorcerer wears a big, feathered headdress and a red loincloth, and smokes a peace pipe. None of these customs are present in Brazilian tribes, but are rather borrowed from foreign media representations of Native Americans (Simm and Bonin 89) such as Disney (e.g., *Californy 'er Bust*, *Peter Pan*, *Pocahontas*), René Goscinny (e.g., *Oumpah-Pah the Redskin*, *Lucky Luke*, *Asterix and the Great Crossing*), and Quino (*Mafalda*, when the children play cowboy games). This conflation of Native Brazilian and Native American tribes encouraged me to think that all indigenous peoples of the continent looked the same. In 2001, *Maurício de Sousa Produções* published the special edition *Manual do Índio Papa-Capim*, (Manual of the Indian Papa-Capim), which explains some particularities of various Native Brazilian tribes. However, most Papa-Capim stories do not account for native cultural diversity; indigenous characters in these stories, including the ones from different tribes, look and behave more or less the same.

I am appalled by how naïve I was in believing in the idyllic farm of Chico Bento, and the untouched forest of Papa-Capim! In Maurício de Sousa's comics, animals are frequently anthropomorphized with friendly behavior and smiles—even predators such as panthers and alligators. Planting, hunting, and fishing are reduced to pleasure, adventure, and fun rather than survival. Furthermore, in some stories Papa-Capim goes so far in protecting animals that he refuses to eat the potential prey. This type of environmentalism is an urban and Eurocentric conceptualization of nature that suggests a modern relationship to animals (Descola). Therefore, people in rural areas should not be expected to protect nature by ceasing to cut down trees completely, turning into vegetarians, or resisting outside hunters; rather, the comics should be more respectful toward *caipiras* and natives' traditional ways of relating to the environment.

Fig. 5: "Woodcutter: Can I go now?
Mônica: Now, you can!
Woodcutter: This was the last time I cut off a tree!"
Source: turmadamonica.uol.com.br (Reprinted with permission)

I remember the countless times someone from São Paulo, Japan, or the US, in learning that I come from the Amazon, has asked, "Is your house inside the forest?" I remember the countless stories friends have told me

about Southeasterners asking, "Do alligators walk freely in the streets?" or "Aren't you afraid of piranhas and anacondas?" or "Do people swing on vines to go from tree to tree?" The memory of *Tarzan*, *Mowgli*, *Anaconda*, and other imported pop culture products conflate Africa, India, the Amazon, and other "uncivilized" settings into one reference. We are the same in savagery, so we are the same in the need for urbanization, industrialization, and enlightenment.

When I was reading Maurício de Sousa's comics, I could feel they had not been written for me, and less still for my Amazonian friends. Even as a child, it seemed obvious to me that the envisioned audience was white, urban, middle-class children in the Southeast. In Papa-Capim, the heroes of the stories are "pure" natives, their allies are the "good" whites (usually children) with whom the reader is expected to identify, and the villains are "bad" (usually adult) whites. This representation can encourage Southeastern readers to feel good about themselves and think that they are enlightened in relation to ignorant woodcutters and hunters. In this manner, readers are prevented from reflecting on how they are also part of an oppressive system that destroys the environment and the people who live in it.

In the comics, Amazonians are natives isolated in the jungle. Well, I grew up in the city, and guess what? Nobody around me had white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. My best friends are either brown or Japanese. Reading the comics used to bring me joy, but also doubt: "are my friends and I inauthentic Amazonians?" (Farenzena and Mendes 8) If we don't appear in pop culture, does it mean we don't matter?" Trinh Min-ha calls "planned authenticity" the process of instilling, into the subaltern's mind, the need to prove one's genuineness (268). When an ethnic group is presented as an "endangered species," white liberals are portrayed as their saviors, and so the oppressed subject can become "more preoccupied with her/his image of the *real* native—the *truly different*—than with the issues

of hegemony, racism, feminism, and social change" (267, Trinh's emphasis).

I open the comic book, and once again, there it is: Papa-Capim, the redskin, encounters the white city-dweller for the first time in his life. The representation leaves out the fact that, for indigenous descendants in the Amazon, genocide and enculturation have occurred for more than 500 years; no indigenous boy is bumping into a white outsider by chance, or solving their differences in the blink of an eye.

