

Brazilian Folktales

Livia de Almeida
Ana Portella

LIBRARIES UNLIMITED

Brazilian Folktales

World Folklore Advisory Board

Simon J. Bronner, Ph.D.

Distinguished Professor of Folklore and American Studies
Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg

Joseph Bruchac, Ph.D.

Abenaki Storyteller and Writer

Natalie O. Kononenko, Ph.D.

Professor of Slavic Language and Literature
University of Virginia

Norma J. Livo, Ed.D.

Writer and Storyteller

Margaret Read MacDonald, Ph.D.

King County Library System



BRAZILIAN FOLKTALES

Livia de Almeida and Ana Portella

Edited by Margaret Read MacDonald

World Folklore Series



Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Almeida, Livia de.

Brazilian folktales / by Livia de Almeida and Ana Portella ; edited by Margaret Read MacDonald.
p. cm. -- (World folklore series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-56308-930-0 (alk. paper)

1. Tales--Brazil. I. Portella, Ana. II. MacDonald, Margaret Read, 1940- III. Title. IV. Series.

GR133.B6A435 2006

398.20981--dc22 2006000382

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2006 by Libraries Unlimited

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006000382

ISBN: 1-56308-930-0

First published in 2006

Libraries Unlimited, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

A Member of the Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.lu.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The publisher has done its best to make sure the instructions and/or recipes in this book are correct. However, users should apply judgment and experience when preparing recipes, especially parents and teachers working with young people. The publisher accepts no responsibility for the outcome of any recipe included in this volume.



CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Introduction to Brazil and Brazilian Storytelling	ix

Part 1: Magical Tales of the Rain Forest Peoples

The Creation of the Amazon River	3
Star Fate of the Bororo Boys	5
How the Night Came to Be	7
The Wandering Head: How the Moon Came to Be	9
The Story of Mani	11
The Snake Eater	13
The Story of the Vitória Régia, the Amazon Water Lily	15
The Hawk Husband	19
The Story of Guaraná	23

Part 2: Animal Tales from the Rain Forest

Turtle and Onça, the Jaguar	27
How Agouti (Cotia) Fooled Onça	29
Jaguar and Goat	31
How Turtle Tricked Onça	35
Crab with the Flying Eyes	37
Curupira and the Hunter	41

Part 3: Animal Tales from Africa and Europe

A Party in Heaven	45
The Cockroach's Wedding	47
The Bald Chick	49
Monkey and the Corn Cake	53

Part 4: Tales of Enchantment

The Louse-skin Chair	59
The Three Sisters and the Children with Golden Stars on Their Brows	65
Princess Toad	69
The Singing Grasses	73
The Golden Jars	75
The Old Lady in the Woods	79
The Princess with the Seven Pairs of Shoes	81
The Fish Mother	85

Part 5: Pedro Malasartes, the Trickster

Pedro Malasartes in the Bag	91
Pedro Malasartes and the Doll Murderer	93
Pedro Malasartes Herds Pigs.	95
Pedro Malasartes Sells Rabbits	97

Part 6: Scary Tales

The Skull Takes Revenge	101
The Devil in a Bottle	103
The Headless Mule	107
Creature of the Night.	109
The Old Lady and the Monkey	111
The Creature of Fire	113
The Beetle Man	115
The Girl and the Kibungo	119
The Kibungo and the Boy with the Sack Full of Feathers	121

Part 7: Death Tales in Brazil

How the Blacksmith Fooled Death	127
The Good Minister and Death.	131
Aunt Misery's Pear Tree.	133

Part 8: Festival Games and Recipes from Brazil

Brazilian Festivals.	137
Festival Recipes	140
Appendix: Notes About the Tales	145
Bibliography	161
Index	163



PREFACE

Livia de Almeida and Ana Maria Portella are Brazilian tellers who perform with the Rio storytelling group Mil e Umas. The name is taken from the thousand and one nights.

Some years ago, storytelling instructors in Rio suggested that tellers did not need huge repertoires. If each teller knew one great story, five or six could do a program. Thus “grupos” were formed, and many, like Mil e Umas, exist to this day. The individual tellers now may have large repertoires, but still they like the camaraderie of performing together.

