

Humor and politics in the deconstruction of superheroes in Latin America during the Cold War: the look of comics

Abstract

A medium associated with everyday life and juvenile entertainment, comics achieved full consolidation in Latin America in the post-Second World War years. During the Cold War and the massive U.S. cultural penetration in the region, comics were already seen in newspapers, where they were sometimes published in specific supplements, and also edited as comic books by specialized publishing houses. Amid debates about the advantages and disadvantages of comics for life that already mobilized those involved in the world of comics, the issue of cultural imperialism also led critics and local production to seek redefining the meanings of this medium in Latin America. One of the steps involved the effective defense of a “substitution of imports” from foreign producers, with a focus on the local creation of comics that could represent the national reality. To do this, there was a need to deconstruct some references from foreign comics, in order to put them into question before their reading community. This article analyzes this process through two case studies: the Brazilian cooperative CETPA (Cooperativa Editora de Trabalhos de Porto Alegre) and the Chilean publishing house Quimantú. In both of them, the focus primarily lied on superheroes, mixing parody and political criticism when discussing the superhero’s action in Latin America. Through the situations under analysis, we highlight this step for establishing comics as a cultural practice in the region.

Keywords: Comics; Superheroes; Latin America – History.

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Humor e política na desconstrução dos super-heróis na América Latina durante a Guerra Fria: o olhar dos quadrinhos

Resumo

Mídia associada ao cotidiano e entretenimento juvenil, as histórias em quadrinhos (HQ) alcançaram plena consolidação na América Latina durante os anos após a Segunda Guerra Mundial. Quando da Guerra Fria e da forte penetração cultural dos Estados Unidos da América (EUA) na região, as HQ já se encontravam presentes em jornais, nos quais, às vezes, eram publicadas em suplementos específicos, além de ser editadas no formato de revista por editoras especializadas. Em meio aos debates sobre as vantagens e desvantagens das HQ para a vida que já mobilizavam aqueles envolvidos no mundo das HQ, a questão do imperialismo cultural também motivou críticos e a produção local a buscar redefinir os sentidos dessa mídia na América Latina. Uma das etapas passou pela efetiva defesa de uma “substituição de importações” da produção estrangeira, focando na criação local de quadrinhos que representassem a realidade nacional. Para tanto, era necessário desconstruir algumas das referências dos *comics*, de modo a colocá-los em xeque perante sua comunidade de leitores. Este artigo analisa tal processo a partir de dois estudos de caso: a cooperativa brasileira CETPA (Cooperativa Editora de Trabalhos de Porto Alegre) e a editora chilena Quimantú. Em ambas, o foco recaiu principalmente sobre os super-heróis, mesclando paródia e crítica política ao problematizar a atuação do super-herói na América Latina. A partir das situações em análise, destaca-se tal etapa para o estabelecimento dos quadrinhos como prática cultural na região.

Palavras-chave: História em Quadrinhos; Super-heróis; América Latina – História.

Introduction – Comics in History: superheroes under analysis

The characters in comics are able to accomplish the most unbelievable feats. Some are represented as characters with superpowers that allow them not only to fly and defeat the evil forces through physical strength, but also provide a whole new narrative genre (HATFIELD, HEER, WORCESTER, 2013); some solve mysteries by resorting to magic or supernatural means; and there are those who simply look at the daily life events in a good mood – something which is perhaps the greatest of all possible feats.

It all has provided the comic characters with a dimension of innocence and purity, historically ratified by the editorial and visual conditions under which they were forged: published in Sunday newspapers and then in the daily press, they served as a funny relief to the adult real-world news. In garish colors and occasional caricature outlines, in many cases, comics just remained with the indulgence of tolerant eyes that saw them as nothing else than entertainment for young people (GABILLIET, 2005, p. 1-8). When they reached editorial autonomy through comic books, the improvised nature of the format generated reactions ranging from indifference and suspicion about this product aimed at children and young people (GABILLIET, 2010; WRIGHT, 2001).

When looking at the history of comics, it all may be largely regarded as true, to the point that comic books are not spared even within the format itself, such as the significant production of parodies of characters and series over time allows us to conclude (GROESTEEN, 2010; PEREIRA, 2011). The trivial nature of comics should be added with another history, which addresses the participation of this language in social order and political issues, historically located in each frame and page.

