

## TRANSLATING THE OTHER: JORGE AMADO'S NOVELS AND BRAZILIAN CULTURE RESISTANCE TO APPROPRIATION

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**Abstract:** Jorge Amado is one of the best known Brazilian authors and the most translated one. His novels are still considered as a portrait of Brazil in the sense that they show not only the hard life of people from Bahia, but also they emphasize most of the stereotypes attributed to Brazilians. His engagement with the Brazilian literary movement called Regionalism led him to make his native land Bahia the scenery for his fiction and to incorporate in his works words closely related to the local speech. Such characteristics made Jorge Amado's novels a very difficult work to be translated, since most of the local vocabulary, specially those related to religion, nature, social relationships and sensations or descriptions associated with the human body, seem to have no equivalence in other languages and consequently in other cultures. This paper is based on the study of the translations of *Dona Flor e Seus Dois Maridos*, *Tenda dos Milagres* and *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra* into English, French and Spanish, taking into consideration Venuti's (1995) theory of a "foreignizing" translation which would keep central cultures from wiping out peripheral cultures and consequently the disappearance of alterity. For the analysis some culture marked utterances were chosen randomly in the Brazilian version and compared with their translations in order to verify the translators' efforts in searching for equivalencies.

**Keywords:** translation; Jorge Amado; "foreignizing" translation.

**Resumo:** Jorge Amado é um dos autores brasileiros mais conhecidos e o mais traduzido. Seus romances ainda são considerados uma representação do Brasil, não somente por mostrar a vida sacrificada do povo baiano, mas principalmente por enfatizar a maioria dos estereótipos relacionados aos brasileiros. Como um dos representantes do Movimento Regionalista, Jorge Amado fez da Bahia o cenário dos seus romances, incorporando no seu discurso o falar regional. Tais características tornam a tradução de suas obras um grande desafio para os tradutores, especialmente no que se refere a termos relacionados a religião, natureza, relações sociais e sensações ou descrições associadas ao corpo, que parece não haver equivalência em outras línguas e, conseqüentemente, em outras culturas. Assim, este trabalho se baseia no estudo das traduções de *Dona Flor e seus dois Maridos*, *Tenda dos Milagres* e *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra* para o inglês, francês e espanhol, considerando-se a teoria da "estrangeirização" de Venutti, que vê esse tipo de tradução como uma forma de evitar que culturas centrais apaguem culturas periféricas e, conseqüentemente, levem ao desaparecimento da alteridade. Para esta análise foram escolhidas aleatoriamente, na obra brasileira, algumas expressões culturalmente marcadas que foram comparadas com suas respectivas traduções, de forma a verificar os esforços dos tradutores na busca por equivalências.

**Palavras-chave:** tradução; Jorge Amado; tradução "estrangeirizadora".

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Jorge Amado is one of the best known Brazilian authors and the most widely translated novelist in the world. In 1987, when Bantam Books paid \$250,000 for his novel *Showdown*, a tale of the violent settling of Brazil's cacao country, it was a record amount for rights to publish a foreign-language novel in hard cover. Amado's 32 books sold millions of copies in more than 40 languages.

Although Brazil is the world's largest Roman Catholic nation, Amado wrote extensively and respectfully of the deities and rites of Candomblé, an African-derived religion widely practiced in Brazil. He also attained his enormous popularity despite having toiled unceasingly for communism, both through his writings and as a Communist representative of the Brazilian Congress, to which he was elected in 1945.

But without formally renouncing communism, Jorge Amado effectively turned his back on it by 1956, opting instead for what he described as a utopian socialism. By the same time, his novels also assumed a different tone.

His first comic novel, *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon* (1958), is the story of a waif from the backlands of Bahia. A huge, immediate success, it was described in The New York Times Book Review as "an exciting and enjoyable romp of a book, rich in literary delights." Dona Flor, a character who appeared in 1966, was an equally beloved heroine from Bahia in a novel also praised for its rollicking and lusty qualities. Both *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon* and *Dona Flor and her two Husbands* were made into successful movies, both of them starring Sônia Braga. They were also made into television series that regularly attracted more than 40 percent of the Brazilian viewing audience when telecasted in prime time five nights a week for months. The 1979 Broadway musical *Saravá* was also adapted from *Dona Flor*.

In terms of cultural importance, Amado's works seem to be the entrance door to the Brazilian culture. Seen as phenomenon by his editorial prestige, he is not recognized as an important writer by literature teachers and scholars in Brazil. In foreign countries, however, Jorge Amado figures as part of many literature syllabus of graduate programs among other important Brazilian writers. Even though Amado's novels are set in a place so culturally different as Bahia, they have always been a huge selling success abroad.

His novels are still considered as a portrait of Brazil in the sense that they show not only the hard life of people from Bahia, but also they emphasize most of the stereotypes attributed to Brazilians. The foreign interest in Jorge Amado is probably based on the fact that his novels have Bahia as their narrative space, with all her mysteries, mysticisms and exotisms, and as theme the suffered life of those who live off fishing in rafts, who work at cocoa plantations and of what they manage to harvest from the dry backlands of Bahia. Everything is seasoned with sensuality and spicy sex scenes. Jorge Amado's engagement with Regionalism, a Brazilian literary movement, led him to make his native land Bahia the scenery for his fiction and to incorporate in his works words closely related to the local speech.

