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ORCID:
MEBH: 0000-0002-9421-9438

***Chinos and palomillas: Comics, Childhood and Race in Colombia and Peru (1920-1940)*¹**

Chinos y palomillas: Cómics, infancia y raza en Colombia y Perú (1920-1940)

MARÍA ELENA BEDOYA HIDALGO

The University of Manchester, UK
Email: malenabedoya@yahoo.com

Abstract. This article examines the comics *Para los niños Mojicón* and *Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante*, published between 1920 and 1940 in Bogota and Lima, respectively. I explore how these graphic narratives are part of a moral project within the prevailing white-mestizo social order. In this regard, I reflect on the concept of racial innocence, whiteness, and inferential racism in the construction of child characters and the playful spaces in which their actions unfold. Additionally, I analyse how the discourse of eugenics acts as a catalyst for anxieties and fears associated with race. I argue that the construction of these childhoods portrayed in the comics heavily relied on perpetuating such imagery, reinforcing the notion that healthy and innocent children were synonymous with whiteness. This text seeks to establish the connections between these urban experiences and the representations of childhood life in the Andean cities during the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: childhood, race, comics, Lima, Bogota.

Resumen. Este artículo se centra en el análisis de las historietas *Para los niños Mojicón* y *Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante*, publicadas entre 1920 y 1940 en Bogotá y Lima, respectivamente. El objetivo principal es explorar cómo estas narrativas gráficas forman parte de un proyecto moral vinculado al orden social blanco-mestizo predominante. En este sentido, se reflexiona sobre el concepto de inocencia racial, la noción de blanquitud y el racismo inferencial presentes en la construcción de personajes infantiles y en los espacios lúdicos en los que se desarrollan sus acciones. Además, se analiza cómo el discurso de la eugenesia actúa como un catalizador de ansiedades y temores relacionados con la raza. Se sostiene que la construcción de estas representaciones de la infancia en los cómics se basa en gran medida en la perpetuación de imaginarios que refuerzan la idea de que los niños sanos e inocentes son sinónimo de la blancura. En resumen, este texto busca establecer las conexiones entre estas experiencias urbanas y las representaciones de la vida de la infancia en las ciudades andinas durante la primera mitad del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: infancia, raza, historieta, Lima, Bogotá.

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«Toda una raza prendida al cajón»
El alma de Bogotá. 1938.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 19th century, myriad literary works² have appeared featuring children's characters commonly known as "chinos" in Bogota and "palomillas" in Lima. In one of Colombian José María Samper's stories from 1899, the encounter between a character and one of these "chinos" is presented in racial terms, the emphasis on the child's awkward physique and grimy face suggesting a possible "mestizo" heritage. Samper associates the children's air of «patent malignity or malignant mischief» with their race, projecting a future of vice and «perdition in the streets» (Samper, 1899, p. 7). Similarly, in Peruvian literature of the same period, the "palomillas" were depicted as a category of street children, orphans, and migrants in the city. They were portrayed as surviving the city by shining shoes, selling lottery tickets, or newspapers. Writer José Diez Canseco Pereira, for example, presented the "palomillas" as representatives of the impoverished mestizo population, particularly mulattos and zambos, who, as traditional poor or native inhabitants of Lima, were part of the creole culture (Diez Canseco in Roggenbuck, 1996, p. 92)³. As such, the terms "chinos" or "palomillas" were associated with the dehumanisation and racialisation of these children, signifying potential deviance, street life, and undesirable behaviour.

In the Andean cities of the early 20th century, the prevalence of child beggars and destitute orphans was notable. A significant number of these young people were migrants, who resorted to precarious occupations to endure the hardships caused by poverty and family abandonment. Historical records reveal that both Bogota and Lima experienced significant flows of internal migration in the early decades of the 20th century. Against this backdrop, the children's comic characters I examine here were an integral part of the urban imaginary of the first half of the twentieth century. To research this article, I focused on the stories of *Para los niños Mojicón*, distributed in *Mundo al Día* in Bogota (1924-1938), and *Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante*, published in *Palomilla, revista peruana para niños* in Lima during the 1940s. The historiography of both countries has recognised these child

characters of Mojicón and Pedrito as milestones in the history of local comics (Rabanal, 2001; González, 2020; Sagástegui, 2003; Reynoso, 2017). Despite the geographical distance separating the two cityscapes, I highlight how both comics express similar concerns about the relationship between urban life, childhood, and race. Specifically, I argue that these cultural productions are integral to a moral project based on the prevailing white-mestizo social order in urban areas. I explore how this order expresses ambivalence (Saguisag, 2018) through a child's encounters with racialised black or indigenous individuals in rural areas or on the streets.

