

# CHILDREN, HISTORY AND SOCIETY IN THE YOUNG GILBERTO FREYRE (1915-1930)

Meninice, história e sociedade no jovem Gilberto Freyre (1915-1930)

Niñez, historia y sociedad en el joven Gilberto Freyre (1915-1930)

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**Abstract:** The article investigates the interest in the social and historical study of childhood in the texts written by Gilberto Freyre during his formative years. It highlights the appropriation of New History, which combined history, anthropology, and culture, as well as Child Study in psychology, derived from his studies at Columbia University. The article analyzes his considerations regarding a sociology of play and the history of childhood, as well as the child and social life in Brazil. It is argued that alongside the author's attentive focus on neglected themes in societal studies, his stance was characterized by an uncritical and selective approach to sources, conservatism, and the naturalization of racial and social relations.

**Keywords:** historiography of childhood; intellectuals; toys; race relations.

**Resumo:** O artigo investiga o interesse pelo estudo social e histórico da meninice nos textos escritos por Gilberto Freyre, durante seus anos de formação. Indica-se a apropriação da *New History*, que articulava história antropologia e cultura, assim como do *Child Study*, na psicologia, oriunda dos seus estudos na Universidade de Colúmbia. Analisam-se as suas considerações sobre uma sociologia do brinquedo e a história da meninice, e sobre a criança e a vida social no Brasil. Considera-se que, ao lado do olhar atento para temáticas desprezadas nos estudos da sociedade, o posicionamento do autor marcava-se por uma apropriação acríica e seletiva das fontes, pelo conservadorismo e pela naturalização das relações raciais e sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** historiografia da infância; intelectuais; brinquedos; relações raciais.

**Resumen:** El artículo indaga el interés por el estudio social e histórico de la niñez en los textos escritos por Gilberto Freyre durante sus años de formación. Se indica la apropiación de la *New History*, que articuló historia, antropología y cultura, así como del *Child Study*, en psicología, proveniente de sus estudios en la Universidad de Columbia. Se analizan sus reflexiones sobre una sociología del juego y la historia de la infancia, y sobre los niños y la vida social en Brasil. Se considera que, además de una mirada atenta a temas descuidados en los estudios de sociedad, la posición del autor estuvo marcada por una apropiación acríica y selectiva de las fuentes, por el conservadurismo y por la naturalización de las relaciones raciales y sociales.

**Palabras clave:** historiografía de la infancia; intelectuales; juguetes; relaciones raciales.

## INTRODUCTION

The concern of Gilberto Freyre (1900-1985) in considering childhood as vital for understanding social life has already been identified in research studies. Most of these works refer to his most well-known and widely disseminated books, such as "*Casa Grande e Senzala*" from 1933, "*Sobrados e Mucambos*" from 1936, and "*Ordem e Progresso*" from 1957 (Brazil & Figueiredo, 2016; Freitas, 2001; Kuhlmann Jr., 1998; Monteiro, 2005; Oliveira, 2011). In the research conducted for this article, we investigated an earlier period, referring to his formative years. In the field of historiography and social studies of childhood, the works of adolescence and youth, as Gilberto Freyre characterized them, have been underexplored and provide several opportunities for analysis.

At the age of 18, Freyre traveled to the United States to begin his undergraduate studies at Baylor University in Texas. He then pursued postgraduate studies at Columbia University, earning a Master of Arts degree. During this time, he also traveled to Europe, visiting England, Germany, France, and Portugal. He returned to Recife in 1923, where he stayed until 1930.

It was during this period that he expressed an interest in writing the history of childhood, considering children as important elements for the study of society and history. "*Meninice*" (childhood) was the category he adopted to refer to the period of infancy, which is present throughout his work. In the analyzed texts, the social and historical study of childhood appears in various themes and contexts: children's toys and games; cultural productions for children, such as children's literature and textbooks; the categorization of childhood in different social and racial groups; the duration of childhood and the transition to adolescence. In his interpretation of Brazilian childhood, there is an emphasis on the consideration of an early state of adulthood. All these components are intertwined.

In this article, we present a literature review and considerations on the research methodology. Then, we discuss the issue of toys, play spaces, and the author's thoughts on childhood and social life in Brazil. The theme of children's literature was not explored, as it would require analyses beyond the scope of this study.

As the main sources of the research, three books by the author were initially studied and analyzed: "*Tempo Morto e Outros Tempos: Trechos de um Diário de Adolescência e Primeira Mocidade, 1915-1930*" (Freyre, 2006); "*Tempo de Aprendiz: Artigos Publicados em Jornais na Adolescência e na Primeira Mocidade do Autor, 1918-1926*" (Freyre, 1979b); and "*Vida Social no Brasil nos Meados do Século XIX*" (Freyre, 1977), which is the second edition of the Portuguese translation of his master's thesis presented at Columbia University in 1922. Subsequently, other works by the author were consulted to enhance the analysis.

"*Tempo Morto e Outros Tempos*," first published in 1975, is a peculiar egodocument, as noted by Pallares-Burke in the introduction to the second edition of the book in 2006. It is a diary filtered and edited by the author in his old age, which presents various details of his memories and interesting reflections related to personal concerns and experiences, academic exchanges, and his intellectual development process, maintaining the characteristics of this literary genre.

In the review prepared for the second edition of the book, Lilia Schwarcz provides an analysis that builds upon the criticisms presented in the book's introduction by Pallares-Burke, emphasizing not only that it was filtered and edited by the author at the age of 75 but also that, "[...] far from being a childlike or naive diary, the book was evidently written and rewritten as a disguised autobiography" (Schwarcz, 2008, p. 743, our translation).

*"Tempo Morto e Outros Tempos"* is intended to secure its author's place in posterity: a beautifully crafted piece of literature disguised as a diary. A past that has never been so present and predictable [...]. In this document, the past is touched by the tune composed of memories: the longing for a time still lived. Therefore, it matters little to try to distinguish fact from fiction. Past and present appear indiscriminate in the pen of this great figure of our intellectual sphere, who has always been an exquisite inventor of himself and of a particular Brazil (Schwarcz, 2008, p. 747, our translation).