Latin America provides a fertile ground for discussing the relations between comics and politics through humor. In contrast, a matter of interest is the relative lack of studies focused on the Latin American reality in the current field named as *comics studies* (HEER, WORCESTER, 2009). Considering the numerous studies addressing the national scene, few studies incorporate the recent discussions concerning approaches to the transnational circulation of printed materials to understand them on a historical basis (PRADO, 2005, p. 11-33). A cultural product associated with technical innovation since the 19th century (SMOLDEREN, 2009), comics circulate from country to country and they

change in each territory crossed, at an intersection that favors writing a history of the crossroads and the circulation and production of meanings about them. After all, if the U.S. comics are historically constructed, could they bear the same meaning in each and every context?

We may say no, at least in the Latin American case. In the interwar period, the list of customers of the main U.S. comics distributor was about 1,200 periodicals worldwide, in 85 countries and translated into 27 different languages¹. From the 1920s and 1930s there is a marked and significant presence of comics in the region, introducing new ways of telling stories in images, combining themselves to local graphic and visual traditions, and enabling the creation of hybrid products. Far from representing definitive models of the ways how each national reality reacted to the presence of comics in the respective editorial market, discussing different contexts may contribute to a transnational view of the circulation of comics (STEIN, DENSON, MEYER, 2013).

Two case studies are discussed herein. The approach starts from the editorial work in contexts where people sought a way to discuss the meanings of comics in a given reality. In Brazil, the CETPA, a small cooperative created during the state government of Leonel Brizola in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, sought to put into practice a “substitution of imports,” launching comic characters with national themes that put into question the foreign legitimacy of comics. In Chile, the big publishing house Quimantú, in line with the political project of the Unidad Popular of socialism through democratic means, sought to apply to the comic strips some of the critical discussions promoted by intellectuals like Armand Mattelart, Ariel Dorfman, and Manuel Jofré.

Through the general references of the national-popular culture (ARGUMEDO, 2009, p. 24-25), the CETPA and Quimantú also tried to address the issue of comics as an aesthetic and political problem. Underlying the sources related to each publishing house there is the following question: what does mean publishing a typical manifestation of the capitalist society as comics in realities historically ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘Third-Worldist,’ resorting to expressions typical of the time? Each publishing house has dealt with the

¹ The bibliography is not accurate. Moses Konigsberg (apud. GENÉ, 2012, p. 184), an editor related to Hearst, sets the year 1919, while MacDougall (1942, p. 80) sets his data “before the [2nd] war.”

problem adopting different emphases, but putting into question a common figure: the superhero.

The dominant visual feature when discussing the comic superhero figure consisted in the extensive use of humor representations. Over much of the Brazilian comic strips *Zé Candango* there was a predominant use of humor in the deconstruction of characters from comics; in Quimantú, such an approach was preceded by a theoretical debate about the superhero, and it has been highlighted in comics published in the magazine *Cabrochico*. Therefore, the analysis lies on the set of comic strips created by Canini and José Geraldo and on a comics *Año 2.000* supported by discussions of superheroes by the Chilean man Manuel Jofré.

It is worth emphasizing again the differences between each editorial experience. The comic strip *Zé Candango* lasted 9 months in the daily section of comics published in the gaucho edition of the *Última Hora*, in addition to a sequence launched between 1963 and 1964 by the *Jornal do Brasil*; the contrast with *Año 2.000*, whose series failed to reach 10 issues in *Cabrochico* and it did not go beyond the year 1971, may seem a bit disproportionate. However, the contrast between different formats and lengths of duration highlights the nuances between them and the ways how each context realized comics. According to the usual approach among the theorists of parody, despite their intent, it demanded the social recognition of a normalizing canon to be mimicked (JAMESON, 1985, p. 16-26; HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 118-119). In other words, parody implies accepting the existence of a model likely to be appropriated and contested. Putting the exception of *Año 2.000* aside, in Quimantú people chose to not represent it visually, as if the publishing house did not recognize the superheroic canon within comics; instead, other heroes should arise, based on the appropriation of the Chilean reality through comics. In turn, in *Zé Candango* the parody established a condition that not only took over and paid tribute to comics, but it sought to emphasize the constraints imposed to the local market of comics.