The article is divided into three parts. First, I examine the representation of racial innocence (Bernstein, 2011) and whiteness (Echeverría, 2010) in the character of Mojicón. By analysing innocent games, I demonstrate how inferential racism (Hall, 2010) operates on various levels. The second part scrutinises the narrative elements of the Pedrito comic, exploring how the discourse of eugenics catalysed anxieties and fears related to race (Ahmed, 2017; Ahmed, 2020). I also study how violence is used as a corrective measure to shape formative years and how "solutions" tied to progress were rooted in whitening and notions of civilization. The construction of these childhoods heavily relied on perpetuating such imagery, reinforcing the idea that whiteness equated to healthy and innocent children.

¡CLARO, HAY QUE AVISARSE!: RACIAL INNOCENCE AND WHITENESS IN BOGOTA

Modern journalism emerged in Colombia in the 1920s linked to the appearance of publishing houses, news agencies and graphic reporters, which promoted the expansion of an urban readership (Cubillos, 2012, p. 58). It was in this context that *Mundo al Día* was born, an evening newspaper focusing on news from the city of Bogota, directed by Arturo Manrique. The contents of this publication were aimed at the capital's growing middle classes and included a profuse use of images, such as comics, photography, caricature, and graphic design. In addition, artistic events, sports, civic festivals, political-economic affairs, and leisure activities in the city were part of its headlines. *Para los niños Mojicón* was written and illustrated by Adolfo Samper and appeared every Saturday. The comic strip was printed on coated paper on the last page, which made it easily identifiable to readers. The artist Samper (1900-1991) was recognised for his caricature, drawing, graphic design, and painting work. From his university days, he was already linked as a designer and caricaturist to the Bogota publishing mar-

² Other literary stories in which these "chinos" characters are mentioned, such as *El niño Agapito* (1870) and *La niña Salomé* (1882) by Ricardo Silva; and *La niña Agueda* (1877) by Manuel Pombo.

³ For instance, Diez Canseco's *El Trompo* (1941) is a popular story about a mulatto boy's journey to retrieve his spinning top. It explores themes of violence in his family and interactions with other children.

ket, participating in magazines such as *Cromos*, *El Gráfico*, *Universidad* and *El Buen Humor* (Segura, 1989, p. 10).

The persona of Mojicón was, in fact, a copy of Smitty, a character from a comic strip named after him that was published in 1922 by Walter Berndt in the *Chicago Tribune*. According to some scholars, the artist Adolfo Samper was somewhat hesitant to acknowledge himself as the creator of Mojicón (Segura, 1989; González, 2020) due to the striking resemblance to the US figure. Both characters, Smitty and Mojicón, as well as other family members in the strips, share identical physical features. Furthermore, there are episodes with similar themes where they engage in family matters, games, and friendships. My analysis of Mojicón primarily focuses on the comic strips from the first five years (1924-1929), as during the 1930s we see a shift towards a less pronounced interest in depicting street activities in Bogota, and the characters' stories begin to revolve more around the family environment and occasionally work-related situations. Additionally, from the 1930s onwards, Mojicón's younger brother, Bizcochito, assumes a more prominent role in the comic strip, transforming it into a story about the innocence and mischievousness of a baby within the family. This change in Samper's comic strip coincides with his trip to Europe in 1928, where he received a scholarship to study art. Upon his return, he continued his work at *Mundo al Día* while also contributing as a cartoonist for other newspapers such as *El Espectador* (Segura, 1989, p. 27). The shift in style and narrative of the comic feature is significantly noticeable between the initial period and this subsequent period.

Another characteristic of Samper's cartoon series is that it was published on Saturday afternoons and was characterised using words associated with sweets and foods that children tend to like at that time of day. For instance, Mojicón derives its name from a type of sweet bread that is typically consumed with a cup of hot chocolate in the afternoons. Similarly, most of the children's characters in the comic have names like Gelatina, Almójábana, Natillita, Panelita, Bizcochito, and Chocolate. The artist establishes a connection between taste and his artwork to evoke a sense of nostalgia for the sweets that were enjoyed during childhood. This association with childhood appeals to our emotional attachment to innocence, and it can be observed in each frame of the comic.