Despite the criticisms or considerations regarding its more autobiographical nature rather than a reproduction of past records, studies on the book refer to it as a diary. Although the text maintains typical elements of this literary genre, as highlighted by Pallares-Burke, one can question its characterization as such. The subtitle of the book announces the editing work: 'excerpts from a diary'; if they are excerpts, it implies that other records have been omitted, which aligns with the aforementioned criticisms. Regarding the dates, all the entries only provide the location and year, without indicating the day and month.

In the book "*Tempo de Aprendiz*," which reproduces chronicles published in the newspaper *Diário de Pernambuco*, one can observe the use of texts that appear in the diary, suggesting that it may have been written as a notebook or drafts for future publications, with excerpts recorded at different moments, as will be further evidenced in this article.

"*Vida Social no Brasil nos Meados do Século XIX*" also underwent alterations and revisions by the author, even in its first translated edition in Portuguese in 1964. To ascertain the changes related to the theme of childhood, the original publication of his master's thesis, "Social Life in Brazil in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," published in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Freyre, 1922), was also

consulted. In the credits of the second translated edition of the book, the reference is made to Columbia University, and it was not possible to obtain information regarding whether the 1922 publication had undergone any cuts compared to what was presented to the university. However, the introduction by the translator, Waldemar Valente, in the first Brazilian edition, mentions the article from the *Hispanic American Review* in 1964. The article, in a footnote at the end, indicates that it is the work submitted as a partial requirement for the Master of Arts degree. (Freyre, 1922, p. 628).

There are studies that encompass Gilberto Freyre's formative period and mention his concern with the research of childhood in society and history, such as those conducted by Rezende (1995), Burke (1997), Pallares-Burke (2005), and Coelho (2016). However, in these works, the contents of the writings regarding the historiography of childhood are not problematized, as the texts were produced with other objectives, such as to address the author's methodological resources used in interpreting society or his intellectual biography.

Antonio Paulo Rezende (1995) situates Freyre's interest in writing a history of childhood in Brazil within the context of a conservative modernism and criticisms of conventional history. Rezende analyzes how Freyre viewed new methods that would combine anthropological, psychological, sociological, and historical perspectives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of social totality.

Peter Burke (1997, p.3), in an article on the parallels between Freyre's methodology and that of the *Annales School*, mentions that the author's interest in childhood dates back to 1921 when he recorded in his diary that he wished to write "[...] the history of the Brazilian child - their life, their toys, their vices - from colonial times to the present." Burke (1997, p.3) also states that "[...] four of the articles Freyre wrote for the *Diário de Pernambuco* in the 1920s approached childhood, children, and their books and toys."

Coelho's thesis (2016) provides valuable insights into Freyre's writings on childhood, mentioning additional works beyond those discussed in this article. Situated within the field of History of Political Ideas, the study, from a psychoanalytic perspective, explores the religious involvement and the impact of Freyre's experiences, both in childhood and during his academic formation, on the production of his work *Casa Grande & Senzala*.

Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke (2005) identifies that the reading of the novel "Dame Care" by Herman Sudermann in 1921 served as a source of inspiration for Freyre's project of writing the history of childhood and for his characterization of an early maturation of children, an idea that he already had in mind even before reading the book, as he had written in a letter to Oliveira Lima. The novel tells the story of an evil fairy, Frau Sorge, who had bewitched the boy Paul, causing him to grow up serious, lonely, and sad. Pallares-Burke analyzes how in 1929 Freyre became enthusiastic once again about the idea of writing about child life in Brazil, as he wrote to Manoel

Bandeira, but ended up redirecting his studies inspired by another story, “The child in the house,” a tale by Walter Pater, in which the memories of experiences lived in the childhood home marked the formation of the main character of the story. The house becomes the “totalizing element, which encompasses the material and the spiritual, the child and the adult, the man and the woman, the masters and the slaves, the big and the small things, the public and the private...” (Pallares-Burke, 2005, p. 410) in the interpretation of Brazilian formation carried out in “*Casa Grande e Senzala*”.

In Freyre's notes and writings, one can observe the appropriation of studies conducted at Columbia University regarding the field of New History, which interconnected history with anthropology and culture (Burke, 1997; Freyre, 1977; Tuna, 2013).

The term “New History” can be attributed to James Harvey Robinson, a professor at Columbia University, who in 1911 published an article with this title, which was also the title of his book published the following year, presenting essays on this new historical perspective (Robinson, 1911, 1912). According to Robinson, if the history found in books focused on notable figures, kings and queens, commanders, and the dramatic incidents of nations, then it overlooked the vast working masses and the fundamental transformations that led from barbarism to civilization, from ignorance to knowledge (Robinson, 1911). The use of discoveries and advancements in social sciences - Anthropology, Economics, Psychology, and Sociology - as well as the study of how people thought and acted in the past, their tastes and achievements in various fields beyond the political sphere, would be much more relevant to historical knowledge (Robinson, 1912).

In the introduction to the digital edition of “*Vida social no Brasil nos Meados do Século XIX*”, Tuna (2013) underpins the importance of these studies to Gilberto Freyre, as evidenced by the presence of Harry Elmer Barnes' book, “The New History and the Social Studies” (1925), extensively annotated, in his library.

The book is dedicated to the ‘Columbia School,’ which a decade earlier had brought together historians who “[...] did so much to create the new history, and to indicate its fundamental dependence upon the social sciences” (Barnes, 1925, p. vii, our translation). Barnes was a professor at Smith College, but before that, he was a fellow at Columbia between 1916 and 1917, and after completing his doctorate, he taught at Clark University. With over 600 pages, the book is structured into 10 chapters, covering the past and future of history; the relationships with geography, psychology, and anthropology; the history of science and technology and social studies; economics; political science; ethics; and social intelligence.