CETPA and the “substitution of imports” of comics

The comic strip by José Geraldo and Renato Canini gathered characters of the genre superhero, such as Superman, Batman, and Captain Marvel, which were added with other adventure heroes – Phantom and Mandrake –, detectives – Dick Tracy and X-9 Agent –, jungle characters, humor-driven or not – Brucutu and Jungle Jim –, among others. The profusion of names and series led ‘Captain Marvel Jr.’ – a version of Captain Marvel – to declare that “in my country there is currently an actual inflation of supermen,” making work “scarce².” The metaphor of inflation, so dear to the political and economic context experienced by the country in 1962, was used to explain the presence of so many foreign heroes in Zé Candango’s Brazil.

However, there was a symbolic price to pay to escape the “inflation of supermen” afflicting the ‘States.’ The visualization of many characters from comics took place by means of visual and thematic appropriation of the main features of each of them, submitting them to the reader’s assessment. The characters and the whole mythology constructed around them over the years by the comics reading community were deconstructed through the language resources of comics. It began by calling up Super-Super, chosen by a troupe of masked people to protect Brazil. Supercilious and arrogant, the nickname Super-Super reinforced the archetypal nature of the character devised by Siegel and Shuster. It drew attention due to his disproportionate and absurd body, as well as other characters that emerged then, such as Batman and Phantom.



Figure 1 - Super-Super in Zé Candango.

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. *Última Hora*, Porto Alegre, 20 out. 1962, p. 14.

² ZÉ CANDANGO. *Última Hora*, Porto Alegre, 20 nov. 1962, p. 12.

What, at first sight, do they have in common? All of them were portrayed as corpulent beings and, as we may deduce, overweight. Strength is one of the defining components of superheroes: as noticed by Jennings through Sturken and Cartwright, superheroes may be interpreted as representations of power, reified in the physical dimension of their bodies (JENNINGS, 2013).

Other characters were presented to create a superhero team, under the leadership of 'Super-Super.' Following the interest that comic books expressed in the aesthetics of cowboys over the 1950s, icons of the genre introduced by film were addressed in the comic strip and included along with the canons of comics (SAVAGE JR., 1990).

Early on, the poor version of Roy Rogers stood out, named as 'Roi Roi,' which seemed to be fragile; "he deals with cows, but [sic] is always fragrant" and, unlike the character that inspired it, contemporary of names like Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, and Dick Foran, which had become famous because of songs sung in many of his more than 90 movies, 'Roi Roi' sang "any 'nonsense' song" after killing "ten or twenty," to his unlucky horse (SLATTA, 1994, p. 129-130)³.

Another character that has lost fantastic attributes was Mandrake. Until then regarded as the greatest Magician in the world, he got disappointed after a visit to the Brazilian Federal Commission of Supply and Prices (COFAP) and found that the real magicians were Brazilian. Interestingly, when this story was published, the COFAP had already been replaced by another federal agency, the Brazilian National Superintendency of Supply (SUNAB), something which may be an indicative that the strip was produced some time prior to its publication. Besides, the dialogue takes place in Rio de Janeiro and it mentions São Paulo, and this seems to reinforce the expectation that strips such as *Zé Candango* went beyond the regional boundaries.

³ ZÉ CANDANGO. *Última Hora*, Porto Alegre, 22 out. 1962, p. 20.

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Figure 2 - Mandrake in Zé Candango (details).

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. Última Hora, Porto Alegre, 07 dez. 1962, p. 20.

ZÉ CANDANGO. Última Hora, Porto Alegre, 08 dez. 1962, p. 16.

Brucutu, a prehistoric being whose comic adventures were motivated by time travels, he came to Brazil accompanied by professor Papanatas having a goal: to ‘get lucky.’ This meant taking advantage of the economic opportunities that the country’s inflation could provide a time traveler with.



Figure 3 - Brucutu in Zé Candango.

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. Última Hora, Porto Alegre, 23 out. 1962, p. 20.

The economic issue, on the other hand, made it hard to keep Popeye, or ‘Papaye,’ as preferred by the two artists from the CETPA, in the team of ‘supers.’ If ‘in his land’ those who paid his spinach ‘are [were] commercial firms through ads,’ in Brazil such an initiative might lead the team to bankruptcy.



Figure 4 - Popeye in Zé Candango (detail).

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. Última Hora, Porto Alegre, 29 nov. 1962, p. 16.

Jim Gordo, a representative of detective comics, believed he had been invited to Brazil thanks to his ability to 'find a spy' and due to his experience in 'comic strips that unfolded here in South America.'



Figure 5 - Jim Gordo in Zé Candango (detail).