Livia de Almeida has worked for many years to promote storytelling in the Rio de Janeiro area. She has organized festivals, Tellabratons, and storytelling series in museums and cultural centers. The professional storytelling scene in Brazil is a lively one, and this is discussed briefly in the introduction.

I was fortunate to be invited to Rio’s Tellabration in 1998. A hoard of wonderful tellers performed for several days at museums and cultural centers throughout the city. Then a group of us flew to São Paulo for more telling. Livia’s full-time job is editor and food critic with the weekly magazine *Veja Rio*, so she used her journalistic and public relations skills to get excellent press for the events.

In 2000 Livia, Ana, and their friend Roberto Carlos Ramos, an amazing Afro-Brazilian teller from Belo Horizonte, visited San Diego to offer workshops at the National Storytelling Association’s annual conference, and they also came to Seattle to share stories at schools and libraries. In 2002, Livia and Roberto Carlos were invited to Seattle to perform at our King County Library System StoryFest International. You can read more about Roberto Carlos and his own Afro-Brazilian telling in my *Ten Traditional Tellers* (University of Illinois Press, 2006).

Working with the tellers in their group and with storytelling friends around the country, Livia and Ana have brought together here a delightful compilation of Brazilian folktales. They bring us tales from varying folktale genres and include tales of the rain forest peoples as well as tales from the Afro-Brazilian and Portuguese traditions. Often several cultural influences are found in one Brazilian folktale.

Our book includes forty-six folktales. Here are amazing stories from the peoples of the Amazon, whose unusual tales show motifs not usual in the rest of world folklore. The unique imaginations are fascinating. Some of the other Brazilian tales included here show European influence: “The Bald Chick” is a variant of the Spanish tale “Half-Chick”; “The Princess with Seven Pairs of Shoes” is of course the same motif as the Grimm brothers’

“Seven Dancing Princesses”; tales of the trickster/fool Pedro Malasartes are distinctly Brazilian, descended from Portugal; and several of the tales, such as the two Kibungo stories, are clearly of African origin.

A brief background of Brazilian history and culture is provided in the introduction. Storytelling is very much alive in Brazil today, and information about the storytelling revival among educators and professional storytellers is given at the end of the introductory chapter. Fun festival games and recipes are shared in part 8. For notes about the tales, including motif numbers and commentary, see the appendix.

We hope readers of all ages will enjoy these unusual stories and that storytellers will pass on some of these tales. What a wonderful visit to Brazil they provide. Here are forty-six delightful Brazilian tales to whet your story appetite! Enjoy!

Margaret Read MacDonald



Livia de Almeida and Margaret Read MacDonald tell stories at Museu de Republica.

INTRODUCTION TO BRAZIL AND BRAZILIAN STORYTELLING



The Country

Brazil, with 8,511,965 square kilometers, is the largest country in Latin America, and the fifth largest in the world. While the rest of Latin America speaks Spanish, the official language in Brazil is Portuguese.

Brazil is crossed in the north by the equator and in the south by the Tropic of Capricorn. Most of the country is located in the tropical zone, but there is a variety of landscapes and ecosystems. The most widely known is the rainforest in the large area irrigated by the Amazon River and its tributaries. It is said that 40 percent of the remaining rain forest in the world is located in Brazil. There is a wealth of vegetable and animal species that still haven't been fully studied.

Brazil is also the fifth most populated country in the world, with almost 180 million inhabitants (2000 census). Most of the population lives in urban areas, especially in the southeast of the country. The capital is Brasilia, right in the central area, but São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are the biggest cities, with nine million and five million inhabitants, respectively.

Brazilian cities are just like other big cities in the world, filled with high rises, traffic jams, and environmental issues. Like most cities in developing countries, Brazilian cities of today show extreme contrasts. Income distribution is highly unequal. In Rio de Janeiro, for instance, it is possible to see in the same district of Ipanema some of the richest residences in town, while up on the hills are the favelas, with their shacks and cobbled-together brick houses. These favelas often lack running water, electricity, garbage pick-up, and other city services. Among the favela dwellers are many immigrants from the poorer, agricultural areas of the country, like the Northeast.