Anchored in anthropology and sociology, Freyre adopts this historical perspective in his studies, which motivated his interest in childhood, alongside the mentioned reading of the novel, as noted by Pallares-Burke, and his adolescent memories.

Regarding the historiography of childhood, it is not only a matter of recognizing Freyre's interest in the subject and identifying his reflections on childhood, but also analyzing how the author conceptualized the investigation of childhood in the past and which sources were considered and incorporated into the interpretation of Brazilian society. In addition to explicit references to the study of childhood, attention is given to indirect mentions, which occur, for example, in reminiscences of his own childhood and experiences.

## TOYS AND THE HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD

The mention of toys already appears in the first entry of the book "*Tempo Morto e Outros Tempos*", which is said to have been written when the author was 15 years old:

Recife, 1915

Until last year, I played with trinkets that generally held no interest for a 14-year-old boy. It is only this year that I agreed with my Mother to distribute these beloved toys of mine with a special and archaic love. Such a special and archaic love that it had already made me unpopular with my aunts and uncles and the subject of laughter by cousins and neighbors. The electric train is one of these toys, and another is the box of wooden blocks with which I built so many houses, so many churches, so many castles that were not made of sand, but rather of vain fantasies. Also, the lead soldiers, demilitarized into simple civilian men and women, and transformed into the living, human part of my world—a world that I created and recreated in my own image for years, as if I were playing God alone in hidden corners of the house and later in an attic that became almost my absolute domain. Now that world has dissipated, and my new world retains only my scribbles: drawings, verses, something that I wished could be literature or art. Even more drawing than writing (Freyre, 2006, p. 27).

The theme is the toy and the nostalgia of a childhood that comes to an end. The text indicates resignation after a period of resistance. Toys would hold no interest for a 14-year-old boy, and the pressure to give them up came from his Mother, named with the moral force of the capital "M". Uncles, aunts, cousins, and neighbors would join in the disapproval.

Coelho (2013, 2016) analyzes the initial passage of the diary from a psychoanalytical perspective. He considers that the "[...] affectively forced separation from his toys 'and his sacralized world, in which he played God', seems to have been

experienced in a traumatic way." Thus, he asks and seeks to answer how "[...] the feelings resulting from this pleasurable childhood experience, marked by the omnipotence of thoughts and the trauma resulting from its castration, returned in the man Gilberto Freyre" (Coelho, 2016, p. 104, our emphasis).

However, the diary passage could also represent a justification for the author's feelings regarding the transition into adolescence, as the subsequent entry in the book, also dated 1915, mentions his reading of the book "Sexology" by William Walling, as he was concerned about the practice of masturbation and its consequences (Freyre, 2006).

In 1921, the diary presents the first reflection on the intention to develop studies on toys and childhood:

New York, 1921

I am interested in studying what could perhaps be called the sociology of toys as an aspect of sociology - sociology and psychology - of the child or the boy. Mr. Edmonds is assisting me in visiting the toy factory. I wish to note the preferences for toys by the child or boy in a large cosmopolitan city like New York. I consider it an important and fascinating subject. I dream of a museum of rustic toys made from pieces of wood, coconut shells, and coconut palm leaves by poor boys in Brazil (Freyre, 2006, p. 95).

Sociology and psychology emerge as tools for understanding the child and their toys. On one hand, industrial production for the American market, which would indicate the interests of the New York child. On the other, artisanal production and popular toys of poor Brazilian children. These studies would allow for a better understanding of social life, as suggested by one of his readings:

New York, 1921

Reading Stanley Hall: his studies on children and adolescents. His theories on play and toys - and the importance of psychology and sociology studies for interpreting the personality of individuals based on their experiences as children (Freyre, 2006, p. 102).

Stanley Hall worked at Clark University, where he served as its president, professor, and research supervisor from 1889 to 1920. He led the Child Study movement, which had in 1910 one of its foundations at the Teachers College of Columbia University (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan Johnson, 2006; Siegel & White, 1982; Thorndike, 1925; Warde, 2014). Barnes, in his book on the New History, indicates that

his chapter on the significance of psychology for the historian's toolkit was developed based on works produced in 1918 and 1919, when he participated in the seminar directed by Hall at Clark University. Freyre's reference highlights the impact of this interdisciplinary environment, where he engaged in reflections not only on the sociology of toys but also on the idea of a history of childhood:

What I would like to write is a history that, as far as I suppose, no one has written about any country: the history of the Brazilian boy - his life, his toys, his vices - from colonial times to the present (Freyre, 2006, p. 102).

To do so, he recorded that he had started researching documentary sources, which would be analyzed using the tools of several disciplines:

I have already started taking notes in the Oliveira Lima Library: on colonial chroniclers, travelers, and the letters of the Jesuits. About children from the sugar plantations, children from the countryside, children from cities. The orphans from Jesuit colleges. The students of priests. The mixed-race children - offspring of Frenchmen and indigenous women - found by the Portuguese. Offspring of wealthy households. Godchildren of plantation owners, vicars, wealthy men, educated by these gentlemen as if they were their own children. It is a significant subject. And I believe that only through a history of this kind - a sociological, psychological, anthropological, and non-chronological history - will it be possible to arrive at an understanding of the Brazilian personality. It is the child who reveals the man. But no one has ever applied this criterion to the study of the formation or national development of a country (Freyre, 2006, p. 102-103).

The following year, he completed his master's thesis but continued his notes on the theme of toys and the study of childhood. To develop the project, he recorded taking notes at the New York Public Library and in the books of his friend Oliveira Lima, as well as seeking knowledge on the production of these objects. In his notes, he also emphasized the relationship between academic interests and personal experience:

New York, 1922

[...] The subject of children's toys is something that attracts me. Why? Perhaps because, as a child, it was in the company of my toys - some of which I personalized, engaging in dialogue with them - that I found one of the best refuges to defend myself against the



banality of most adults. I have visited the toy section of the monumental Lord & Taylor several times. It is marvelous. The trend is for mechanical toys to dominate. In my view, this trend is regrettable in its excess. In my opinion, the ideal toy will be one that demands the maximum of constructive imagination, inventive power, and creative spirit from the child. It should not be something that is handed to them as pre-made pieces (Freyre, 2006, p. 124).