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. Última Hora, Porto Alegre, 26 out. 1962, p. 20.

The list of characters from U.S. comics who paraded in Zé Candango strips went on throughout each issue of the gaucho Última Hora, possibly feeding the curiosity of readers concerning the next character that could not escape Canini's pencil and critical text by José Geraldo. In the strip by CETPA, Superman and Batman were treated as

superheroes on an equal footing with characters like Roy Rogers, Mandrake, Popeye, and Jim Gordon, something which represented a specific interpretation of comics, unlike what happened in the USA, for instance.

Contrary to what might be understood as the concept of ‘superhero’ in the USA, they were not regarded as ordinary heroes, but treated indistinctly as ‘supermen.’ Seemingly, *Zé Candango* proposed a direct association between comic characters and superheroes, treating everyone as synonyms. This attitude got closer to the guidelines provided by the Rio Grande do Sul State Law 2,220/1953, regarding the Special Committee of the CPOE/RS (VENTORINI, 2009), and criticism from several sectors of the Brazilian society in the 1950s and 1960s (JÚNIOR, 2004), which tended to associate the genre superhero to any and all comics. Thus, ‘heroes,’ ‘supers’ and even figures related to the *Far West* film were treated as synonyms in *Zé Candango*. What united them all was the same common origin, international. Within the limits of national-popular, the conceptual appropriation of comics provided their characters with a ‘super’ nature, because all of them were heroes from the ‘States’⁴.



Figure 6 - Satire of superheroes from the ‘States’ in *Zé Candango* (detail).

Source: ZÉ CANDANGO. *Última Hora*, Porto Alegre, 24 out. 1962, p. 20.

⁴ The historicity of the relation between concepts and society is advocated by Reinhardt Koselleck (1992, p. 134-146), whose reflections inspired the idea of ‘super-hero’ as a conceptual category in conflict.

What could explain such a specific conceptual appropriation in relation to the U.S. headquarters? In addition to criticism to the U.S. cultural imperialism, specific hypotheses about comics may be drawn to try addressing the issue. First, superheroes promoted a revolution in the youth entertainment industry. They were key to consolidate the comic book format and their stories have spread to other media through adaptations for radio and film. Soon, they became a significant component of U.S. mass culture exported to countries aligned with the capitalist bloc in the Cold War years. A representative fact is that the consolidation of 'supers' has taken place in Brazil since 1945, when the Editora Brasil-América Limitada (EBAL) was created, which strengthened the ties with the capitalist power in its name.

In a supplementary way, the introduction of comics in Brazil through syndicates may also point out paths to answer the question. There are no accurate data about it, but it is possible to say that, in contrast to what occurred in the USA, superhero comics arrived almost simultaneously with adventure and humor comics during the 1930s, bringing a new visuality and new reading practices to readers accustomed to the comic strips published in illustrated magazines, such as *Tico-Tico*, since 1905. Perhaps this may have contributed to the widespread criticism of comics as a foreign expression and contrary to the Brazilian reality. In turn, the specificity of superheroes, protagonists of a narrative genre inherent to comics, which would even influence other genres created under the comic format⁵, stimulated the interpretation that reduces all forms of comic expressions to this specific approach.

Finally, in a way, Brazilian publishing houses stimulated the occurrence of such a confusion. The main one, EBAL, launched, in 1947, the *Superman* magazine, with Batman, Robin, and Superman on the cover. Incidentally, the translation for the name of Clark Kent's alter-ego has not been chosen by chance and it served to differ the comic book by Siegel and Suster from what the publishing house saw as comic book heroes. That is, the magazine title, *Superman*, also served as a concept to encompass all comic heroes launched by it, while *Super-Homem* designated the specific character released in 1938. In

⁵ There are many examples, but among the best known, the case of *The Shadow* series stands out. Regarded as one of the inspirations for *Superman*, the series derived from the pulp stories would soon be adapted to comic books, but not before providing its protagonist with superheroic powers.

its debut editorial, the history of heroes from the ‘North America’ is described in an adventure atmosphere:

In Brazil, heroes in *Superman* are also well known. They emerged in one of our monthly juvenile magazines. They went to another one. Then to another one. They came back to the first one. From time to time they come back here and there, until, finally, under a contract between stakeholders in Brazil and North America get established in *Superman* – the magazine in the five continents⁶.

