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The case of Brazilian journal GEOgraphia (1999-2019)


Les agents de la traduction et la circulation des classiques dans la périphérie de la science : le cas de la revue brésilienne GEOgraphia (1999-2019)

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

All the remarks suggested by Archie Davies and Laura Péaud were very important to improve this paper, and Archie also had the patience to rectify my English. In turn, Leonardo Arantes and Breno Viotto Pedrosa helped me with informations about their education and translations, and Eustógio Dantas shared with me a precious interpretation on the growth of the graduate courses in Brazil in the 1990s. This paper is part of our research project “Center of calculation, circulation networks, and history of geography: the case of the Brazilian Journal of Geography from IBGE (1939-1996)” funded by 2019 FAPERJ’ Support to Emergent Research Groups in Rio de Janeiro.

Introduction

1 The current text is part of a research project on the translations published by four Brazilian journals of geography from 1939 to 2019: Revista Brasileira de Geografia
Brazilian Journal of Geography, Boletim Geográfico [Geographical Bulletin], Espaço e Cultura [Space and Culture], and GEOgraphia [GEOgraphia]. Whereas the first two were edited in one of the most important “centers of calculation” in Latin America, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics], representing the pioneering and consolidation of geography in a peripheral country, the other two arose thanks to the development of graduate courses at the end of the 20th century. Comparing and distinguishing them according to their intellectual, historical, and geopolitical contexts, I aim to investigate the role of translators and translations in the circulation of foreign ideas in Brazil.

In Braudelian terms (Braudel, 1997), translating is a work of the longue durée in Brazil. During colonial times, Portuguese deportees and deserted sailors were left among Indigenous peoples to learn their languages, and these men were named “línguas” (“tongues”) (Gonçalves Barbosa and Wyler, 2001: 326 [1998]). In the first half of the 19th century, in order to be part of the so-called civilized world and the Brazilian attraction to European ambiance led to a British magazine, the Revue Britannique, being published in translation. Yet, it was translated not from the original version, but the French one (Ramicelli, 2009). In the early 20th century, the Brazilian medical journal Memórias do Instituto Oswaldo Cruz had to publish its papers in German and French to reach the “international” community — although the writers were Brazilian (Hanes, 2014). From 1939 to 1957, the papers issued by the Revista Brasileira de Geografia were followed by abstracts in French, English, Spanish, German, Italian, and even Esperanto. The Boletim Geográfico, by translating almost four hundred and fifty texts from 1943 to 1978, is probably one of the key periodicals in this context (Ribeiro, 2018).

It is within that rich tradition — including in theoretical terms, as demonstrated by the concept of anthropophagism elaborated by the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade in the 1920s, as well as by the Concretist poet and translator Haroldo de Campos through the notion of transcreation in the 1960s (De Andrade, 2017 [1928]; De Campos, 2006 [1963]) — that I will analyze the first twenty years of a journal called GEOgraphia. Founded in 1999 by the Department of Geography at the Federal Fluminense University (UFF) in the city of Niterói, State of Rio de Janeiro, it would be a relatively standard academic journal if it weren’t for the section Nossos Clássicos [Our Classics]. Dedicated to translations and commentaries by the translators themselves, it didn’t take long to become a source for all interested in the history of geography — including European geographers in pursuit of “other geographical traditions” (Ferretti, 2019: 8-9) and our Argentinian neighbors (Lus Bietti, 2019). In addition to this, in the last years, other Brazilian journals such as Terra Brasilis and Tamoios have established similar rubrics inspired by GEOgraphia.

Looking to study the history of Brazilian geography from a viewpoint that emphasizes language and politics, this paper aims to identify the authors who were translated, the translators, and their reasons for doing it. Based on decolonial thinking and translation studies, my main argument has two claims. Generally, there is a close relation between the peripheral condition and the act of translating. The nations of the metropole and its dominant languages, cannot be obliged to be bilingual or multilingual (Casanova, 2015). Thus, languages have had a crucial role so in the colonisation of memory and of the imagination as in the asymmetrical scholar exchanges within the international division of intellectual labor (Anzaldúa, 1981, 1987; Mignolo, 1995, 2012). Specifically, the translations of classics published by GEOgraphia have been a way to rethink...
“canonical” issues (Keighren et al., 2012) on the history of geography so in national as in international spheres. Some of these issues (the dichotomy between Ratzel the determinist and Vidal de la Blache the possibilist, for instance, to mention just one of them) were widespread in Brazil through books such as Introdução à geografia: geografia e ideologia [Introduction to geography: geography and ideology] (Sodré, 1976), O que é Geografia? [What is geography] (Moreira, 1980), Geografia: pequena história crítica [Geography: a short critical history] (Moraes, 1981), and Geografia, ciência da sociedade: uma introdução à análise do pensamento geográfico [Geography, the science of society. An introduction to the analysis of the history of geographical thought] (Andrade, 1987), as well as by A geographical introduction to history (Febvre, 1991 [1922]) and Geography serves first to wage war (Lacoste, 1976).

