From translation to appropriation: foreign works in Portuguese periodical press in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

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Résumé

La circulation d’idées et d’imprimés de différentes cultures et langues à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe au Portugal fut, en grande mesure, l’œuvre de la presse. Les périodiques traduisaient des livres aussi bien qu’ils les adaptaient, fréquemment sans mentionner l’original.

En outre, l’omniprésente appropriation d’idées et d’histoires venues d’ailleurs poussait auteurs et éditeurs à faire des déclarations indignées de leur originalité, en face des fréquentes accusations selon lesquelles leurs périodiques contenaient de simples traductions. Ce fut le cas de l’humoristique O Piolho Viajante (Le Puce Voyageur), réclamant qu’il était «né et élevé au Portugal, un enfant de Lisbonne», en réponse à son concurrent Hospital do Mundo (Hôpital du Monde), en 1805.

«Traduction» était le mot-clef parmi les communautés de lecture et de l’imprimé au tournant du siècle. Almocreve de Petas (Colporteur de Bourdes), un autre périodique humoristique, a même publié un choix d’entrées d’un simulacre parodique de dictionnaire.

Tandis qu’un journal politique tel que Correio Braziliense (Courier Brésilien), publié à Londres, contribua à la réception d’idées sociales, politiques et économiques parmi les lecteurs lusophones grâce à la traduction d’A New View of Society, de Robert Owen, ou des Principes d’Économie Politique, de Sismondi, Almocreve de Petas leur
offrit les *Aventures du Baron de Münchhausen* et le « Conte du vendeur d’indulgences » des *Contes de Canterbury* de Chaucer. Même si l’éditeur du périodique humoristique n’a pas pris la peine de prévenir ses lecteurs qu’il s’agissait de traductions.

Cette communication cherche à discuter le rôle de la presse portugaise dans la circulation, réception et appropriation de la culture de l’imprimé à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et au début du XIXe, une Babel de livres qui a traversé les frontières et a même permis au périodiques locaux de faire des blagues à propos des mœurs et coutumes étrangers.

Abstract:

The circulation of ideas and the printed word from different cultures and languages in Portugal during the late 18th and early 19th centuries was largely relayed by the periodical press. Newspapers not only translated full books in weekly or monthly installments duly acknowledging their authors, but also published foreign works in various degrees of adaptation, often without any reference to the original, sometimes on the brink of plagiarism.

Moreover, the ubiquitous appropriation of ideas and stories from abroad prompted editors and writers to make dramatic statements of originality, thus answering the frequent accusation that their periodicals were mere translations. This was the case of the humoristic *O Piolho Viajante* (*The Travelling Louse*), claiming it was “Portuguese born and raised, a Lisbon’s child”, in response to its competitor *Hospital do Mundo* (*World’s Hospital*), in 1805. “Translation” was a keyword in the turn-of-the-century printing and reading communities: the also humoristic *Almocreve de Petas* (*Fibs Peddler*) even published a choice of entries to an English-Portuguese, Dutch-Portuguese, Italian-Portuguese and Turkish-Portuguese mock-dictionary.

Whereas a political periodical such as the London-based *Correio Braziliense* contributed to the reception of social, political and economic ideas by Portuguese-speaking readers through the translation of Owen’s *A New View of Society* or Sismondi’s *Principes d’Économie Politique* (from the Geneva edition in French), *Almocreve de Petas* introduced its readers to *The Adventures of the Baron of Münchhausen* and to Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale*, from *The Canterbury Tales*. Even
though, in the latter, the editor did not bother to mention the fact that they were reading translations.

This paper discusses the role of Portuguese press in the circulation, reception and appropriation of print culture in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a Babel of books that crossed borders and even enabled local newspapers to make jokes about foreign cultural uses and fashions.

1 Introduction

The circulation of ideas and the printed word from different European cultures and languages in Portugal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was largely relayed by translations¹ in the periodical press.