The confusion between genres observed in comics should not be associated, however, to ignorance about the peculiarities of this format by the creators of *Zé Candango*. The graphic representations observed here point out various graphic approaches among the comic ‘heroes.’ Characters like Papaye and Brucutu had features virtually identical to the original ones; Far West detectives and heroes were lightly satirized. The parody focused on the characters Superman, Batman, Phantom, and Lothar – named as ‘Lotação’ –, grouped according to what they might have in common: a uniform that set them apart from the rest of the people and physical strength above average.

“There will be no comics or capital”: Quimantú and the superhero against the wall

The Chilean case got closer to the reading proposed by the CETPA to some extent, insofar as it made criticism deeper from the theoretical viewpoint. It differed due to the fact that humor did not stand out in its editorial line, something which may be justified through the agreement that led to the creation of Quimantú. As a part of the negotiations for buying the participation in the private publisher Zig-Zag, it was agreed that the new State publisher might receive a considerable number of comic books with low sales volumes. In order to immediately start its activities, Quimantú decided to keep publishing these titles, as an exercise to adapt their content as opposed to the bourgeois ‘cultural industry’. Among the titles from Zig-Zag that were kept and reworked by Quimantú, none established a direct dialogue with humor; even when Quimantú began to

⁶ EBAL. *Superman*, n. 1, nov. 1947.

launch titles of its own, it was quite shy in the choice of comics aimed at humor. Putting aside the particular case of the magazine *La Firme* and sporadic comics observed in some titles, the only magazine focused on humor was *Ganso*, whose first issue came to light in September 1973, the month when a coup overthrew Allende and brought the activities of Quimantú to an end. Anyway, the first issue of *Ganso* had no parody of superheroes⁷.



Figure 7 - *Supercauro* (detail), by Pepe Huinca (apud FLORES, 2012, p. 614).

As it was not directly linked to the comics area in Quimantú, the magazine *La Firme* is not addressed herein, although it is a matter of discussion for other scholars analyzing comics by Quimantú (KUNZLE, 1978; FLORES, 2012). It is worth mentioning, however, the character *Supercauro*, published over some issues of the magazine in comics on political education.

The protagonist was a poor boy with a stunted physical appearance who acquired special powers after eating well. In the image below, the character became *Supercauro* after eating 'proteins,' perhaps through milk, a concern of the UP administration synthesized in the campaign distributing half a liter of milk to Chilean children on a daily basis. The milk distribution campaign adopted by the UP would become, according to Zárate (2010, p. 184), one of the "emblematic imaginary states associated with the socialist experience," up to the point of being the target of critical deconstruction of the dictatorship that emerged.

⁷QUIMANTÚ. *Ganso*, n. 1, Santiago de Chile, set. 1973.

Despite the powers, Supercauro did not solve the problems based on physical strength, defeating enemies such as the black market, illiteracy, the flight of dollars, copper strike, and competitors to the State-owned companies through reasoning and collective organization, demonstrating that superheroes were not needed (FLORES, 2010, p. 586-587).



Figure 8 - Año 2.200 (detail), by Guidú and Saúl Schkolnik.
Source: QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 3, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 10.

The simple outline, the parodic approach, and criticism of the superheroic canon, as well as the contrast between fantasy and reality, would be resources worked out in another comics by Quimantú. *Año 2.200*, drawn by Guidú according to scripts by Saúl Schkolnik, was a science fiction comics that fed on the Cold War imagery regarding the space race to comment on the Chilean reality. The comics, published in the third issue of *Cabrochico*, had as its theme the role played by the superhero in the lives of children from a distant planet⁸. After an alert call, the characters Gagarito, Próton and company landed their ship and found themselves within an unusual scene.

⁸ QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 3, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 09-16.



Figure 9 - Año 2.200, by Guidú a Saúl Schkolnik.

Source: QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 3, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 13.

The situation was quickly clarified: inspired by the character Super-Super and equipped with covers that refer to the paradigmatic character by DC Comics, children jumped off a stone towards a tree in the hope of flying and thus saving the mascot Miú, which could not get off the top of a tree. The repeated attempts failed and all of them had an expression of discomfort on his face, when they had no bruise on the head. Even after reality proved the fallacy of superheroic tales, the boys remained faithful to the icon of comics, up to the point of attacking with stones Gagarito and his friends – just because they said that Super-Super was nothing but a ‘story.’ The power of Super-Super soon became clear to the protagonists when they realized his presence everywhere; this might explain the fact that children thought Super-Super was the only solution to every problem.