The term "chino"⁴ in Colombia is equivalent to a child in English. It is used throughout the comic to refer

to all children. The etymology of the term is linked to the street inhabitants of Bogota, and their innocent and mischievous nature. The children portrayed in the Mojicón cartoon are playful, impish, ill-behaved, and disobedient. From the perspective of adults, there are various moral corrections that are implemented in response to these behaviours, many of which involve physical violence. As noted by Cook (2020), children are perceived as inherently prone to degeneracy and childhood is seen as a stage emerging from a complex web of moral tensions, projecting the potential development of a human subject in the future (2020, p. 6). Among these "chinos", notable distinctions emerge based on their social class, gender, and race. Mojicón, a white-mestizo boy in his early middle-class adolescence in Bogota, embodies an «innocence that is never innocent and always racialised» (Bernstein cited by Cook, 2020, p. 6). His actions and expressions are intrinsically intertwined with his whiteness, which is perceived as a desirable yet potentially degenerate moral attribute. This boy wanders in the street. As Lara Saguisag highlights, children's characters in print comics represent a powerful manifestation of ambivalence towards the "Other". Childhood metaphorically both infantilises and humanises individuals considered inferior, serving as a redemptive metaphor (Saguisag, 2018, p. 13).

In Mojicón's case, his whiteness is particularly evident when he interacts with other children, particularly those who are homeless, impoverished and subjected to racial marginalisation. In the comic, children's interactions in the urban environment are determined primarily by their access to money. As youngsters, they inhabit the spaces of the street and must navigate the realm of consumption, driven by the need for money to satisfy their desires and engage in play (Cook, 2020; Zelizer, 2022). Consequently, the antics and pranks they engage in as "chinos" are intrinsically linked to the rhythm of urban life: founding football clubs, travelling by tram, visiting cinemas or operas, strolling through the countryside, buying toys, and so on. Mojicón serves as a central figure in this milieu, encapsulating the perspectives of white adults and embodying the desires and fears associated with an «ethnic whiteness» that serves as proof of conformity to the «spirit of capitalism» and as a symbol of humanity and modernity (Echeverría, 2010, p. 67).

Mojicón assumes the role of group leader. In their children's playful interactions, we can see how the structural relationship of race operates, which according to Stuart Hall, is a social and cultural construct that is used to establish hierarchies, power, and unequal-

⁴ Since the 18th century, "chino" or "china" has had various meanings. In 1729 in *Diccionario de Autoridades*, "chino" refers to things originating from China, but it can also describe someone who is easily disturbed. "Chino" has additional meanings, such as describing a dog or the phrase "we are Chinese", which implies deceit. In 1880, José María

Samper defined it as a mestizo child from the popular class in Bogota, a meaning that has endured for several decades.



Fig. 1. *Mundo al Día*, año I, n° 109, 24 de Mayo de 1924. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

ity between human groups. Despite his appearance as a middle-class boy, distinguished by his well-dressed attire consisting of short trousers, shoes, and a cap, his friends are seen wearing torn pants, broken shoes, espadrilles, *ruanas*⁵, with dishevelled hair, and often barefoot. They visibly resemble a lower socioeconomic status. However, despite his privileged position, Mojicón shares the same need for earning money as his friends, and many of their games revolve around this necessity. In his leadership role, Mojicón consistently holds the power to act, making decisions, deceiving, calculating, and either disrupting or succeeding in various situations. When he succeeds, it is a collective victory, but when his mischievous acts are discovered, everyone suffers the consequences. Thus, being alert or “avisparse” appears as part of the ideology of the white-mestizo order that operates in Mojicón. This enables the identification and understanding of how this playful child utters ideological truths that appear legitimate due to his racial privilege, marked by his class status.