Brazil's Ethnic Groups

Brazil's official history starts in 1500, when the country was "discovered" by stranded Portuguese sailors on their way to India. At first, Portuguese settlers regarded the new land as a source of riches to exploit and not as a new home. The Portuguese government was more concerned about extracting vegetable and mineral goods from the land than with settling new dwellers. They depended mainly on slaves to work the fields and level the woodlands. At first they tried to enslave the native population. Later, they brought black slaves from Africa to do agricultural work. Present day Brazilians originated from these three very different ethnic groups: Europeans, native Brazilians, and Africans. Our culture is a result of the fusion of different traditions. Brazilian folklore owes its richness to this blend. Oral literature in Brazil shows this great variety, passed from one generation to the other by tradition.

Native People in Brazil

Historians believe that around 1500, the year in which the Portuguese first arrived in Brazil, there were one to three million indigenous people living in the country. After five centuries, the indigenous population has been reduced to 270,000, or 2 percent of the Brazilian population. According to the last official population survey, produced in 2000, the largest concentrations of the indigenous population are in the Northern and Midwestern areas of the country. There are 206 different indigenous nations, some with no more than a dozen members. There are only ten nations with populations over 5,000.

Society and Culture

The various indigenous groups in Brazil hold different customs, sets of beliefs, and organization. But there are a few common traits. They are mostly concentrated in small villages with 30 to 100 inhabitants. They have very rigid laws that establish the way goods are exchanged; the division of tasks; and their beliefs about the structure of the universe, in which there are human beings, animals, and supernatural beings.

Presently there are 170 indigenous languages in Brazil. The most important branch is the Tupi-Guarani, which includes nineteen languages spoken by 33,000 native Brazilians, who live mostly in the tropical and subtropical forest.

The Portuguese language was greatly influenced by the native languages. During colonization, the indigenous languages were spoken as often as Portuguese in the daily lives of the settlers. The Portuguese adopted numerous native words, especially those regarding plants, animals, geographical references, and names. Portuguese only became the language most generally spoken in Brazil some 260 years after the arrival of the colonizers.

The native reserves are, presently, the islands of preservation of the cultures and languages of the native Brazilians. The best known are the Yanomami, located in the states of Roraima and Amazon, where 9,300 natives live, and the Parque Indígena do Xingu, in the Northeast of Mato Grosso, inhabited by seventeen different tribes.

Native Contributions to Brazilian Folklore

During the first two centuries of Portuguese colonization, the native tongue, *Tupy*, was widely spoken. In fact, it was more widespread than Portuguese. It was the language of explorers, settlers, and priests from the Company of Jesus that kept missions all around the new country.

A great number of tales became part of our tradition through daily contact between the white men and the native population on farms and in the woods. They have been kept alive to this day. Native oral tradition kept track of great deeds done by the tribes' ancestors. It also told a lot about the groups' history, the origins of things, and moral tales, sometimes interwoven with dances and chants. These stories were meant to explain the world, criticize, and educate; fables were shared by the campfire. They were told for fun. Listeners were free to draw their own conclusions.

Native fables have an important place in Brazilian oral literature. However, they have often suffered from misinterpretation. At other times, their terms were subverted to fit religious goals. Even the heroes were changed to meet European standards. Europeans transmitted the native tales according to their personal needs, adapting them to their different ways of thinking and molding the tales according to their own values.

Native Brazilians found explanations for almost any natural phenomenon. The stars, the rain season, the animals, the rivers, darkness of the night, all had a different shape a long time ago. Constellations were born after some tragedy, when animals, children, or men climbed all the way to heaven. The Brazilian Black Bird is the Southern Cross, the most recognizable constellation in our sky. The Pleiades are children who starved after a long famine. Manioc, the native staple food, sprang from the tomb of Mani, a girl with a very fair complexion. Gwaranah, the energetic drink, originated from a dead boy's eye, according to the Sateré-Maué.