Such characteristics made Jorge Amado's novels very difficult texts to be translated, since most of the local vocabulary, specially those related to religion, nature, social relationships and sensations or descriptions associated with the human body, seem to have no equivalence in other languages and consequently in other cultures.

This study focus on translations of *Dona Flor and her two Husbands*, *Tent of Miracles* and *Tereza Batista home from the wars* into English, French and Spanish. Some culture marked utterances were chosen randomly for the analysis in the Brazilian version and compared with their translations in order to verify the translators' efforts in searching for equivalencies. The degree of proximity/distance between the original and the translated text was classified according to Vinay & Darbelnet's (1960) model and its reformulation by Aubert (1996), in an attempt to measure the translation difficulties in these novels with such regional accent and also to reassure the linguistic challenge caused by the impossibility of disassociation between language and culture.

Translation is an activity whose starting and arrival points are not just linguistic, but also a cultural fact. It is interesting, however, to observe the translation of Amado's texts according to Venuti's (1995) theory of a "foreignizing" translation which would keep central cultures from wiping out peripheral cultures and consequently the disappearance of alterity. Venuti sees domestication as dominating Anglo-American translation culture; so he bemoans the phenomenon of domestication since it involves 'an ethno-centric reduction of the foreign text to Anglo-American cultural values'. This entails translating in a transparent, fluent, 'invisible' style in order to minimize the foreignness of the target text.

The analysis of the corpora shows that the Brazilian culture seems to be resistant to such appropriations, not only because the translator wants to look visible in the text, as Venuti affirms, but also because Amado's novels are so full of cultural/linguistic elements that make it impossible to appropriate without losing their narrative meanings. The English versions of the three novels showed almost the same behaviour in the treatment of cultural marked utterances. In *Dona Flor and her two Husbands*, 81,66% were impossible to be simply substituted by terms of the target language. The translator had to recur to loans (which means bringing exactly the same term from the source language to the target language text), to adaptations (which is to substitute terms of the source language by terms of the target language that have some resemblance in meaning – e.g. a *pitanga* is substituted by *cherry* because it resembles the fruit in color and shape), and explication (cases in which the term is kept in the source language, followed by an explanation of its meaning). In *Tent of Miracles*, 79,33% of the terms had to go through the same process of translation as well as in *Tereza Batista home from the wars*, with 86,84% of the culturally marked terms.

The English versions of the three novels seem to be closer to the SL text because of the great number of loans, but in fact they are creative translations in the sense that the explications and adaptations together area almost twice the number of loans.

The French versions of the three novels showed that the translator's options were centered in loans, literal translations, adaptations or calques. The analysis of the collected data points to a high degree of translation proximity, showing the translators opted for a more immediate and less elaborated translation. A larger percentage of literal translation were possible because many words of the Brazilian Portuguese vocabulary are now part of most recent revised French dictionaries. The close contact of the French people with the Brazilian culture, through books, movies, songs and even *candomblé* rituals makes it easier to transfer linguistic meanings as well as extralinguistic meanings of the text.

In the Spanish translations, the options for culturally marked utterances were also loans, literal translations, and calques (a word or expressions borrowed from the source language which has undergone certain graphical and/or morphological adaptations to the conventions of the target language). In Spanish, most of the loans were linked to terms related to *Candomblé*, like entities, rites, musical instruments and objects used in the rituals. The literal translation was more associated with terms of the ecological culture, like fruits and vegetables, and terms with the same Latin origin, such as *obrigações* / *obligaciones*. The same observation for the analysis of the French version could be made in this case. The translation of words like obligation for *obligaciones* not necessarily indicates that in Spanish obligation means the payment of promises made to *Candomblé* saints. So a linguistic equivalence does not mean an extralinguistic equivalence at all. A Cuban translation would have a much more similar extralinguistic sense than a Spanish one, since *Santería* is a common practice in Cuba.

The comparison of the results of the three works showed that the translation behavior resembles each other with relationship to the loan. The text seems to have imposed to the translators the maintenance of specific terms of our culture in the three languages. For the behavior of the data, it is confirmed that French as well as Spanish, since they are linguistically closer to Portuguese, neither needed so many explicitations nor adaptations, as in English. On the other hand, the literal translation that should not happen as frequently in English, represented an important resource for the other two Latin originated languages. That possibly happens due to the cultural absorption among countries with the same linguistic origin, which goes toward Venuti's theory of a "foreignizing" translation. The adaptation, surprisingly appears in larger number in English and in French, when related to material and social cultures, respectively, while in Spanish such option was less expressive.

Nevertheless, Amado's novels seem to be resistant to appropriations and to a domesticated translation in which the other's interpretation wipes out our cultural specificities. In order to translate Jorge Amado one has to keep visible certain elements of the Brazilian culture that are related to our history, our language and our religious beliefs. His novels are not just plots that can be transposed to other codes – they can only make sense as a whole in which cultural facts play an important part. The translated texts analyzed, in all three languages, proved that Amado's texts are so culturally bounded that a "foreignizing" translation seem to be the best alternative, even

for those languages with the same linguistic origin, since they have different cultural background.

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