This comic strip is characterised by the presence of inferential racism, which perpetuates and subtly manifests through the depiction of innocence as an intrinsic quality of childhood. According to Stuart Hall, this form of racism presents seemingly naturalised representations of events and situations related to race that involve unquestioned underlying racist assertions. Thus, these formulations become racist statements without our awareness of the racist predicates on which they are based (Hall, 2010, p. 301). This racism is evident in portrayals such as the characters Chocolate and Clarita. In both cases, the artist employs skin colour to establish a contrast with these racialised bodies. On the one hand, in Chocolate, there is a sensory connotation of sweetness

⁵ The *ruana* is a type of poncho made by the indigenous people of the Bogota and Cundinamarca highlands.

or an edible quality, following the long-standing colonial racist tradition of such representations. Chocolate is depicted as a calm, submissive, obedient black child who is unafraid of the dark due to the way his colour blends in at night (fig. 1). Mojicón’s interactions with him involve the explicit use of violence on his body, which is presented as innocent child’s play. This “playful” experience is accepted by Chocolate naturally (fig. 2). Furthermore, the need to “whip” (*curtirse*) him is frequent, and the use of this verb is common in the dialogues with both Chocolate and Clarita.

On the other hand, Clarita, the maid in Mojicón’s house, is a black woman. The use of the name Clara alludes to whiteness.⁶ When the artist uses the diminutive as a form of endearment, sarcasm becomes a positive emotion. This enables the artist to subtly convey their dislike for this type of body and reinforces her subservient position to the white child. She always tries to help him despite her efforts often being unsuccessful. An example of this is when Mojicón and Gelatina are denied entry to the cinema due to their age (fig. 3). Clarita initially refuses to impersonate their mother out of fear of punishment, but Mojicón convinces her, and they disguise themselves by painting their faces with charcoal. While Mojicón’s racial innocence prevents him from fully comprehending the seriousness of the situation, Clarita’s language and reactions indicate her awareness of social norms and the potential consequences.

In my final example, Mojicón travels to the countryside, known as the Bogota savannah. This area is known for its valleys and has a climate described as “European”. The indigenous *resguardos* in the region gradually disappeared at the end of the colonial era and throughout

⁶ The word *clara* in Spanish has several meanings. It is related to tone or color, usually associated with white. Additionally, it carries the idea of being transparent and clean.



Fig. 2. *Mundo al Día*, año II, n° 566, 5 de diciembre de 1925. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.



Fig. 3. *Mundo al Día*, año I, n° 76, 12 de abril de 1924. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

the 19th and 20th centuries, displacing and impoverishing native communities (Delgado, 2021, p. 114). Bogotá's white elites turned the savannah into a privileged zone for cattle ranching, establishing haciendas as key economic centres. The dispossession and speculation of land that was originally part of these *resguardos* undermined communal ownership and had an adverse impact on ancestral communities (Mejía Pavón, 1998; Delgado, 2021). Mojicón establishes relationships with indigenous children in the Bogotá savannah. He encounters wild

nature and the possible discovery of treasures such as Muisca or Tunjos. Though he describes these young people as “fools” and “simpletons” (fig. 4), intending to mock them, instead he always ends up hurting himself.

In these chapters, Mojicón is portrayed as the helpless urban child in the face of this geography, represented through the experiences of these racialized children who wear espadrilles, *ruanas*, and hats. In another scene, the youngster engages in a conversation with an indigenous man in the countryside, offering him citizen-



Fig. 4. *Mundo al Día*, año IV, n° 1114, 8 de octubre de 1927. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

ship if he walks to Bogota. The man expresses his duty to tend to the fields and refers to Mojcón as “miamito” (fig. 5). Mojcón tempts him with money and liquor, and they proceed to the city. Upon arriving at the polling station, the boy instructs the man to pretend to be someone else and gives him money to vote. He jokingly offers him more money and another name to vote again, resulting in the man being attacked by the people at the polling station. In the final scene, Mojcón, observing the man’s battered body, dismissively remarks that those with bruises are never the elected ones once the elections are over.

Images like these reinforce the racist stereotype of the ignorant and subservient indigenous man. Furthermore, upon returning to Bogota, Mojcón’s power, seemingly lost in the “untamed” landscape, is reinstated. The “white” city restores his ability to play “innocent” pranks and jokes. According to Hall, representations of Indigenous populations such as these always function as an anonymous collective mass and are set in opposition to the isolated white figure alone «out there» (Hall, 2010, p. 302). In this case, the representation of these Indigenous people is associated with humour, and it is unclear whether we are laughing at Mojcón’s innocence or sympathising with him and his lonely experiences in these indomitable geographies. From this perspective, the white mestizo adult order relies on laughter to ease the ambivalence produced by that «double vision of the white eye through which one observes» (Hall, 2010, p. 303), and the relationship with these perpetually paradoxical subhuman childhoods.