Observed not only in comic books, as well as in TV shows, commercials, and public monuments, superheroes might be a 'place of memory' that caused discomfort to the socialist project of human emancipation. Against the extraordinary individualization of actions, the teamwork advocated by *Cabrochico* brought the unfolding of the narrative. The context changed only when one of the boys, at the time of another jump, injured his head and needed medical care provided by Chilean characters who promptly proposed collective cooperation as a strategy to get, together, the mascot. The boys finally realized they needed Super-Super no more to solve their problems and thanked the protagonists, who went back to space.

Funny reduction in the world of comics having superheroes and their readers was an exception within the editorial Project of Quimantú and it might have pleased the editors of *Cabrochico*, who resumed one of the comic strips in a supplement aimed at parents. The aim was explaining to them the political proposal of the magazine that, in its first four issues, did its utmost in the critical deconstruction of many narratives and characters that inhabited the social imagery of Chilean children until then. As a response to letters that the magazine had received and to the impact observed through the early copies⁹, the editors of *Cabrochico* saw themselves compelled to attach to the magazine a supplement with explanations to parents, where they argued in favor of the magazine's proposal.

After criticism to fairy tales, the attention was directed to comics, among them the superhero ones. When speaking of them, the magazine's supplement asked whether parents should really believe that a man alone is able to solve every problem in 'our country and the world' and whether, indeed, the progress and issues of each person should not be tackled through union and cooperation in a team. Instead of supporting the individualismo appreciated among superheroes, parents should support narratives encouraging the 'union of all Chileans towards the country's progress,' calling them up to, together, "show that it is better to help each other, just as adults do," instead of wait for Superman¹⁰.

⁹ QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 5, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 22-23.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 33.



Figure 10 - Supplement for parents in *Cabrochico*.
Source: QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 5, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 30.

On the next page, the supplement discussed the ethnocentrism seen in a comic book by Disney that treated the ‘stupid natives’ disparagingly; and even horror comics did not escape criticism due to its content regarded as morally degrading and violent. Instead of these publications, there was a need to encourage comics aiming at the cooperation and unity of Chilean individuals and highlighting the role of work and sport in the healthy development of children, something which could be conveyed even in science fiction comics, such as *Año 2.200*¹¹.

This supplement attached to the fifth issue of *Cabrochico* brought a direct mention to discussions about the meanings of comics that filled the press and academic debates since the mid-1960s in Chile. Beside In addition to *Para leer al Pato Donald*, the book *Superman y sus amigos del alma* provided valuable data to the debate about the social

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 30-31, 34, 30, 32, 33, 35.

meanings of comics in the socialist Chile. The findings of researches carried out within Quimantú, between 1971 and 1972, were written once again by Ariel Dorfman, this time in partnership with the sociologist Manuel Jofré, and published only in 1974, in Argentina. When the coup that led to the collapse of the UP occurred, the book reached its final production stage, it was ready for binding and took the initial title *Documentos secretos sobre a vida íntima do Super-Homem e seus companheiros d'alma*, perhaps referring to a book of great success at the time, launched by Quimantú in April 1972 (DORFMAN, 1978, p. 16)¹².

In the original prologue, which could have been written in comic format and lost during the seizure of the book by the military men, Dorfman said that people sought to “link the ideology that pushed soul fellows of the superhero with the insurrectionary attempts by dominant classes, devoid of executive power in Chile¹³” (DORFMAN, JOFRÉ, 1978, p. 15-16). Like Gagarito and his friends, the authors sensed that Superman “was everywhere in Chile” and he became “the most dangerous” adversary to be fought (DORFMAN, JOFRÉ, 1978, p. 15-16). To do this, they wrote the book.

The second part of the work, written by Manuel Jofré, was devoted to the analysis of comic books published in Chile during the first year of operation of Quimantú. Written in a language that moves between essay and political pamphlet, the book came from general theoretical references, such as Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes – besides Dorfman and Mattelart, of course – to define the features of comics in the capitalist world then. At first, it pointed out that the comic book was socially forged as an allegedly innocent entertainment and, therefore, it idealized a child as a reader, infantilizing its sense. The evasive nature of comics, however, should be seen in the light of the social relations of production and, within capitalism, it was configured as a form of ideological compensation in face of the alienation of the capitalist world. Interposing between the workers and their inevitable attempt of revolutionary emancipation, Jofré declared: “man

¹² *Documentos secretos de la ITT*. Santiago de Chile: Quimantú, 1972.