In a country where a translated and adapted version of the Matter of France, História do Imperador Carlos Magno, continued to be one of the top ranking best-sellers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries², periodicals not only translated full books in weekly or monthly installments duly acknowledging their authors, but also published foreign works in various degrees of adaptation, often without any reference to the original.

The cultural environment reflected the slow, painstaking change in the overall society, where centuries-old identities were beginning to be challenged by new tastes from abroad. A new climate reluctantly recognized by the humoristic periodical Almocreve de Petas³ in an allegory of mixed gastronomic and fashion stereotypes.

Letter from Pernambuco (...) Don’t you know that all Foreign Nations differ in taste and fashion; Spain’s best delicacy is the red bell pepper; Naples, anchovy; Genoa, chopped mushrooms; Venice, pluck with eggs; Germany, sausage; Italy, macaroni; Hungary, her spirited aqua vitae; Prussia, pudding; the Netherlands, kidney fricassee; England, roastbeef; Denmark, oysters; Sweden, herring in sauce; Poland, stewed aubergine; Russia, malasada [fried dough]; America, manioc flour; Asia, tea; and Africa couscous? Don’t you

¹ On the concept and problems of translation see BRANCO (2008); RICOEUR (2003); STEINER (1975).
² “…. My tailor, my shoemaker, my barber, even the galucho [Galician] who waits on my home….. they all confessed to me they were sick of reading Charlemagne” (Almocreve de Petas, CXL, p.2). “In the afternoon, when had nothing better to do, he used to read Charlemagne…..” (Piolho Viajante, IV, p. 38).
³ Almocreve de Petas (Fibs Peddler) was the first Portuguese printed periodical where humor was consistently and systematically used. It was edited by José Daniel Rodrigues dos Santos – author, editor, playwright, poet, as well as civil servant and military officer –, one the most prolific writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in Portugal.
know that Portugal, before acquiring these tastes, has done well with açorda [bread mashed with water, olive oil and eggs] with garlic, at the same time when in all those countries people ate and dressed according to local tastes and usual practices? So, how do you want to get back in time, in a time when all things have changed? You are wrong if you try to stop the Portuguese Ladies from wearing Spanish mantillas; Neapolitan shawls; Genoese hoods; Venetian jackets; German mittens; Italian ribbons; Hungarian slippers; Prussian cloaks; English hats; Dutch caps; Swedish coats; Polish skirts; Turkish clothes; Asian girdles; and other stuff that anyone knows is quite embellishing. You must know that this country is composed of different tastes, tastes which are not persistent at all, so that each and every one is compelled to be a harlequin of fashion, otherwise a Lady is no longer esteemed… (Almocreve, CXXXVII, p. 2)

2 The louse vs the ship of fools

The ubiquitous appropriation of ideas and stories from abroad prompted editors and writers to make dramatic statements of originality, thus answering the frequent accusation that their periodicals were mere translations. This was the case of the humoristic O Piolho Viajante (The Travelling Louse), claiming it was “Portuguese born and raised” in response to an indirect charge brought by its competitors Barco da Carreira dos Tolos (Ship in the Fool’s Course) and Hospital do Mundo (World’s Hospital), in 1803 and 1805.

Published anonymously, O Piolho was the work of a successful bookseller and printer, António Manuel Policarpo da Silva, who managed his bookshop in the very heart of Lisbon: Terreiro do Paço (Black Horse Square). There he collected ideas and devised the characters of the victims of his Travelling Louse: Travels divided into one thousand and one caps (O Piolho Viajante: Divididas as viagens em mil e huma carapuças. 4 vols., Lisboa: Nova Of. de João Rodr. Neves, 1803-1805).