Fig. 5. *Mundo al Día*, año II, n° 519, 10 de octubre de 1925. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

PALOMILLA: EUGENICS AS A RACIAL CATALYST OF EMOTIONS

The politics of eugenics took the debate over racial degeneration as central to the early decades of the twentieth century. By the time *Mojicón y Pedrito* was published, the debate on racial degeneration had permeated not only intellectual, but also political, medical, scientific, and educational circuits in Colombia and Peru (Pohl-Valero, 2014; Sáenz Obregón, 2013; Saldarriaga, Sáenz, 2007). As Peter Wade points out, there was a mixing within a hierarchical framework that evidenced the racial burdens of blackness and indigeneity inherited from the past that were present in the populations inhabiting these countries. This situation was seen as a barrier to the future and progress of the nation-state, which is why mixture was seen as desirable, especially if indigenous and black people could be effectively assimilated, preferably alongside an increasing proportion of white immigrant blood (Wade, 2017, p. 65). Thus, a series of eugenic policies were developed in these years with the aim of promoting education, hygiene, and childcare practices. These discourses were doubly marked by the association of primitive children with dangerous and threatening childhoods as potential threats to the achievement of a longed-for white society. This implied a process of evolution towards “civilization” and was based on «eugenic notions that white “blood” was stronger than other types and would naturally dominate in the mix» (Wade, 2000, p. 43).

Children’s magazines emerged during the early decades of the 20th century in Peru. However, *Palomilla*, revista peruana para niños, considered a milestone in the history of Peruvian comics, was the first publication dedicated exclusively to comics (Reynoso, 2017; Sagástegui, 2003; Lucioni, 1996). Nevertheless, prior to

this magazine, there were other magazines that featured comics in their pages, such as *Figuritas* (1912), *Cholito* (1931), and *Abuelito* (1932). These publications also included educational content, school news, materials for teachers, games, songs, stories, etc. And some of these publications featured racially depicted characters, such as *Aventuras de Perotín* in *Figuritas* or *Charolito, el marinerito de agua dulce* in the publication called *Abuelito*. Both characters had a short lifespan and used racial stereotypes with black faces (Sagástegui, 2003, p. 24).

Palomilla was directed by Guillermo Duarte Chamorro and published in Lima between 1940 and 1942. It was edited by Imprenta El Cóndor and circulated on the first and fifteenth of each month. Well-known Peruvian cartoonists and comic artists worked there, including Pedro Challe himself, as well as others like Víctor Echegaray and Ricardo Marruffo. Artists from diverse backgrounds and regions also participated, resulting in a magazine that showcased a varied «graphic style, ranging from handmade to extremely professional, featuring caricatures, avant-garde strokes, and realistic styles» (Sagástegui, 2003, p. 25). Within *Palomilla*, readers could find comic strips covering a wide range of themes, such as police matters, jungle adventures, historical narratives, and more. The publication's ability to bring together artists from different regions earned it a reputation as a national and "Peruvian" magazine. As highlighted in its first editorial:

Consider it your friend, whose sole desire is to entertain you with exciting adventures and acquaint you with our rich history, filled with beautiful episodes that highlight the lives of our heroes and, in a word, encapsulate the essence of Peru. (*Palomilla*, 1940, s/p).

As mentioned in the inaugural issue, the magazine also reached readers in the provinces beyond Lima. Over the course of nearly three years, *Palomilla* published 40 editions with a print run of 20,000 copies (Lucioni, 1996, p. 56).