In general terms, translations reproduce but also question dominant narratives (Spivak, 2010). All this work cannot be realized without translators. Surprisingly, this is not an obvious starting point, because translators have been historically neglected in various ways (Schulte, 1992; Venuti, 1995, 1998), and their work has even been placed under suspicion, and various forms of control. To reverse this situation I will underscore the role and the practice of translators (Buzelin, 2005, 2010; Sakai, 2010), or to be precise, of what we are calling geotranslators. My aim is to highlight that translators have been central agents in the geography of international scientific flows concerning papers, chapters, journals, and prefaces. The end of their work, the translation, is just the tip of the iceberg whose dimension as a whole remains hidden. However, until it reaches the readers, the translations entail a large network involving language training, national and/or foreign interlocutors, dealings and payments around copyrights, but chiefly the processes of selection (and, inevitably, of exclusion [cf. Foucault, 1971/1970]) of authors, concepts, and methods. From material to intellectual processes relating to scientific circulation, it is worth noting both the spatiality and the agency of translators. To do this, the concept of geotranslator is useful.

This paper is divided into three sections: firstly, I will connect translation studies and decolonial thought, aiming to see translations as a geographical and a geopolitical object. Secondly, I will analyze the translations and the commentaries associated with them, and address their intentions. Finally, the conclusion shows how GEOgraphia’s Our Classics become an important forum of debates on canonical histories of geography from a Brazilian perspective thanks to the work of the geotranslators.

Translation as a geographical and a geopolitical object: methodological perspectives

It is impossible to think of Brazilian scholarship without referring to translations. Our intellectual life is inseparable from references from abroad. However, I would dare say that this presence is so familiar that it has become naturalized. This is an absurd situation above all from a geographical standpoint, as the spatiality of all translations —namely their circulation — make these two words, translation and circulation, effectively synonymous. Thus, it is difficult to realize why both were ignored as geographical concerns throughout the 20th century.
It is worth noting that translation studies have often resorted to the geographical expertise that arose mainly from the spatial turn (Bachmann-Medick, 2016 [2015]) to study the theoretical role of the space in understanding translations; to analyze how translations can affect the imaginary of places; to understand the ideological dimension of translating in times of war, and to understand the movement of translations into a globalized world. The result of this fusion are concepts such as “paradigm of space”, “translating geographies”, “geographies of translation” (Italiano, 2012, 2016), “translational spaces” (Bachmann-Medick, 2009), “translation zone”, “Balkan Babel” (Apter, 2006), and “new geography of translation” (Cronin, 2003).

As a geographer, my reading from translation studies moves in three interconnected ways. First, translations have a particular nature both as an intellectual subject and as a “hybrid” text. However, the general comprehension of what translation means is so precarious that Venuti draws up five directions to learning “how to read a translation” (Venuti, 2004. See also Venuti, 2009, 2013, and Schulte, 2012), whereas Apter attests that translation is a kind of new comparative literature (Apter, 2006). Secondly, translation could be understood as a sort of method able to shed light on the scholarly exchanges between Brazilian and foreign geographers, for example. It is possible to identify by the use of translations an interesting network containing laboratories, journals, and travels, on the one hand, and international influences, scientific hierarchies, and editorial politics, on the other hand. Within that network, space has had a crucial role, as Rupke summed up:

A detailed and systematic study of translations should prove to be highly efficient as a tool for the analysis of scientific knowledge in terms of region and territory (national, partly political, social and so on) and in the cartography of scientific meaning. Translation studies could help in answering the two questions formulated by Shapin: how does science, whatever its local mainspring, travel with such remarkable efficiency, and to what extent are local circumstances involved in the meanings that scientific texts acquire and the purposes they are made to serve? (Rupke, 2000: 210)

Thirdly, translation must be denaturalized. As a geographical object, translation had not been transported by a metaphysical entity, and its content was neither selected by coincidence, nor it is independent of place and language. Translation is action (Buzelin, 2005, 2010), and, further, it is a kind of geopolitical action (Tymoczko, 2000; Spivak, 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Mezzadra and Sakai, 2014; Casanova, 2015). Translators, therefore, cannot remain invisible (Venuti, 1995, 1998). More than individual acts randomly disseminated in journals and books, translating is a social movement submitted to historical contexts, ideological orientations, and institutional politics which govern the production of knowledge. Far from neutral or passive, translations are present so in the “modern regimes of translation” which have shaped national languages (Sakai, 1992, 1997) as in the territorial practices and discourses mobilized by National Schools of Geography.