The electric train, wooden blocks, and lead soldiers were his favorite toys, listed in the 1915 notes. The first one would fall into the category of mechanized toys, while the other two would require more creative imagination: the wooden blocks, reminiscent of the constructive material in Froebel's pedagogy for kindergarten; and the demilitarized soldiers, reminiscent of the figurines that would make up his imaginary world, with people who were better than real adults.

In the following passage, he evokes Proust's work, "In Search of Lost Time", which took the memory of childhood as a mobilizing element for narrative construction:

I intend to write something about toys in my planned - but so difficult to be written without Brazilian experience - 'History of a Boy's Life in Brazil'. Or: 'In Search of a Lost Boy'. I have already started taking notes on the subject [...]. When in Germany, I will not fail to visit Nuremberg, the city of toys (Freyre, 2006, p. 124, our emphasis).

The desire to visit the city of Nuremberg in Germany came true. In April 1923, the *Diário de Pernambuco* published his chronicle, "Ludum Pueris Dare," a Latin expression referring to the act of giving toys to children:

In September of last year, while traveling through Germany, I arrived in a very old city. Instantly, I fell in love with the place. Mentally, I already knew a city like that - with that castle-like atmosphere, with that blue foliage by the river, with those arched bridges and chubby towers. I knew it from novels and colorful illustrations in children's history books. [...]

The next day, it was already late morning when I went out into the street after having a chocolate. [...] But what caught my particular attention was the vivid, bright, colorful display of toys in the shop windows - dolls, wooden animals, boxes of little soldiers, tin locomotives, blocks for building castles and chalets.

It then occurred to me that I was in Nuremberg [...], renowned for its poetic and useful toy industry. Nuremberg makes toys for German children and beyond. It is the city of Santa Claus, the city of Saint Nicholas, the sweet grandmotherly city that spends hours cutting out dolls, animals, locomotives, cars, and all the toys that enchant childhood, from wood, tin, and cardboard (Freyre, 1979b, p. 238-239, our emphasis).

The text continues with considerations about the importance of toys for children. Among primitive and European toys, Freyre highlights a Brazilian toy connected to folklore traditions: the "*mané-gostoso*," a former character from the "*bumba meu boi*" festivities, which is a jointed doll pulled by strings (Cascudo, 2001):

The unhappy boy is not the one who lacks a watch to tell the time, or who doesn't have boots or shoes to go to school, or jars of jelly to enjoy during snack time. The unhappiest boy is the one who lacks the humblest of toys: a crude wooden ship made with a pocketknife or a simple cardboard "*mané-gostoso*."

The love for toys is an instinctive desire that is connected to the most important instincts and impulses of human beings: the paternal, the domestic, the religious, the social, the creative, the adventurous, and the artistic. It is a desire that should be stimulated and nurtured. There are parents - I know it well - who try to repress and extinguish this desire. Such parents deserve a good thrashing (Freyre, 1979b, p. 239, our emphasis).

In these passages, Freyre seems to return to his abandoned toys. He seeks to give social meaning to his study, both regarding industrialized toys given to children from affluent families and the importance of popular toys for impoverished children. He identifies their presence in different cultures as constitutive elements of these cultures, rather than mere trivial objects, and criticizes adults who classify them as such. He also presents information on the presence of toys throughout human history:

Toys date back, according to serious anthropological research, to primitive man. I won't say to the first man because our father, Adam, had the unfortunate originality of being born a fully grown man - already ready for the solemn role of Eve's groom.

The most primitive dolls of which there is historical knowledge - do you know what they were made of? Pieces of bones. Dolls made of corn husks, flowers, and dried straw are also acknowledged.

The ancient Egyptians seem to have been great admirers of dolls. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where I had the pleasure of spending an afternoon exploring the Egyptian section with an expert in the field, the famous poet Vachel Lindsay, there is a large number of dolls found in the tomb of a nobleman from a distant dynasty. They represent soldiers, priests, bakers, canoeists, and so on.

Queen Mary of England owns a group of remarkably interesting dolls [...]. Among these dolls, one represents the king with his crown and mantle; another represents a journalist with a top hat and a prayer book in his hand; a third one represents a fat cook... There are also princes, admirals, bishops, doctors. But all this luxury is not worth the affection that any poor little girl from the East Side dedicates to her dirty and ragged cloth doll. (Freyre, 1979b, p. 240-241).

Upon returning to Brazil, Freyre once again noted in his diary his intention to write about childhood, which he referred to as "*meninice*" (childhood):

Recife, 1924

I reveal my secret to J. L. Rego: the book that, in my rare moments of inspiration, I wish to write. A book about my own childhood and about what the childhood of the various regional types of Brazilians that make up Brazil has been throughout almost four centuries. [...] Unlike novels that make boys their heroes, considering them mere future men. Unlike social histories in which the adult takes up all the space and dominates all the scenes. The adult of the so-called stronger gender (Freyre, 2006, p. 202).

It is remarkable that at that time there was an interest in the social study of childhood and play, as well as the emphasis on children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In his 1921 notes, Freyre indicated the need for historical research to encompass social diversity, women, and children:

In conventional narratives, and perhaps in all narratives written to this day, there has been insufficient space for the glorification of adults, and among adults, only men; among men, only the important ones such as politicians and military personnel. This is a mistake. Women are almost entirely left out of the historical spotlight, remaining in the shadows; intellectuals, farmers, artists, scientists, craftsmen, industrialists, merchants, servants, and slaves are also marginalized; and the presence – the mere presence – of children, boys, and adolescents is ignored (Freyre, 2006, p. 103).

However, the argumentation falls short of proposing a history from the perspective of the underprivileged, as the valorization of these subjects reveals the author's conservatism:

It is necessary to react against this. For there can be no true understanding of Man without seeking to comprehend Woman and Child. Just as it is impossible to understand the Master without understanding the Slave (Freyre, 2006, p. 103).