The author of *Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante* is Demetrio Peralta Miranda (1910-1971). He was an artist from Puno who worked in various formats, including illustration, painting, woodcut, and comic strips. He was the younger brother of Gamaliel Churata (Arturo Peralta)⁷, one of the founding members of the *Boletín Titikaka*, which was published between 1926 and 1930 in Puno. This *Boletín* is considered an important expression of the indigenist avant-garde in Peru, comparable to José Car-

los Mariátegui's *Amauta* (1926-1932). The *Boletín* aimed to create an Indo-American aesthetic and promote leftist ideologies (Reynoso, 2017, p. 186). During that time, Demetrio Peralta signed his name as Diego Kunurama and gained recognition for his work as a woodcut artist, depicting various Andean motifs and faces of people. In 1932, Peralta was imprisoned by the Sánchez Cerro government due to his socialist ideas. He was released the following year and settled in Arequipa by the end of the decade, later moving to Lima (Reynoso, 2017, p. 198), where he became involved with the magazine *Palomilla*.

Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante was a 15-issue comic strip published between April and December 1940. The story followed a format of 4 vignettes per page, with a total of 12 to 14 in each issue. Initially, the comic relied on long explanatory texts adopting the style of an omniscient narrator. However, towards the end of the series, the use of traditional narrative tools, such as speech balloons, became more prevalent. *Pedrito* shared space in the magazine with other comics produced during those months. For example, there was *El Imperio de los Hijos del Sol*, a monumental-historical narration about the Incas, or stories with racist representations such as *Don Zenón*, *Petronila y Trampolín*, *Raspadilla y Chicharrón*, or *Coquin*, to name a few.

PEDRITO IN PUNO... PALOMILLA IN LIMA

The narrative of *Pedrito* unfolds in three segments: first, it depicts the boy's circumstances following the loss of his mother; then, it details the journey of emigration and his arrival in the city, culminating in his eventual migration abroad. The main character of the comic is a "palomilla". He is an indigenous boy between 9 and 11 years old, portrayed in traditional dress. His body is depicted with rigid movements and hieratic poses in the illustrations. Throughout the story, he forms relationships with various male adults who guide and protect him. Only towards the end does he interact with children his own age, Macaco and Panchito, who also lack supportive families. This comic follows the imagined journey of *Pedrito* from the Puna highlands to Arequipa and Lima. The story revolves around his desire to study at school, although the full implications of education for a racialised childlike *Pedrito* are only explained towards the end. The story begins with *Pedrito*'s isolated and obedient existence, living with his single mother in a remote hut. The narrative is set against a backdrop of sparse vegetation and vast mountainous landscapes.

The region of Puno portrayed in Peralta's comic was an important focus for the political and social organi-

⁷ Churata has been recognised within Peruvian indigenism and participated in various groups such as *Bohemia Andina* in 1915 and the group Orkopata.

zation of indigenous peasant movements during this period, in response to the continued usurpation of land by landowners (De la Cadena, 2014, p. 66). As Contreras and Cueto point out, the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed a consistent process of “privatisation of pastures” that were previously considered communal resources (2007, p. 244). This situation gave rise to various demands by communities for access to resources such as water and forests. In the 1930s and 1940s, conflicts gradually diminished, partly due to the emerging influence of indigenism, championed by figures such as José Antonio Encinas, Hildebrando Pozo and Luis E. Valcárcel. This political and cultural movement saw education as a means of liberation and redemption for indigenous peoples, while other groups advocated a more Marxist-inspired perspective, emphasising the economic, social, and political underpinnings of indigenous oppression (Ames, 2012, p. 358).

However, as highlighted by Marisol de la Cadena (2014), the underlying notion of the indigenist project was that culture could transform race. Thus, artistic expressions depicting Inca themes, the highland landscape, and its people were promoted. Furthermore, this indigenist defense of the “Indian race” sought to enhance literacy campaigns and improve working conditions without fundamentally «altering the ‘soul’ seen as the essence that shapes culture» (2014, p. 66). According to De la Cadena, the contradictions, and paradoxes within the Peruvian indigenist project gave rise to a form of «silent racism» that laid the foundation for establishing racial hierarchies, positioning progressives and liberals within a framework that «subordinated biology to the ‘force of the spirit’» (2014, p. 73). Thus, the Inca legacy was deemed deserving of respect, while the perceived «racial inferiority» of Indigenous peoples required political attention and improvement (2014, p. 73). Often, this “soul” was located within the natural habitat of Indigenous individuals, while at other times, redemption was sought through migration to urban areas and education, seen as a path to *mestizaje*. It is from this perspective that we can unravel Pedrito’s story and his interactions with the white-mestizo adult world, both in Puno and in the capital.