In these legends the fantastic is always close, and it is transmitted from one generation to the other, explaining a mythical beginning. There is frequently an epic background. Supernatural elements are a must. In fables, supernatural elements may be present, but they are not typical. These elements are the fabric of legends. Fable is like casual talk, the word that brings joy or sadness. Legend and myth have to do with religious beliefs. They were shared with care and did not become as widely known as the fables. Today they are more frequently found in books or in anthropological works than repeated as a part of oral tradition. They also suffered from misinterpretations, depending on who collected them.

Some very interesting native stories remain quite vital in Brazilian folklore, especially animal tales that involve typical fauna such as monkeys, *jabuti* (a kind of turtle), *urubus* (buzzards), and *onça* (the jaguar, the largest predator in the jungle). The most popular of all is the *jabuti* (or *Yauti*, as it is pronounced in the Tupy language). It is a large turtle, much appreciated as food. Short-legged, slow, weak, and silent, the *jabuti* in the Amazon tradition is like the fox in the European tales. The *jabuti* is shown as a witty fellow, active and good-humored. He is the kind of guy who has a way with words and likes using them.

African Contribution

African literature, mostly oral, shows some influence of Asia and Europe. The Portuguese and Africans got many tales from the same eastern source. Both African and Portuguese tales often show an Arab influence. Over the centuries, the Portuguese and Africans certainly had the opportunity to share their tales. Many traditional tales spread in coastal communities and moved inland.

The African contribution to Brazilian oral literature includes tales, proverbs, jokes, riddles, songs, and games. The tales, particularly, made a deep impression on Brazilian culture because of the power of the storytellers. In Africa, the storyteller, the *griot*, the *akpalô*, and the *ologbo*, were responsible for keeping the oral tradition. They were to remember all that could not be forgotten. They belonged to a special group with rules, rights, obligations, privileges, and prohibitions. This was a hereditary position. The wisdom transmitted through time made them look a bit magical, soothing and cheering up people, and giving advice. The charismatic appeal of the storyteller shows through expression, gestures and supreme attention to the plot. The Brazilian teller concentrates on the action, suppressing many descriptive details that were present in the Arab tale.

The Brazilian narrator follows a kind of homespun no-nonsense. There is no prison or forgiveness in the end. The criminal loses his life through the judgment of men or kills himself. This is not an Arab element, but very African in its hard way. Generosity, in these folktales, would be an insult to the victim of the wrongdoing, a glorification of the criminals. The audience's pleasure resides largely in punishing the culprit.

In Brazil, the black slave would usually take care of the landowners' children. By this means the slaves spread African tales among the European children, sometimes creating a merging of African and Portuguese cultures. It was the storyteller who put white children to sleep with simple African folktales, many with animal characters: animals that could talk, get married and feast like people. Sometimes they changed the tales, introducing new details, sometimes influenced by the fear that they would never go back to their own land.

Like the *akpalô* in Africa, in Brazil there were also weavers of tales, the old black servant who could spin wonderful tales and went from one farm to the other telling tales to other slaves. Brazilian oral literature absorbed many tales, especially monkey and rabbit stories. Both characters are endowed with wits, speed, and quick reactions. In these stories, they win through the use of intelligence against strength. The turtle, the stubborn hero that survives in its own slow way with persistence, appears as the hero in hundreds of tales. Often the frog substitutes for the turtle in Brazilian tales. "A Party in Heaven," the story of a land animal who flies to heaven with the help of birds, is one of the most popular of all tales in Brazilian folklore. The story is told about both the turtle and the frog.

African stories are teaming with strange creatures and monsters that eat little children for dinner: the well-known *Bicho Papão*, present even in lullabies; the *Kibungo*; the *Cumunjarim*; the *Tutu Marambaia*.