Few Brazilian geographers have noted the power of language and translation in the last years, as exemplified by Novaes’ interrogation on from what extent the International Conference of Historical Geographers is really international (Novaes, 2015), the paper For a critical practice of translation in geography by Germes and Husseini de Araújo (Germes and Husseini de Araújo, 2016), Milton Santos’ paper The active role of geography: a manifesto translated into English by Clarke and Melgaço and accompanied by a commentary placing it as “thinking outside the bubble of the Global North” (Melgaço,

Published by relevant vehicles such as *Journal of Historical Geography, ACME, Antipode,* and Springer, they are unfortunately the exception that proves the rule, and it not by coincidence that all of them were written in English and aimed at an English-speaking audience — despite their critical aims, needless to say. To my mind, translation and language have been seen by Brazilian geographers as a “cultural” issue both in the naïve and depoliticized sense of the term, which serves to dissipate the power and politics of transactions, the conflicts and inequalities that cross an “international” geography of science, books, reading, and translations. However, these contradictions are not always evident either in the English-language literature on the circulation of knowledge (Livingstone, 2003, 2005; Naylor, 2005, 2005a), nor among Brazilian geographers. As a result, despite the fact that Francophony was constitutive of the university Brazilian geography, it becomes just a cultural-intellectual tradition rather than the outcome of dealing between centers and peripheries, for example. This situation helps us to explain the intense debate on the hegemony of the English language involving geographers from different parts of the world had no echo in Brazil (Minca, 2000; Desbiens, 2002; Garcia-Ramon, 2003; Aalbers, 2004; Desbiens and Ruddick, 2006). In this line of reasoning, is it possible that the lack of interest of Brazilian geographers to publish in foreign idioms is related to a wider failure to understand languages as a socio-spatial phenomenon? The issue becomes more complex because Brazilian geographers still work actively on translations, but they have little awareness — including myself — that it is exactly their peripheral condition *lato sensu* that leads them to do it. As a result, translation appears always as a linguistic “obstacle” to be solved and never as a question to be studied.

From French hegemony across the Age of Enlightenment to the English one spreading the American way of life after the Second World War, language never was a “soft power” (Nye, 2004), and it is hard to believe how such a weak argument was taken seriously. Yet, instead of considering this interpretation only in ideological terms, I think that it reveals a difficulty in incorporating language into geography’s *modus operandi.* By conceiving language as a regulator of what we read, teach, and write, we will be more attentive to the social, ethical, and geopolitical features which have been guided the production of knowledge and the intellectual exchanges between centers and peripheries — including the role of translations in that context, needless to say (Spivak, 2000). Although I am aware of the limitations represented by the center-periphery binary approach (Raj, 2013), I am also very persuaded that the world scientific field has built upon an unequal balance of flows, influences, legitimacy, and recognition — not to say prejudices, one-sidedness, and so on. Thus, let me accentuate that the circulation of European classics through translations at the scientific periphery is not an aleatory movement (see Bourdieu, 2002 [1990]), but part of the *geopolitics of knowledge* (Mignolo, 2000) within which translation is a form of *domination* of one language by another (Casanova, 2015). Broadening the scope of the question, language and its pair, translation, have shaped the thinking and the production of knowledge within modernity/coloniality. From this perspective, the Euro-western epistemological dominance cannot be understood without a criticism of
language in general (Mignolo, 1995; Kilomba, 2008; Mbembe, 2013), which includes the task to develop a “decolonial translation” (Mignolo, 2012: 33). According to Mignolo:

Basically the directionality of translation began to change because of the growing number of students from the Third World who become scholars and scientists in the First World. The problem of translation here is not a problem of language but a problem of the scholar: racism works through the language and the colonial difference has not been forgotten, for a scientist from the Third World carries the traces of their own ‘sin’. That is, belonging to the historically epistemic and ontological deficient part of the population. There are always exceptions, but the rule of colonial differentials still holds. (Mignolo, 2012: 27)

Translating is a social act and, as such, configures an entire geography of science. Deliberately selected but conditioned by historical and political structures, translators’ agency provides an intellectual landscape in which some labels (idioms, journals, books, methods, concepts, and authors) appear with more or less frequency, forging some traditions at the expense of others. Far beyond cultural mediators, in spreading values, influences, and Weltanschauungen, translators reproduce the assymetric power relations among nations within the intellectual division of labor, thus mobilizing the political dimension of languages. So, I will call them geotranslators.