When originality, credibility and more or less fun concerning storytelling were at stake, translation was the weapon of choice among competing periodicals. In Barco da Carreira dos Tolos, editor José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa was targeted in a letter whereon a supposed reader criticized both his writings and O Piolho Viajante for lack of quality⁴. José Daniel defended his competitor wholeheartedly but this solidarity was

⁴ “Letter from the annoying Critic from Evora…. I am amazed by the blindness of our century, when tasteless people, with no selection nor criterium entertain themselves with works as wishy-washy as, for example, yours and another one called O Piolho Viajante…. whose Author tried to imitate you.” (Barco da Carreira dos Tolos, X, pp. 12-13)
just pretense: he sympathized with *O Piolho*’s editor insofar as he, according to José Daniel, was not the author of the “fiction” but just its translator.

The blow struck home. The *Louse*, where La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère or Alexander Pope were also quoted, answered the charge: “Yes, Gentlemen, the Louse is Portuguese born, a son of Lisbon, raised in the Motherland and proud of it. He does not envy any other nation.”

José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa replied in his next periodical, *Hospital do Mundo* (Word’s Hospital), in a somewhat appeasing tone: “… He should make the Little Louse [Piolhinho] stop stinging me…. He writes with the same end that I do, therefore we should keep the peace between us.”

3 Mock-dictionary, duly acknowledged translation, plagiarism

“Translation” was a keyword in the turn-of-the-century printing and reading communities: the also humoristic newspaper *Almocreve de Petas* even published a choice of entries to an English-Portuguese, Dutch-Portuguese, Italian-Portuguese and Turkish-Portuguese mock-dictionary.

A few years later, a political periodical such as the London-based *Correio Braziliense* contributed to the reception of social, political and economic ideas among Portuguese-speaking readers through the translation of Robert Owen’s *A New View of Society* (from English) or Sismondi’s *Richesse Commerciale, ou Principes d’Économie Politique appliqués à la législation du commerce* (from the Geneva edition in French).

In late 1801, shortly before his first journey to London, Brazilian born journalist Hipólito da Costa – then holding a position at the Royal Printers Casa Literária do Arco do Cego, in Lisbon, to which he was appointed by the minister Dom Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho – translated *Essays political, economical and philosophical* by Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford. The original four volumes, published from 1796 to 1800,

On his return from London, in July 1802, Hipólito da Costa was arrested under the charge of being a freemason and imprisoned, first in a police jail and later in the Inquisition premises. He managed to escape in 1805, reached Gibraltar and arrived safely in London, where he settled under the protection of the Duke of Sussex. In 1808 he became the writer, editor and publisher of *Correio Braziliense*, the first Portuguese language newspaper unhindered by censorship. The periodical circulated not only among the tradesmen and commercial bourgeoisie of Lisbon, Oporto and of the Brazilian merchant ports but was also read by the court of Rio de Janeiro and the Portuguese community in London.

In March and April 1813, alongside political articles irritating the absolutist Regency government of Lisbon, Hipólito da Costa found place in two consecutive issues of his newspaper to publish a review with lengthy excerpts translated from Robert Owen’s *A New View of Society* \(^{10}\).

*It is always useful to meditate and to compare the findings or inventions aiming at putting a remedy to these evils [vices, corruption and passions], whether or not approved…. We know only too well that the wicked, interested on the disgrace of society, always ridicule the ideas of reform. Though they recognize the existence of evil, they say it impossible to provide a remedy to it… Such is the language of the politicians, absorbed in cogitations on the manner of bringing down their enemies. Yet the philosopher thinks otherwise….The author dwells on the hypothesis that children can be taught and brought up in such a way that they may acquire any language, feeling or creed, whatever manners, according to the principle that ‘individual happiness, fully understood, can only be obtained through a behavior intended to promote the happiness of the community’** \(^{11}\).

Moreover, Hipólito underlined, the author sustained that governments should establish rational plans for education in order to form the character of their subjects.