In the colorful comics, the forest is a beautiful and tranquil paradise, without stress or responsibilities (de Castro 473). Outside the pages, the Amazon is overcome with deadly conflicts over rural land property, large-scale deforestation by big companies, massive migration to the capital, and other social diseases. Is the place I grew up in not genuine? The child in me could instinctively notice something was off when the Amazon I experienced daily and learned about at school had nothing to do with the Amazon I saw in comics, cartoons, and movies, but I could not yet identify these differences. The idyllic forest appeared to be more real, because that was how it allegedly used to be before evil woodcutters invaded it, and that was how it was supposed to become again.

As an adult, I can point out the dichotomies that were invisible to me as a young reader: society versus nature (Procópio), civilized versus uncivilized (de Lima; Luíndia and Oliveira; Torrecillas), modern versus outdated (Manthei), protector of nature versus destroyer of nature (da Silva et al.; de Castro and Oliveira; Natal), and reason versus intuition (Procópio). Of course, the child in me wanted to be and enact the first of each binary. Not anymore. I reject both options, because they are not really options. Instead of choosing a rigid and self-contained identity given to me, I choose more fluid, nuanced, intersectional identities. Do all Amazonian children have the opportunity to grow into this realization? I hope, but doubt that they do.

5. A Letter to Maurício de Sousa

Dear M. Maurício de Sousa,

I'm a huge fan of your work. I grew up reading your comics and watching your cartoons, over and over again.

I'm from Belém, Pará. You've been going to the Amazon in the last few years, haven't you? You've been talking about the desire to create characters that speak to us: an indigenous boy, a *seringueiro*'s little son (rubber latex extractor), and a group of *ribeirinhos* boys. Why not girls? The only important girls in your stories live in the city, as if only urban life allowed for feminine agency, and women in the capital were liberated.

In 2013, you declared, "Like every guy from the Southeast, I used to see the Amazon as a jungle, but when I realized the place's great scope in conversations with scholars, natives, and people who lived in these areas, I decided to stop and organize an adequate group to show this beautiful thing without being exaggerated" ("'Pai'," my translation). I'm glad you recognize the urgency to listen to Amazonians and make the representations of the Amazon more complex. Nonetheless, the *Chico Bento* and *Papa-Capim* comics, as well as your posts about the Amazon on the official website, continue to be problematic for the abundance of stereotypes, binaries between city characters and forest/countryside characters, preservationist discourses, and other ideologies that, despite your good intentions, can harm the self-perception and development of critical thought in Amazonian readers.

Millions of Brazilian children look up to you. Many of them even dream of becoming a cartoonist in your studio. But what kind of

examples do you offer to these aspiring cartoonists, when all creations are credited solely to you in the publications? Disney, Marvel, and other comic studios have already abolished this practice (Natal 4). This says a lot about the appropriation of artistic work, but it also justifies appropriation in general: of our labor, culture, and image for the profit of your company.

You frequently say the environmental messages in your comics originate from a commitment to education and social justice. The Ministry of Education, NGOs, Unicef, and many other institutions use your characters to teach about the environment, health, and human rights. But we both know this is not solely about selfless contributions; it is a commercial strategy for the promotion of the *Turma da Mônica* brand in Brazil and abroad (de Castro and Oliveira). Your characters feature in governmental campaigns, textbooks, television screens, and thousands of products.

Maurício, perhaps you don't realize how much your stories impact the lives of Amazonian children. You forget we are part of your audience too. The messages about preserving nature, or leaving the responsibility of preserving it to *caipiras* and indigenous children, can contribute to the formation of a conservative public opinion (da Silva et al.). The positioning of indigenous characters as old-fashioned can promote hurtful consequences to native readers, while stereotyped portrayals of Amazonians as anachronous have the potential to encourage young consumers from the North to reject their indigenous heritage, or assume that indigenous people live an outdated life. This hegemonic discourse was the same employed during colonization and is now present in neoliberalism (de Castro).