In the chronicle "Ludum Pueris Dare," Freyre presents his understanding of Woman and a limited understanding of the significance of toys for children:

Regarding the development of a child's personality through toys, much could be said. The subject has always fascinated and interested me. In these brief notes, I limit myself to pointing out the educational value of dolls for girls. Dolls serve as an initiation into the future domestic duties of women. It is through the influence of their cherished doll that girls begin to cut, sew, and repurpose costumes and fabric scraps from adult sewing; to embroider; to mend; and to arrange hats. Mr. Afrânio Peixoto recounted – I don't recall where exactly – that a friend once found a young girl in his family trying to breastfeed her doll. Dr. Gulick, an American physician who dedicated his life to studying the psychology of play, affirms that his daughters learned to harmonize dress colors with personal appearance by making dresses for blond and brunette dolls, for chubby and slim ones. I am firmly convinced that feminism will not pose a serious threat as long as girls play with dolls and, upon reaching adolescence, with action figures. Speeches and theories cannot work the miracle of changing the nature of things, much less our own nature – even when these speeches come from the mouth of a J. J. Rousseau (Freyre, 1979b, p. 240).

The text brings to mind Madame Plaski's report at the International Congress for the Protection of Children held in Brussels in 1913, which advocated for a "rational sharing" of occupations and stated that "[...] in Froebelian school games, the doll could be an instructive toy, thus becoming a lovely school for little mommies [...], while girls would engage in organized doll games, boys would occupy themselves with construction games" (Kuhlmann Jr., 2001, p. 227). These propositions reveal the adults' intention to allocate social roles to children according to their own conceptions. Toys are seen, or even designed, as exclusively intended for specific groups: boys, girls, the poor, the wealthy. The ways in which children appropriate them are disregarded. The complex power relations and social and educational processes through which inequalities are produced are simplified in interpretations

that project onto the material, onto the toy, the reinforcement of differences or the determination of behaviors, as Freyre speculated in his 1922 notes:

The relationships between the boy and toys, in my opinion, influence the behavior and personality of the future man: the perfect being that emerges from the boy when some believe the opposite to be true. In any case, the boy and his toys are a fascinating topic for an anthropologist, for someone who gives the deserved importance to the hidden future man, revealed in the child (Freyre, 2006, p. 124).

Freyre would still express this view of a direct influence of toys and school materials on child development 27 years later, in 1949, when commenting on the boy's toy:

For if considerable importance is attributed to the school textbook of history and geography and to the biography of a hero in the formation of the child [...] equal importance must be attributed to the toy. [...] Through the toy, just as through the excessively patriotic geography or history book, the narrowly nationalist or fiercely militaristic hero biography, sadistic predispositions for war are created in the child or adolescent. [...] As the child is the "father of the man," the grown man can only, at the cost of rare heroism, free himself from the crudest impressions of those toys that awakened in his still-developing personality an exaggerated taste for war, battles, and firearms (Freyre, 1979a, p. 217, our emphasis).

These statements contrast with the memories of his childhood, presented in the 1923 chronicle of his trip to Nuremberg, which refers to the first entry in his diary, where he demilitarized soldiers to play with them as dolls:

When I was a boy, I had several boxes of lead soldiers. They were my delight. I'm not ashamed to admit that I played with them until I was thirteen years old - when I was already the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. I owe many hours of joy and educational value to those soldiers. I didn't play battles, and without wanting to boast, I can say that the desire to be a general or a circus clown never excited me. I would demilitarize most of the soldiers by dressing them in frock coats, tailcoats, and paper jackets. I would also individualize them, giving each one a name and a role that ranged from king to orderly, and later from president of the Republic to editor of the opposition newspaper. In this world of mine, like a quasi-god, I made things happen according to my daily mood: banquets, rides in matchbox cars, revolutions (in which, by the way, my quasi-god status always stood alongside the principles

of authority and discipline), parades, earthquakes, baptisms, weddings. I assure you; it was a more humane world than certain novels and movies (Freyre, 1979b, p. 240).

In the excerpt, the toy does not determine behaviors or personality but rather conforms to the author's social belonging, childhood interests, and creativity. There is a naturalized view of social structure, a controlled order by superiors that cannot be transformed by theories and discourses, where women, slaves, and children appear as subordinate to male masters. Towards the end of the chronicle, two themes are announced: the seriousness of Brazilian children and the spaces for children to play:

I wish that my fellow countrymen's boys knew how to resist the obsession here with turning children into little men as quickly as possible. It is enough that this town, like other towns in Brazil, is a sad city without recreational areas for the little ones, without lawns where they can run, without ponds where they can play with paper ships, without anything that stimulates joy in them. And unlike the children one sees, joyfully flocking through the grass in the parks of London and Berlin, in the Tuileries and in the playgrounds of any city in the United States and Canada, the boys here are sad creatures, candidates for formal wear and premature baldness (Freyre, 1979b, p. 241, our emphasis).

In 1925, the author revisited the two themes in the *Diário de Pernambuco*, in the chronicle titled "*Livros para Crianças*":

The Brazilian passes through childhood almost without being a child. They lack toys. They lack places to play. They lack books.

A certain Frau Sorge sprinkles their childhood with ashes in its finest pleasures. Except for eating. Because nowhere else does the boy's gluttony find more delight than in Brazil - land of the best fruits and sweets.

Regarding places to play, adults don't care for it among us. In the past, many children in Recife used to play in domestic gardens. But the domestic garden is now a luxury, a rare luxury in a city where construction advances and shrinks without the compensation of public parks.

Indeed, the urgency to reserve areas in Recife for children's free recreation sharpens day by day. And I ask myself, without knowing the answer, how long will the top-hat aesthetes continue to clutter the rare open spaces with bandstands, little mercuries, rustic bridges, and even scenic ruins (Freyre, 1979b, p. 183).