European Contribution

The Europeans arrived in Brazil with their memories as part of their luggage. Portuguese folktales were introduced by settlers all over the country. Fairies, witches, ghosts, giants, princes and princesses, castles, hidden treasures, foreboding dreams, and the fear of darkness were thus introduced in the young country. There they acquired new shapes. Tales of enchantment, comical stories, animal fables, and religious legends were brought to Brazil. Many Christian legends and myths that came from Portugal were changed as they were transmitted. Lost souls, masses ministered and attended by skeletons, cries, the noise of chains, strange winds, and other surprises came with the Europeans and acquired a regional accent. Oriental motifs had been introduced to Spain and Portugal by the Moors. These tales were changed many times to work as a means of indoctrination for the Catholic faith. Most of the time, the stories that resulted from this process were transmitted orally.

Brazilian folklore is an amazing mix of these many cultures. This story collection offers you a glimpse into these many worlds.

Revivalist Storytelling Today in Brazil

Oral tradition remained alive and well in Brazil during the last century. The presence of the storyteller, sharing whoppers, scary tales, and fantastic adventures, is an everyday fact in most of the country, in villages where electricity remains a luxury. It was in the big cities of the country, where millions of inhabitants are concentrated, that the art of telling stories for a while seemed to have gone out of style. During the materialistic 1980s, with the country shaken by inflation and political unrest, some of the first artists to present storytelling to new urban audiences appeared. One of these pioneers is Bia Bedran, a singer and composer, based in the town of Niteroi, ten miles from Rio de Janeiro, who managed to get a television show on the official educational channel. *Bia Canta e Conta (Bia Sings and Tells)* captivated a small but fascinated audience, lasted five seasons, and was a favorite among educators. Bia used puppets and songs to show to young audiences ancient native Brazilian wisdom tales and the funny adventures of Pedro Malasartes.

The present storytelling scene was shaped in the early 1990s. Battling against an ancient problem in the country—illiteracy—Proler, a government agency in charge of reading programs around the country, adopted storytelling as its main tool for stimulating new readers. But where were the storytellers? There was a dire need to develop new professionals as fast as possible and send them across the country performing and, after a while, also teaching storytelling techniques. Under the dynamic coordination of Francisco Gregorio and Elaine Yunes, a university professor and member of Morandubetá, one of the first storytelling troupes, Casa da Leitura do Rio de Janeiro (the House of Reading), became a school for storytellers and also a meeting point for anyone who wanted to hear a good tale. One of the strategies of the Casa da Leitura was to stimulate the creation of troupes. While an individual storyteller would take some time to acquire a repertoire and be able to perform, a group of five or six would be ready very quickly with just one story by each member. All kinds of

people got their training there: actors, teachers, librarians, housewives, bank clerks, and students. Literary storytelling was preferred, stressing the importance of memorizing texts word by word, even when dealing with folktales. Storytellers were taught to avoid excessive gestures.

From the Casa da Leitura sprang groups like Confabulando, Tagarelas, Mil e Umas, and Conta Comigo, as well as a few artists who decided to lead solo careers, like Augusto Pessoa and José Mauro Brant. The weekly programs for kids and adults, offered for free, always filled the 100-seat theater built at the back of the Casa da Leitura. During the mid-1990s, the appeal of storytelling in Rio was obvious to producers and corporations. In 1998, with the financial support of SESC-Rio, an association that supports commerce workers, it was possible to organize the first Brazilian storytelling festival, a four-day event with performances, workshops, and the participation of more than twenty groups and artists from Rio and other regions of the country, attended by 4,400 spectators. On opening night Professor Regina Machado, a long-time scholar of oral tradition and sensitive performer from São Paulo, performed. But the spotlight was on a storyteller from Belo Horizonte, an educator who had been himself a delinquent. Roberto Carlos Ramos had been working steadily as a storyteller for over ten years but only well known in his own home state. Presenting his own renditions of the werewolf tale, Roberto showed that he was a master of jump tales.

That same year, the Casa da Leitura helped back the trip to Rio and São Paulo of Dr. Margaret Read MacDonald for workshops and performances during our second Tellabration. On November 21 and 22 there were fourteen performances around Rio, culminating in an open air concert at the Museu da Republica. The next year, our special guest was Heather Forest. The event grew beyond the boundaries of Rio, to Niterói and Petropolis, where it was organized by Joaquim de Paula, a master musician, puppeteer, and storyteller.