¹³ Throughout the work, the notion of ‘ideology’ is crafted through the Marxian framework that defines it as ‘false consciousness,’ according to the famous quote of Marx and Engels: “And If, in every ideology, men and their relations appear upside down like in a darkroom, this phenomenon arises from its historical life process, just as the inversion of objects on the retina is due to its direct physical life process” (MARX, ENGELS, 2001, p. 19).

must look at himself to find out that he is economically and humanly poor: comics prevent it” (JOFRÉ, 1978, p. 91).

Designed as the main publishing house of the Chilean State, Quimantú was in charge of putting forward the habit of reading through books, variety magazines, and comic books, something which required that the latter underwent critical analysis. Inserted in something evaluated as a democratic experience of socialist transition, the exercise proposed by Jofré consisted in discussing the media through ideological criticism and thus help constructing the new society, endowed with new values:

Comics are a weapon. The media are a weapon. But the use we make of them is not to kill, but to protect. Because our weapons are different. Truth, freedom, human fulfillment, all in all, the unity of human beings. Under socialism there will be no weapons. Under socialism there will be no murder. Under socialism there will be no men who kill other men, neither through work or any weapon. Because there will be no bullets or weapons, there will be no comics or capital. There will be no false riches. (DORFMAN, JOFRÉ, 1978, p. 93)

Jofré went on by listing a number of ideological values underlying comic books, arguing how the speed of action and its ‘eminently pragmatic structure’ contributed to strengthen a single message, where the ‘values of bourgeois ideology’ conveyed by the characters were absorbed by readers. According to him, the readers were concealed through the entertainment and innocence ideas historically disseminated by the media. Jofré established that a comic story:

Denies or distorts the historical fact that there are developed and underdeveloped countries (setting the space of comics in a no man’s land, such as, for instance, in the cases of the West, the jungle, or Batman’s Gothic City), [...] It denies social transformation (proposing a circular world where superheroes always triumph, either Batman, Tarzan, or Zorro), [...] it denies the insurmountable contradictions of capitalism (with the superhero overcoming problems of justice) [...] it denies society (showing the good ones always alone), it denies humanity (depicting the superhero as a Messiah who enforces justice and order, turning him into a supratemporal being endowed with eternal powers), it denies class justice (leading the superhero to solve problems that justice cannot solve), [...] it denies freedom (the superhero punishes those who rebel, arresting them, or recapturing them to the system), [...] it denies work (the characters are always idle), it denies creation (resulting in a repetitive world), and of course, besides denying many, many things else,

the ideology of comics denies itself (no character reads them at all). (JOFRÉ, 1978, p. 95-96)

In addition to the prose full of accusations and an accusatory tone, with denials that occupied almost an entire page, it is worth highlighting the fact that Jofré does not distinguish the narrative genres existing in comics. In fact, just as seen in *Zé Candango's* strips, comics whose setting is the jungle or the Old West were placed at the same level as superheroic narratives of characters like Batman, for instance.

The guideline of allocating comic characters from such different genres in common approaches is still followed today by other European analysis of comics. Even after overcoming the structuralist inflections observed in Jofré's theoretical guidelines, little emphasis is given to the differences between heroes and superheroes. Savramis (1986, p. 254-264) notices the dialogue between Superman and Tarzan, bringing the comic superhero along with the influence of science fiction to the comic version of Burroughs' work through religion and the wish for transcendence in conjectures of modern life or the articles by Prévost (2014, p. 47-64) and Levet (2014, p. 69-81), who define a genealogy of superheroes through the serial literature of the 19th century, in order to dialogue such a literary tradition with characters like Superman, Batman, and European Astérix and Tintin.

Although Jofré has outlined a distinction between the comic genres by saying that superheroes are 'one of the most frequently widespread trends in comic books,' the analysis started from them to generalize the interpretation of comics as a whole. In this way, Superman and his 'bosom friends' – like the 'superheroes' from the Western Zorro and Roy Rogers, Phantom and Tarzan, Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon, Prince Valiant, and, of course, Super Mouse – might be usurping the role of reality changer, inherent to the proletarian class profile. According to Jofré, instead of it, the superheroes proposed the abolition of any conflict. In one of his famous sentences, Jofré (1978, p. 101-102, p. 96) stated that "in a world protected by Superman, Marx and Che Guevara are unnecessary."