In the above chronicle, he refers to the wicked fairy, Frau Sorge, who had bewitched the gloomy boy Paul, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, commenting on the considerations of Pallares-Burke (2005) regarding his inspiration from the novel “Dame Care” by Sudermann, which told this story. The idea of the anticipation of adulthood is very present in Freyre’s historical interpretation, which will be further analyzed.

The counterpoint to this precocity would be the provision of spaces for children. In the 1923 text, Freyre highlighted playgrounds in the United States and Canada, and in 1925, he argued for the need for recreation areas for children in Recife. Later, in 1929, when he was a sociology professor at the Normal School of Recife and personal secretary to Governor Estácio Coimbra, he would have worked towards the implementation of playgrounds in that city:

As a result of the small research conducted by the students at the Normal School of Pernambuco, whose results were commented on and highlighted by *A Província*, Mayor Costa Maia, in agreement with the governor, is going to create the most modern type of playgrounds in the city. Several playgrounds. The first in Brazil.

Perhaps this is the first time that a sociological research has achieved such immediate success in Brazil or any other country [...].

What was found in the sociological research conducted by the students at the Normal School? That a large number of children in Recife have nowhere to play. The open spaces are disappearing. Even backyards are becoming rare. So, what is left for the majority of kids in the city? Playing in the streets. A danger, as the number of automobiles is increasing. There is only one solution: the playground. Recife is going to be the first Brazilian city to have playgrounds (Freyre, 2006, p. 314, our emphasis).

In another note, after expressing his concern about urban planning and suggesting the need for regional planning, he returns to the subject:

Within this criterion, I have been guiding my Sociology students at the Normal School in conducting a field research on the streets of Recife. Each one should gather sociological material about the street where they live [...].

We are discovering that many of the children in Recife have nowhere to play. Recife [...] is becoming a city hostile to children. Kids have nowhere to play or have fun except in the streets, risking being run over by cars. We must persuade the Mayor to initiate a system of playgrounds in Recife, even if modestly. Another

complete novelty for Brazil. It will be a demand from the first group of Brazilian adolescents conducting sociological field research. Estácio is enthusiastic. [...] Recife not only needs playgrounds but also parks that can serve various purposes and strengthen the city's connection with nature (Freyre, 2006, p. 322-323, our emphasis).

There is no information available on whether playgrounds were installed in Recife, as in October 1930, the governor was deposed and Freyre accompanied him to Europe in a self-imposed exile (Meucci, 2007). They would not be the first in the country, as with a different name, the *Jardins de Recreio* had already been established in Porto Alegre in 1926. In 1930, the playground at Parque D. Pedro II was inaugurated in São Paulo, which later became known as *Escola de Saúde* and subsequently as *Parque Infantil*, the name by which the institution became better known in our country (Kuhlmann Jr., 2019).

## CHILDREN AND SOCIAL LIFE IN BRAZIL

The connection between childhood memories and the themes of Freyre's investigations is evident in the preface of his master's thesis, where he states that his preparation began unconsciously when he used to ask his grandmother about the "good old times" while still a child (Freyre, 1922, p. 597, 1977, p. 13).

One of the vivid memories of his grandmother referred to her childhood and the joy of watching the caravans of people from the countryside arriving in the city to sell cotton and hides, which Freyre generalizes as an attraction for the children of the city (Freyre, 1922, p. 603; 1977, p. 55).

In several passages, there are mentions of childhood. The child and their toys are remembered when referring to the furniture in the houses:

Each reception-room had a large sofa at one end and rows of chairs, one from each end of the sofa. They were arranged with a childlike idea of symmetry—I mean as a child places his toy-soldiers in line for a battle—in straight, regular rows (Freyre, 1922, p. 614, 1977, p. 81).

Citing Ewbank's account of his trip to Brazil in 1856, it indicates how religious festivals and processions, "[...] the chief amusement of the masses [...]", were characterized by a "[...] note of joy [...]", with "[...] little girls dressed as cherubs or *anginhos* [...]", and that, in children's funerals, they were also dressed as angels and cherubs, with rouge on their cheeks and silver powder on their necks and arms, and their hair styled in natural or artificial curls (Freyre, 1922, p. 622, 628, 1977, p. 100, 111).



Those were times when, according to Freyre, there were, on one side, landowners and slaveholders, and on the other side, a large mass of slaves, with a few small bourgeois and farmers among them (Freyre, 1922, p. 600; 1977, p. 43).

The text mainly focuses on children from the elite, with their representation predominantly as precocious and sad adults. Drawing on an article by Carlos de Laet in *Jornal do Brasil* in 1917, it suggests that the Catholic religion played a significant role in the family life and education of boys and girls from patriarchal households:

Children were piously taught by their mothers to fear the Almighty Man-God, who watches all that we do and marks in a huge notebook all our sins for future punishment. They were told also stories of the Virgin Mary and her little, plump, rosy baby—the Divine Infant—who grew into the Man of Sorrow and our Savior. They were taught to say the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ave Maria, the Salve Regina, and the catechism (Freyre, 1922, p. 615, 1977, p. 84).

The girl from a patriarchal family would go to a religious boarding school from the age of eight until thirteen or fourteen. "She learned the delicate art of being a woman. Music, dance, embroidery, prayers, French, and sometimes English, a light burden of literature." Women would mature early, sometimes becoming mothers at the age of thirteen.

The daguerreotypes of the time bring us images of girls matured before their time into ladies: sad, melancholic ladies. Docility and even shyness were the main charm of a young lady (Freyre, 1977, p. 86).

The boy, too, grew up as if he were an adult or a little man from the age of eight. At ten years old, he was a caricature of a man. In this regard as well, the daguerreotypes of the time bring us images, sometimes melancholic, of boys matured into men before their time (Freyre, 1977, p. 90).

The argument is repeated in other parts of the text, as well as in the photographs from the Francisco Rodrigues collection that illustrate the book as evidence. The two quoted passages and the photographs are not present in the original version, they are only included in the Portuguese version.