The comic uses an omniscient narrator who initially describes the scenes and characters but later allows for greater interaction among them. This narrative device highlights the relationship between the children and the adults, as well as the projections and desires of a white-mestizo, normative masculinity. The narrator describes the scenes and figures, providing commentary and judgment on the story’s actions. Pedrito can be identified as a «flat character» (Ahmed, 2022, p. 350), lacking concrete

agency or reaction to situations. This condition elicits an emotional response from the audience, requiring an active reader to bring the persona to life and accompany them throughout the story until its resolution (Gardner, 2012 in Ahmed, 2022, p. 352). The emotional response to Pedrito’s experiences necessitates an «emotional community» (Rosenwein, 2020, p. 17) that perceives certain patterns of affirmation in these narratives, allowing them to confirm collective thoughts, expectations, encouragement, tolerance, or disapproval. This «imagined lethargic state» associated with indigenous people always requires a literate male subject who can instill in them courage (Peluffo, 2019, p. 27), and in that case, the instilling of useful and productive knowledge so that a future of progress can be achieved. What we witness here is another kind of inferential racism. The statement *Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante* uses the diminutive not only to emphasise the double subordinate condition of being a child and being indigenous. It seeks to create an apparently positive emotional link with the adult’s action towards this racialised body.

The omniscient narrator creates a dual meaning using imagery (fig. 6). Firstly, Pedrito is never shown in frontal or close-up shots, emphasising the presence of adult men who make decisions beyond the child’s control. The young lad’s body is often depicted from the side or back in wide shots, whether he is walking alone in nature, navigating the streets, or engaging in activities under adult supervision. Secondly, there is a scarcity of frontal images of the boy himself. The visual narrative primarily focuses on his interactions with adults, positioning him in subordinate roles: with an adult’s arm on his shoulder, hands controlling his body, or feet kicking him. Pedrito’s body language is rigid and passive, por-



Fig. 6. Details of “Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante”. Palomilla. *La revista peruana para los niños*, año I, n° 2, 1940. Biblioteca Nacional del Perú.

traying him as a receiver or listener. When the youngster does speak, it is with gratitude and agreement, lacking any questioning or assertiveness.

After Pedrito's mother's death in the opening episode, he encounters the muleteer Tatay in a desolate landscape. Tatay levels allegations against him for "*cimarronearse*", (fig. 7) a negative pejorative term associated with being wild: not following the rules, fleeing, or being lazy. This accusation triggers the fear of adults, related to concerns about racial degeneration and the vulnerability of solitary children. This dialogue aligns with the discourse of eugenics and whitening as possibilities for progress. At this point, fear constructs the other as a threat to the self and one's own existence. As Sara Ahmed explains, fear establishes the other as fearsome, capable of absorbing the self (Ahmed 2017, p. 107). Pedrito's body is perceived as a persistent menace, always at risk of going astray. Thus, the adult world represents the possibility of the white-mestizo racial order saving these childhoods. This perception legitimises verbal or physical violence. Consequently, Pedrito becomes a victim, observer, fugitive, or participant in violence as part of the adult world's learning experience.

Tatay experiences conflicts with farm labourers during the journey with Pedrito to Arequipa. The omniscient narrator highlights the muleteers' freedom of movement, which generates contempt and suspicion among those with stable jobs in rural areas. As a result, Tatay is arrested for public brawls, and the police officer who takes him into custody tells him «*Silencio indio*» (Shut up, Indian!). In prison, Tatay advises Pedrito to gather the courage to embark on his education. Alone again in Arequipa, the boy wanders, sleeps on the streets and finds temporary shelter in a house that later burns down. After this, he continues his journey to Lima with



Fig. 7. Details of "Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante". *Palomilla*. La revista peruana para los niños, año I, n° 2, 1940. Biblioteca Nacional del Perú.

a chauffeur as a companion. At the end of each episode, the artist Peralta includes a note at the bottom of the page, stating that the next issue will continue the story and the «surprising adventures of a boy who symbolises a race striving for self-improvement» (*Palomilla*, 1940, s/p). The concept of improvement is associated with eugenics as a discourse, and the city appears as the realm of opportunity and socio-economic advancement. This notion of overcoming reflects the fiction's attempt to rectify the perceived "flaw" in race through an ongoing process of violence, which is presented as the norm and as a form of learning. In this case, inferential racism implies constant white anxiety about the racialised child's vulnerable condition in transit to the urban environment. The narrative is replete with expectations about the child's future in the city and the possibility of viewing this place as a space of potential salvation, albeit always uncertain.