*The education of the people is miserably neglected in almost every country of the world and yet, even without any ill succeeded experiment on the matter, the politicians dare to discredit the idea of educational reform, and spread the error that it is impossible to improve things.** \(^{12}\)*

*At a time when the miseries of war and the depravation of some individuals force us to ascribe most of the space of our newspaper to current affairs*

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\(^{10}\) “Analysis of the pamphlet entitled *A New View of Society*; or, Essay on the formation of human character, and the application of the principle to practice: by one of the Justices-of-the-peace of H. M. in the county of Lanark. London 1813.” *Correio Braziliense*, vol. X. Londres: W. Lewis, 1813, 295-298 and 426-430.

\(^{11}\) Ibidem, p. 297.

\(^{12}\) Ibidem, p. 298.
which are anything but monuments to human wickedness, it is twice a delightful task to look away from the horror scenes and turn to the efforts of the philanthropist which tend to prove how easy it is for Governments to improve human character.\(^\text{13}\)

The A. shows the feasibility of educational improvements in an experiment pursued in a large cotton mill in Scotland and in a village nearby where the efforts of the philanthropist proprietor were extremely well succeeded in the task of improving the character of the people thereof. He points out that large mills, especially those that engage a great number of poor children, are some of the places most easily prey to corruption and depravation, where everything induces noxious habits to the health of the body and to the principles of morals. Thus, he concludes that the execution of his plan is feasible as long as the Government would implement it in all the Realm, as it was adopted in that village [New Lanark] (…) The Reader will allow us, in order to give an idea of these brief but excellent essays, to finish with a passage of the same (…)\(^\text{14}\)

Thus were the Portuguese speaking readers introduced to the work of the social reformer, founder of the cooperative movement and utopian socialist.

From 1816 to 1821, *Correio Braziliense* also published 52 excerpts – more than four hundred pages – of the work of one of Europe’s leading thinkers in the field of political economy: Jean de Sismondi’s *De la Richesse Commerciale, ou Principes d’Économie Politique, Appliqués à la Législation du Commerce*. Geneva: J. J. Paschoud, An XI (1803)\(^\text{15}\). Thanks to this translation, lusophone readers became

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\(^{13}\) Ibidem, 426.

\(^{14}\) Ibidem, pp. 429-430.

acquainted with the notion of productive labor\textsuperscript{16} developed by Sismondi, then follower and soon-to-be critic of Adam Smith.

Among the main sources of \textit{Correio Braziliense} were the \textit{Philosophical Transactions} of the Royal Society and the \textit{Journal of the Royal Institution}, alongside with the \textit{Edinburgh Review}, \textit{Agricultural Magazine}, \textit{Annals of Philosophy} or the \textit{Transactions of the American Philosophical Society}.

Not long before, \textit{Almocreve de Petas} had introduced its readers to \textit{The Adventures of the Baron of Münchhausen} and to Chaucer’s \textit{The Pardoner’s Tale}, from \textit{The Canterbury Tales}. With a significant difference: while Hipólito da Costa, in \textit{Correio Braziliense}, made reference to the original editions and also included notes on the authors, \textit{Almocreve}’s José Daniel did not mention that the lengthy serial of the adventures of “a Military gentleman” was a rather free adaptation of Gottfried Bürger’s 1786 version of the German tale \textit{Wunderbare Reisen zu Wasser und zu Lande, Feldzüge und lustige Abenteuer des Freiherrn von Münchhausen}\textsuperscript{17}.

The stories are told by “a Military officer, guest of Dom Sonho Sonhé, gentleman of Braga” and correspondent of the periodical in that city of Northern Portugal. “Once removed from this Kingdom and now returned to it”, he was “bound by friendship to write down every detail” of the “frequent rarities” happened to him in the different countries he travelled across, “a journey worthy of the attention of the curiosity of my Readers” (\textit{Almocreve}, CXVI, p. 6).