Freyre did not problematize these sources, using them as if they were expressions of everyday life. The photos from studios such as Hermina Costa and Alberto & Henshel, included in that collection, show the technical conditions of production in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the necessary stationary time for exposure required physical supports for people to lean on. Also, the social and cultural issues

related to family photographs refer to the solemnity of the moment, which does not allow us to generalize that attire, poses, and serious expressions represented the lives of those children<sup>1</sup> (Leite, 2000; Turazzi, 1995).

As for the accounts of travelers, Moncorvo Filho (1926, p. 11), in the preface to his history of child protection written for the Brazilian Congress on Child Protection in 1922, criticized the remarks of A. Rendu in the book *Études sur le Brésil* from 1848, which he described as "[...] filled with lies [...]" and containing "[...] malicious assessments and concepts [...]", such as the assertion that "[...] childhood with its innocent charms practically does not exist in this country."

The interpretation of children as miniature adults would not be the result of a consistent analysis of evidence, but rather the projection of an existing representation of childhood, which would lead to a selective appropriation of sources. It is plausible to suppose that the formation of the elite required children to make an effort that resulted in sobriety and an anticipation of responsibilities in their learning in order to belong to the 'upper class'. Similarly, for those 'from below', the subordinate situation anticipated their entry into the world of work. However, in both cases, elements of childhood life appear as indications that account for the toys and games in which these children participated, even acknowledged by the author in other parts of his writings.

In the preface to the first Portuguese edition, Freyre characterized the essay as "[...] a university work of adolescence [...]", stating that he reviewed it in some points, "[...] in surface details [...]", changes in form that would not alter "[...] its structure or substance" (Freyre, 1977, p. 17). In the end, the preface reaffirms that there would be some additions to bring details to the English text. As in the examples above, it is observed that, concerning childhood, the text published in 1922 underwent substantive alterations in the Portuguese edition, not only in form.

In the introduction to the first digital edition, Tuna (2013) states that the text received additions and alterations, for instance, when "[...] seeking to relativize the theses of the benignity of slavery and the prominence of patriarchy in all regions of Brazil defended in the original text."

However, if there is a relativization of the benignity of slavery, it is subtle, and the text clearly manifests the naturalization of power relations between masters and slaves, between men and women, between wealthy white boys and their subordinate black peers. Regarding children, the alterations reinforce this stance.

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1 The girls in the photograph by Alberto & Henschel & Cia., taken by Augusto de Souza Leão and his daughters, are described by Freyre (1977, p. 82) as having "[...] the air of respectable matrons." The image is available at: [http://digitalizacao.fundaj.gov.br/fundaj2/modules/visualizador/i/ult\\_frame.php?cod=4034](http://digitalizacao.fundaj.gov.br/fundaj2/modules/visualizador/i/ult_frame.php?cod=4034). The digitized collection contains several images featuring children in posed scenes, such as the photo by Hermina Costa & Cia., 'Eduardo Paiva with unidentified children,' found at: [http://digitalizacao.fundaj.gov.br/fundaj2/modules/visualizador/i/ult\\_frame.php?cod=7229](http://digitalizacao.fundaj.gov.br/fundaj2/modules/visualizador/i/ult_frame.php?cod=7229).

In the Portuguese version, after a citation from Stewart regarding the “the fearfully mongrel aspect of the population” (Freyre, 1922, p. 601, 1977, p. 46), there are additions concerning the characterization of slaves and their children. As for the different denominations, the text now identifies, in newspaper advertisements, that mixed-race slave children were called “*cabrinhas*,” while “*moleques*” would be used for “intensely black” kids (Freyre, 1977, p. 46-48).

Furthermore, to support the claim that slavery in Brazil was not particularly cruel, it mentions the travel reports of Alfred Wallace, an abolitionist, who stated that the slaves he encountered on a plantation in northern Brazil in 1852 were as happy as children and that their children were never separated from their mothers (Freyre, p. 607, 1977, p. 65).

According to the text, in a typical upper-class household, the lady of the house (*sinhá-dona*) would teach prayers to her children and their black playmates, referred to as ‘little masters’ (*sinhozinhos*) and ‘boys’ or ‘little goats’ (*moleques* or *cabrinhas*) in the Brazilian edition. These children would also be kept away from vices such as eating clay, and sometimes they would be punished with the ‘stocks’ or the ‘tin mask’ (Freyre, p. 609, 1977, p. 67).

The text mentions severe punishments as something normal, contrasting with the previous argumentation of a harmonious coexistence between masters and slaves. It also refers to the work of young black boys, referred to as “*molecotes*” in the translated text, who would go shopping for the young ladies (*iaíás*) in elegant stores or sell novels by Alencar and Macedo from house to house (Freyre, 1922, p. 609-610, 1977, p. 71). In the Portuguese version, when discussing sexuality, it describes the initiation of “little masters” in a way that suggests it was normal for them to “[...] deflower young girls and impregnate black slaves” (Freyre, 1977, p. 73).

Freitas (2001) and Oliveira (2011) highlight and criticize the characterization of the ‘whip-happy’ attitude portrayed in *Casa Grande & Senzala*, published in 1933, where the dominance and sadism of the young master towards the enslaved child are evident.

This form of treatment already appears in 1925, in the chapter ‘Social Life in the Northeast’ of *Livro do Nordeste*, a commemorative work for the centenary of *Diário de Pernambuco*, organized by Freyre. The text presents analyses of daily life in that region, exploring ‘aspects of a century of transition.’ Regarding childhood, it suggests that boys on the sugarcane plantations had a more carefree childhood compared to those in the city, playing on carousels in the mills, “[...] with the ‘*moleques*,’ their comrades and whipping victims”:

They surely bathed in the river. They rode horses. Sometimes they would go into the woods with the ‘*moleque*’ to catch *curiós*. During the sugarcane harvest season, they delighted in sucking on the sweet cane stalks that the plantation’s slaves peeled and carved with a knife. And [...] the plantation boys enjoyed floating paper ships, little flies, and crickets on the water channels (Freyre, 1979c, p. 84).