Although storytelling is no longer supported by official reading programs, the city council and culture secretaries occasionally organize events, which are attended by eager audiences. Leia Brasil, a reading program supported by the Brazilian oil company, brings storytelling to schools and educators. Joaquim de Paula and José Mauro Brant have both recorded stories and music on CD. Roberto Carlos Ramos appeared on the most widely seen talk show in the country and has published a beautiful picture book with an audio CD and a CD-ROM. Professor Yunes continues to be involved in the development of new storytellers in her work at Catholic University and the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro.

Since 2002, Benita Prieto, of the group Morandubeta, has been organizing a yearly international symposium in Rio that draws storytellers from around the world. Regina Ress (from the United States), Lillian Cinetto and Ana Padovani (from Argentina), Ernesto Abad (from the Canary Islands), and many others have taken part in this exciting annual event.

PART 1

MAGICAL TALES OF THE RAIN FOREST PEOPLES

Because the Amazonian peoples have lived in isolated circumstances throughout the ages, their folktales reveal some astounding themes. Though most of the world's folktales are shared through many countries in various variations, most of these Amazonian tales do not appear elsewhere in the body of world folklore.



THE CREATION OF THE AMAZON RIVER

A long, long time ago, *Jaci*, the silver moon, happened to meet the golden Sun, while wandering by the Amazon forest. The sun was a strong, fiery warrior. As he set his eyes on *Jaci*, the Sun realized that he had never beheld anything so beautiful. They fell in love immediately and decided to wed.

Suddenly the Sun realized that their passion could never be consummated. It would mean the end of the world. The Sun's intense love would scorch all plants and burn all life on Earth. The tears of happiness shed by the Moon would flood the universe. Reluctantly they agreed to part and never meet each other again, for the good of all the world's creatures.

Jaci (jah-cee) the Moon, and Sun never did meet again. Whenever one comes by, the other immediately retreats.

But *Jaci* was so unhappy that she couldn't help but cry night and day. Her tears fell on the forest and filled the valleys. They rolled on down to the sea. In this way the Great River came to be.

STAR FATE OF THE BORORO BOYS



There once lived a very curious little boy in a Bororo village, in the heart of the Amazon forest. It was a time of want. The women, who were responsible for finding food, couldn't find much to eat. One day, one of the older and wiser women from the village suggested that this time they take the little boy.

"They say it is lucky to bring a '*curumim*' (cuh-ruh-mim)," she said. The women agreed.

They left very early, as usual, before the sun rose. It did not take long for them to find a field full of corn. They were delighted and filled baskets with the grain. The next day, they did the same and again found another field full of corn. On the third day, they decided to go to a secret place to prepare the dishes that only fully grown men were allowed to eat.

The boy begged to go with them. At first, they did not want to take him. But he insisted so much that they decided to take him.

"He is just a boy. There will be no harm," they thought.

The boy and the women walked for hours and came to an open spot in the forest. There the women made fire and prepared the dishes that only men were allowed to eat. The boy was overwhelmed by the sweet scents.

"Please, let me try. Just a little," he begged. But they would not let him eat anything.

"You are too small. Wait a bit. In a few years, you too will be able to eat the dishes that only men are allowed to eat, little one," they said, and they laughed.

The boy was very angry. The next day, he stayed in the village, brooding. His friends came and asked him to play, but he remained quiet. He ended up telling them that he had seen the women preparing the dishes that only men were allowed to eat. They were curious. They had heard that they were delicious. He nodded at them. Then he had an idea.

"Let's go to the old woman's hut. Maybe we will be able to convince her to prepare those dishes," he said.

The boys went there. They told everything to the old woman. She remained silent, with her parrot sitting on her shoulder. She nodded, then went outside and brought in the corn. She lit the fire and began to cook many different kinds of dishes. When they were ready, she called the boys. They devoured the food, licking their fingers. When they were full, they