In the final part of the comic, new characters of the same age are introduced: Macaco, of Chinese origin, and Panchito, a black boy who shines shoes. A chauffeur offers odd jobs to the children to help them survive. The comic shows scenes in which the children sneak into the cinema and share a room to sleep in. However, they are discovered and kicked out by the room's owner. The children find refuge in the driver's garage and invite Macaco to join them. The comic concludes with a confrontation with thieves, which is resolved by calling the police. This scene of violence serves as the closing of the story. On the last page, Peralta relates the boy's last journey. Pedrito agrees to accompany a sailor who sympathises with him after the boy returns his lost wallet. This character invites him to travel on his boat. The adult insists on the duty of helping children like him and on the need to study in advanced centres to be useful to his people. The little lad accepts with enthusiasm and believes that his dreams will finally come true. He says goodbye to his friends, who warn him of the horrors of war, bombings and the terrible situation in China and Africa. There, elderly people and children are being killed and subjected to terrible cruelty. However, Pedrito ignores their fears and sets off on his journey, leaving behind the worries of his companions.

Macaco and Panchito evoke memories that instil fear about the world (fig. 8), operating as a scenario of future harm that manifests as present violence. This fear leads to the shrinking of their bodies and constant apprehension, as they refuse to venture beyond confined spaces or anticipate harm in external environments. In Lima, racially marginalised children face explicit discrimination. While they remember the violence of their origins in China and Africa, it is normalised in Peralta's



Fig. 8. Details of “Pedrito, el indiecito estudiante”. Palomilla. *La revista peruana para los niños*, año I, n° 15, 1940. Biblioteca Nacional del Perú.

story. The artist portrays Lima, paradoxically, as a comparatively safer place even though it is not. However, the underlying moral lesson is that these “palomillas” lack the protection of certain adults. Meanwhile, Pedrito, on the boat, reflects on the adult figures encountered during his journey, experiencing emotions such as love and responsibility (mother), camaraderie (driver), tenderness (Teresa), generosity and freedom (muleteer), sacrifice and self-sacrifice (teacher). Pedrito identifies himself as a “street student” with the aim of returning fully prepared. The world of the white adult serves as a normative guide, emphasising usefulness, learning, progress, detachment from origins and transformation. Whiteness and improvement through a eugenic ideology shape Pedrito. His experiences become a moral standard set by the urban adult world.

CONCLUSIONS

The representation of urban childhood in these comics explores the intricate relationship between race and power. On one hand, there is an ambiguous connection between white-mestizo children and those who

are indigenous, black, peasant, or poor. These children, mostly boys, engage in street games, competing for money and mischief in public spaces. However, the dominant narrative revolves around the character of Mojicón, who embodies white-mestizo privilege and justifies hierarchies and the use of violence. Despite being a “chino” himself and thus a person in the making, Mojicón primarily identifies with whiteness, which is seen as both a privilege and a future aspiration. Furthermore, the boy is allowed to “break” the rules due to his racial innocence. This permissibility reinforces how racism operates in the portrayal of childhood. Thus, it is permissible to play with and mistreat “chinos” street kids, despite the consequences of these situations.

On the other hand, eugenic ideas deeply infiltrate the story of Pedrito, an indigenous boy with no family network, who wanders alone in the city and suffers violence. The constant guidance of the white mestizo adult world shapes his journey between Puno, Arequipa, and Lima. Throughout the narrative, white-mestizo anxieties are evident, reflecting the fears and concerns surrounding this racialised childhood. We witness this harsh transition. Although the artist Peralta’s purpose is to highlight Pedrito’s subordinate status, inferential racism is present in the ways in which education is conceived as a stage for “overcoming” race. Pedrito’s education in the streets is a process of assimilation to whiteness. Consequently, this process situates this child as a subject of civilization and progress, “despite” his indigenous origin. In short, these “chinos” and “palomillas”, who represent urban children, become recipients of the shelter provided by the ideology of white-mestizo miscegenation, which subtly permeates their bodies.

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