Another characterization presented in the text, which Oliveira (2011) comments on its use in the works *Casa Grande & Senzala* and *Sobrados e Mucambos*, is that of the 'devilish boy'. In the 1925 text, it emerges as a contrast between the city boys and the plantation boys. Although the city boys were more domesticated, when they were alone, they set aside their more serious behavior:

They were like that 'devilish boy' from Braz Cubas: they would pin paper tails to the coats of illustrious visitors, hide hats, pull on the tufts of wigs, sprinkle ashes in the coconut sweet pot, and break the heads of old black people who kindly forgave them. (Freyre, 1979c, p. 84, our emphasis).

The text mentions Machado de Assis and paraphrases the escapades described in Chapter XI of *Memórias Póstumas de Braz Cubas*, titled "The Child is the Father of Man", in which the character reminisces about his childhood:

Since the age of five, I had earned the nickname 'devilish boy,' and truthfully, I was nothing else; I was one of the most mischievous of my time, sharp-witted, indiscreet, mischievous, and willful. For example, one day I smashed the head of a slave because she denied me a spoonful of the coconut candy she was making, and not content with that mischief, I threw a handful of ash into the pot [...]. Prudêncio, a house slave, was my horse every day; he put his hands on the ground, received a rope in his mouth as a makeshift bridle, and I climbed onto his back with a switch in hand, whipping him, going around in circles, and he obeyed - sometimes groaning - but he obeyed without saying a word, or at most, a "*ai, nhonhô!*" to which I retorted, "Shut up, you beast!" - Hiding the hats of visitors, throwing paper tails at serious people, pulling on the tufts of their wigs, pinching the arms of matrons, and many other feats of this nature were signs of an unruly nature, but I must believe they were also expressions of a strong spirit [...]. (Assis, 1991, p. 26, our emphasis).

Perhaps the expression getting beat up was inspired by the story of Prudêncio, who, when grown up and already free, is found by Braz Cubas mistreating his slave:

It was a way Prudêncio had of getting rid of the beatings he received - by passing them on to someone else. When I was a child, I would ride him, put a bit in his mouth, and mercilessly flog him; he would groan and suffer. Now, however, being free, he had control over himself, his arms, his legs; he could work, enjoy, sleep, freed from his former condition - now was the time for him to take revenge: he bought a slave and paid him back, with high interest, the amounts he had received from me (Assis, 1991, p. 84).

Freyre's generalization, in his characterization of children from the past as 'devilish boys' or 'whipping boys,' appropriates the Machadian narrative, thus stripping it of its critique of the "[...] pernicious aspects of the dominant class" (Schwarz, 2000, p. 72). Representations of the slaveholding past in Brazil blend with the projection of his own childhood memories from the lordly classes, as the author confesses in a chronicle published in 1942, where the perpetuation of racial domination after abolition is treated as a natural occurrence. In the text, the author recalls a trip he took with his siblings at the age of seven or eight to a sugar plantation in the interior of Pernambuco, where the church of São Severino do Ramo was located. There, his childhood became familiar with the plantation life, where horseback rides were the great adventure, always accompanied by "[...] one or two black boys by their side." When speaking of the saint, Severino, Freyre reminisces:

[...] Severino was the name of the black boy with whom we were raised at home, turning him into either a "train machine," which had to whistle, squeak, and move the tracks imitating locomotives, while we followed him as luxury carriages, or a simple carriage or pack animal. Severino - the name of our whipping boy (Freyre, 1979a, p. 13, our emphasis).

The title of the chapter in Machado de Assis' book, 'The Child is the Father of the Man,' refers to another category appropriated by Freyre, used in the 1949 text about war toys for boys, mentioned above. The idea, not yet directly attributed to that author, had already appeared in 1921, in the diary entry where he discussed the history of childhood, mentioned earlier: 'it is the boy who reveals the man.' Also, in a chronicle published in 1924, he took as his starting point the allusion to the ancient sect in which mystics considered the child as the perfect being that degenerates into a man. In the end, it is reaffirmed that this is the case, as the man 'is the child without its charms.' According to him, if the years of childhood, during which one pretends to be a grown-up, are few, the grown-ups spend much more time imitating children:

[...] We, the grown-ups, are sad imitators of children. Sad imitators because, in my view, adults imitate children in their worst aspects. In their stubbornness, their brutal selfishness, their gluttony, and their propensity for chaos. And my thesis is this: we spend  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our lives reproducing the first  $\frac{1}{4}$ ... And we reproduce its vices rather than its charms.

Therefore, in this first  $\frac{1}{4}$  lies what life has gloriously creative, original, and natural: the rest is imitation. It is a copy (Freyre, 1979b, p. 44-45).

In the chronicle, once again, conservative thought manifests itself by flirting with fascism:

The forty-year-old Mussolini caricatured the eight-year-old one, and the result was this postcard Napoleon who saved Italy from red dangers. The heroic in man is almost always imitated from the child (Freyre, 1979b, p. 45).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Freyre's interest in the study of childhood is identified in his formative years and will manifest itself in his future work. Thus, the widespread attribution of Florestan Fernandes as the founder or precursor of the sociology of childhood in Brazil is weakened, mainly due to his work "*As Trocinhas do Bom Retiro*," written in 1944. In fact, although with distinct perspectives, both authors can be seen to not confine the study of this age group to separate from other social relations: there are children of different ages and social groups, children in relation to different age and social groups.

The category of *meninice* used by Freyre is an important contribution to emphasize, distinct from infancy, as it refers to the children's experience, while infancy pertains to this period of life and the representations about it. It has not been widely utilized in the historiography of Brazilian childhood and would correspond to the term *niñez* used in Spanish-language texts.

The idea of a child with adult behavior is one of the aspects that brings together the works of Freyre and Ariès (1981), both of which are subject to questioning by historiographic criticism. Notably, there is a similarity in the conservative stance of both authors. While they address topics and sources that highlight important and neglected aspects of history, the use of documentation is uncritical, as the selected sources are treated as if they were an expression of reality serving to legitimize a preconceived, conflict-free view of social life.

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