The villains in your comics, particularly the woodcutter and the hunter, presuppose the blame for deforestation lies on individuals (Scareli). Ironically, these individuals do not exist in the Amazon. The woodcutter is based on US American lumberjacks shown in imported cartoons, and has nothing to do with the timber factories operating in Brazil, or the impoverished workers exploited in them. Similarly, the hunter is based on US American and Western European representations of rich aristocrats who hunt fox and deer for sport, rather than Brazilian peasants and natives who hunt armadillo, paca, and turtle to complement their diet.
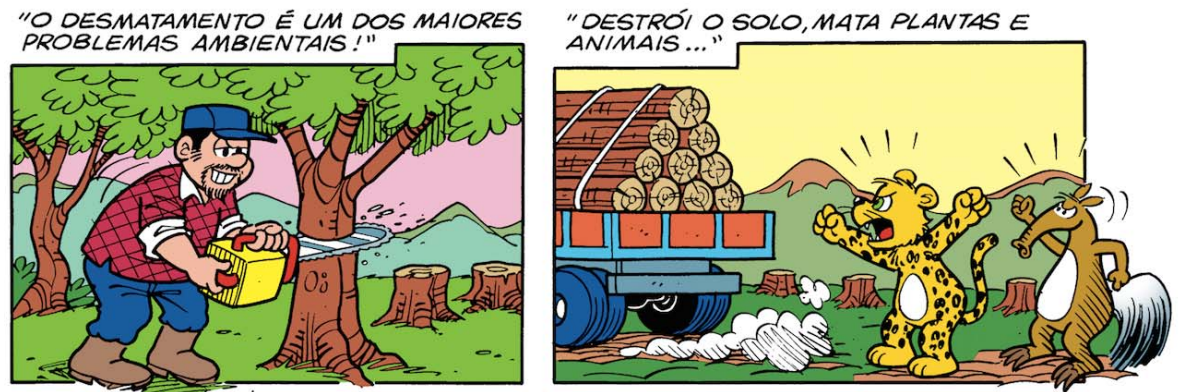

Fig. 6: "Deforestation is one of the biggest environmental problems! It destroys the soil, kills plants and animals…" Source: Image sent to the author by *Maurício de Sousa Produções*. (Reprinted with permission.)

In the globalized context of pollution, deforestation, land theft, predatory fishing, transportation barriers, and poverty, access to food becomes limited and hunting gains a new importance to contemporaneous dwellers of non-urban areas. Ignoring the survival needs of these communities, the law criminalizes hunting and fishing, and the general public makes community members responsible for the future of humanity through complete

preservation, instead of finding fault in the *de facto* cause of environmental destruction: the expanding urban-industrial model (Arruda).

In the comics, when a little boy can stop deforestation through interpersonal relations, by persuading a misguided adult into being ashamed of his selfish acts, the larger cultural context is ignored. The discourse does not give the child a chance to minimally understand environmental issues in a constructive way, or empathize with the real sufferers of such an oppressive system. All the child sees is a hero and a villain. Let's not try to be heroes, let's not try to persuade a fictional villain. We Amazonians want to be ourselves. And we want you, and everybody else, to be our allies.

Sincerely,
M.

6. Epilogue: Brazil, a Postcolonial Land

I reread my letter to Maurício. Oh, no, I did it again… I made it personal. I let my childhood memories, where he was a "cool uncle" who betrayed me, cloud my judgment. Maurício is not a villain, like the evil woodcutter; he is an entrepreneur inside a larger hegemonic system of neoliberalism that involves public and private institutions. Amazonian children's low self-esteem is a consequence of a long history of colonialism by Portugal, and neocolonialism by continental Europe (especially France) and the USA. As some activists and intellectuals fight to decolonize our politics and economy, others fight to decolonize our minds, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o professed.

In academia, Postcolonial Studies have canonized scholars from the Third World, such as Edward Said. I, too, as a woman of color from a

poor country and an even poorer region, want to be heard in developed countries' educational sites. Perhaps my work can open the way for more silenced voices; for instance, the countryside Amazonians and indigenous students who are just now getting the opportunity to graduate. Perhaps when I translate my publications to an accessible Portuguese and make them available for free online, some Brazilians will take notice and feel empowered. Perhaps my call for building alliances can inspire the subaltern and elites in the Amazon, Brazil, and the US to stop attacking each other, and instead turn against the common enemy of structural oppression.

Postcolonial Studies itself is divided. Poststructuralists such as Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock criticize research within their own discipline, while academics from other areas such as Arif Dirlik and Terry Eagleton criticize postcolonialism in an almost generalizing form. The two most common critiques, classism and a focus on the micro (the agony of a hybrid identity) to the expense of the macro (neocolonialism), might place me as a culprit: I am in a privileged position among the subaltern like Gayatri Spivak is, and sometimes I "forget" systemic oppressions like Homi Bhabha does. Nevertheless, my commitments to criticality, intersectionality, context, and social justice guide me to self-criticism, so that I can acknowledge my mistakes and try, try again.

Besides the hybridity of my cultural identities, I also try to find my academic identity in Communication Studies, Popular Culture Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and every other discipline I explore. Latinocentricity, Asiacentricity, Lusophone Postcolonialism, and Epistemologies of the South are only a few of the options. I must use my privilege of having options to become an ally of those who have nearly none: my spiritual family from Amazônia.

Acknowledgments

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