Jofré's analysis of comics followed this tune, listing a number of features observed in any comic story. Fragmentation and naturalization of reality, Manichaeism,

individualism, vertical power relations, emphasis on adventure instead of everyday life time and on quantitative instead of qualitative aspects, legalism, irrationalism, and class and race prejudice were some of the elements listed as constituting the “traditional bourgeois comic story,” from Superman to Dick Tracy (JOFRE, 1978, p. 101-103). *Cabrochico*, the main editorial project by Quimantú aimed at the publication of comics different from those that hitherto had spread “ideological values of the bourgeoisie,” may be seen as an attempt to put into practice such readings, something which may be realized in the widespread criticism of all juvenile narratives – from fairy tales to various genres observed in comics.

Even some product ads in *Cabrochico* fed on discussions regarding the images of heroism to be conveyed to Chilean children. Figure 5.11 combines the strength obtained after drinking milk to father’s efforts, ‘a top-ranking worker.’



Figure 11 - Advertisement in *Cabrochico*.

Source: QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 4, Santiago de Chile, 1971, p. 43.

The superheroic body, which deserved attention in *Zé Candango* and *Año 2.200*, took the central space again, this time in advertising. Health and physical education, major elements of the visual culture of socialist regimes like the Soviet (O'MAHONY, 2006), were also significant themes for the visuality of the Chilean socialist project, occupying space in specific supplements of *Cabrochico*, through economic and original revenue sources, health recommendations, and guidelines on vitamins and medicines, among others¹⁴. In Quimantú, the sports magazine *Estadio* changed its editorial line, replacing the exclusive coverage of football teams, horse racing, and international sports in favor of reports on community sports activities and health tips.

In the case of comics, the defense of a counter-hegemonic body against the U.S. cultural and political domination involved the deconstruction of the superheroic body. Seen as invulnerable and free from marks, located above any historical determination, highlighted above ordinary citizens, and treated like celebrities (BUKATMAN, 2013, p. 179), the Super-Supers should be overcome by other national heroes. To do this, the local past was a recipe for the introduction of new (super)heroes in the canon of Brazilian and Chilean comics.

Conclusion

Despite the differences, a common point brings the CETPA and Quimantú closer: attention aimed at the comic superhero figure. Thus, the paradigmatic role of the superhero narrative within comic stories serves as a backdrop so that the editorial initiatives of Brazilian and Chilean comics produce interpretations on it and, more broadly, about comic stories as a whole. We tried to point out some of the guidelines and criteria that guided the comic creations of the CETPA and Quimantú, in order to discuss the impact that such a medium achieved in the Latin American scene during the Cold War.

The differences between them should not be overshadowed, despite the approaches proposed, something which forced the development of a historical narrative

¹⁴ For instance, cf. QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 3, Santiago de Chile, p. 22-36. QUIMANTÚ. *Cabrochico*, n. 4, Santiago de Chile, p. 22-36.

that includes both the “games of scales” (REVEL, 1998, p. 15-38) and a “crossed history¹⁵” (WERNER, ZIMMERMAN, 2003, p. 07-36), in favor of the social construction of comics’ meanings in Brazil and Chile. It is possible to conclude that Latin America has its own editorial and visual history of comics yet to be told, where clashes involving local works and foreign material are paradigmatic elements for its construction as a cultural activity.

The coincidence that the CETPA and Quimantú entitled their parodied superheroes as ‘Super-Super’ should go beyond a mere anecdotal curiosity. It is indicative that the circulation of meanings on a cultural practice cross national boundaries. It is possible to see them, according to Appadurai (2008, p. 15-88), as endowed with a “social life” whose “cultural biography” implies the circulation of meanings and practices that go beyond historically artificial boundaries, such as the nation-State, for instance. Through the regional and national realities of the publishing houses CETPA and Quimantú, we do observe that comics consist in a cultural practice by means of the circulation and appropriation of meanings of the various interactions between these analysis scales, something which points out a transnational history of comics.

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¹⁵ The quotes refer, respectively, to REVEL, Jacques. Microanálise e construção do social. In: REVEL, J. (Org.), op. cit., and WERNER, Michael; ZIMMERMAN, Bénédicte, op. cit.

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