In the following issues he tells about his journey among wolves, wild ducks and geese (CXXIII, pp. 2-3); his adventures in the war against the Turks (CXXIV), where he was made prisoner and sold as a slave to work in the palace of the Sultan. He even travelled to the Moon (CXXVI) and, while sailing the Mediterranean, was swallowed by a big fish – just like in the tale of Münchhausen. All but the last chapter, where he tells how he came back to Portugal:

\begin{quote}
With all these pleasures and experiences of the world I find myself in my Motherland; after seeing, experiencing and reading so many good things, I became a subscriber to a paper which circulates in that city of Lisbon called \textit{Almocreve de Petas}; but I confess that the adventure of its Author writing these leaflets is worthy of my adventures. Nevertheless he gets the better of me because my adventures bring me no profit and he gets \textit{forty réis} from them. (\textit{Almocreve}, CXXXIII, pp. 4-5)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Correio Braziliense}, vol. XVI, nº. 96, p. 456.

\textsuperscript{17} PALMA-FERREIRA (1974), pp. 51-52.
The *Almocreve* also failed to inform its readers that the story “reported in some letters sent from America by balloon” about three brothers who stole a treasure and eventually killed each by dagger and poison was very much the same as Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales*\(^{18}\), including the translation of the motto “Radix malorum est cupiditas” (*Almocreve*, CXXV, pp. 4-5).

4 New ideas crossing borders and oceans

This paper discusses the role of the Portuguese periodical press in the circulation, reception and appropriation of print culture in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, works of many languages that even enabled local newspapers to make jokes about foreign cultural uses and fashions\(^{19}\).

José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, editor of *O Espreitador do Mundo Novo, Comboy de Mentiras, Barco da Carreira dos Tolos, Hospital do Mundo* and a number of other humorous periodicals besides *Almocreve de Petas*, was keen on pointing a finger at *Piolho Viajante*, accusing the “little louse” of being a mere translation of some foreign work. But at the same time he himself was publishing adapted translations from foreign books without bothering to mention it or to acknowledge their authorship.

Curiously, José Daniel had once answered an “alert” to the imminent publication of a new competitor with a rather interesting – and significant – statement:

Alert, alert, Mr. *Espreitador do Mundo Novo*: …. Your findings will soon be imitated by another Author more or less witty…. So spoke a vision to our *Espreitador* in a dream he had last night. To whom he said he replied in his sleep: let us live all…. if he takes advantage of my jokes is because he has found them worthy of general applause; and he does with me the same that I have done with others: he takes advantage of my thoughts and I have taken advantage of many recollections from our elders: this is the chain of the world: we are the echoes of one another. If I was to complain of the Little Louse, many more geniuses, already in their graves, would also complain of me if they could. The long series of time elapsed in such a way that one cannot utter anything new anymore: the farthest the Authors can advance is to criticize the uses of one’s own time, which, more or less funny, comes to be the same that others have already said. (*Espreitador*, 8, pp. 1-2).

Admitting to having taken advantage of the work of previous authors, accepting that others do the same with his own work and claiming that “we are the echoes of one another” is not just a peculiar point a view on author’s rights, most surprising in a writer

\(^{18}\) CHAUCER (2007).

\(^{19}\) About the issue of different kinds of audiences and the changing tastes of readers see LISBOA (2014), p.79.
who in many occasions underlined the value of the work of the author. Considering the receipt of his periodicals in Portugal and also in Brazil, it is, perhaps, the recognition of an all-out appropriation of ideas in a time and place where the printed word was circulating and being disseminated in a Babel of books and periodicals across borders and oceans.  

References  

20 Almocreve de Petas arrived for the first time in Pernambuco in 1799 and was ordered again in 1800. Two copies of Almocreve as well as one of Comboy de Mentiras and Jogo dos Dotes, all by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, figure in a list of books shipped to Paraíba on 21st July 1808 by the Lisbon-based bookseller António Manuel Policarpo da Siva, who was later identified as the author of O Piolho Viajante (VERRI, 2014, pp. 90 and 98-99). See also, for the political periodicals, ALVES (2014).


--- *Comboy de Mentiras*. Lisboa: Na Officina de Simão Thaddeo Ferreira, 1801.