Languages, translators, and networks in action: from creation to consolidation of GEOgrahia’s Our Classics

While undergraduate courses progressively spread across various Brazilian regions during the twentieth century, just five universities were able to offer a Master’s course in geography (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro [UFRJ], Federal University of Minas Gerais [UFMG], Federal University of Pernambuco [UFPE], Federal University of Sergipe [UFSE], and Federal University of Santa Catarina [UFSC]), and only two offered both Master’s and Doctoral’s degrees (University of São Paulo [USP] and São Paulo State University [UNESP-Rio Claro]). The spatial concentration in the Brazilian core area (the Southeast region) and the low number of graduate courses began to change in the 1990s and the first decade of the current century (Dantas, Augustin & Cavalcanti 2016). Notwithstanding the implantation of neoliberal education policies promoted by president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) — whose negative impacts were partially reverted thanks to a sustained national project, the REUNI, to found new universities and federal institutes during Luis Inácio Lula da Silva’s Government (2003-2010) —, the survival strategy put in practice by universities was to found graduate courses and journals. This was not only an intellectual movement but a form of political resistance against neoliberalism.²

In this context, three newly founded journals of geography circulated in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s: Espaço e Cultura, a pioneer vehicle edited since 1995 by the Space and Culture Center of Study and Research, and directed by Zeny Rosendhal and Roberto Lobato Correa at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) Department of Geography; GeoUERJ, issued since 1997 by the same department; and Território, published since 1996 by the Laboratory of Territory Planning at UFRJ Department of Geography (the second oldest Brazilian course of geography). Only this latter has ended its activities. Navigating survival and competition, Federal Fluminense University (UFF) (situated in the city of Niterói, State of Rio de Janeiro), whose undergraduate geography course was established in 1947, opened Master’s courses and a Doctorate degree in 1998 and 2001...
respectively, and launched its journal, GEOgraphia, in 1999. Among their founders were both experience and rising professionals, as well as two scholars who were responsible for the dissemination of Critical Geography during the 1980s: Ruy Moreira, recognized for connecting marxism and geography from an epistemological perspective; and Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves, known for his works on capitalism, rural social movements, and environmentalism (Moreira, 2007; Porto-Gonçalves, 2006). A half-yearly journal, in its first issue in 1999 GEOgraphia published a paper by Milton Santos extracted from his keynote at the opening conference of the UFF course a few months before. For a newly launched course, this gave UFF’s course a stamp of prestige (Santos, 1999). However, all the other papers in the journal were written by UFF professors — something very common at the time. Consisting of articles, reviews, and suggestions of books and authors, GEOgraphia did not have any particularly distinctive features, apart from a section named Our Classics [Nossos Clássicos]. It is described in the following terms: “A permanent section will be dedicated to the classics, in order to salvage that work, and to stimulate reading and debates through selected papers. We will bring to geography a practice that has long been common in other academic fields” (author unknown, 1999: 2, my translation). Another particular feature of this section is that almost all of the translations were followed by a commentary.

Of course, all journals have their own history, and often in the first years it is difficult to attract and publish good papers, as well as overcome the difficulties associated with actually publishing each issue. I have therefore decided to split this paper into two parts, of ten years each. To my mind, the comparison across two decades is enough to distinguish superficial shifts from structural changes, and therefore to detect the dynamic of translations practised by Our Classics.

The initial years, or Testing a formula (1999-2009)

A semi-annual journal, from 1999 to 2009 GEOgraphia’s Our Classics published 22 issues, 20 translations from 14 different sources, 19 comments, 11 translators, 11 authors translated from 3 nationalities (French, German, and North American) and from 4 languages (French, German, Spanish, and English). The main source, translated author, and translator are the Annales de Géographie [5 times], Vidal de la Blache [8], and Rogério Haesbaert [5] respectively. Overall, French authors appear 13 times (Vidal [8], Reclus [2], Tricart [1], Sorre [1], and Dresch [1]), Germans 6 times (Kant [2], Hettner [1], Humboldt [1], Ratzel [1], and Benjamin [1]), and North-Americans 1 time (Sauer).

In qualitative terms, these numbers confirm the stability of the French influence and its ability to renew itself over and over, ever since the mid-1930s when French academic missions played such significant roles in the founding of Brazilian university geography at USP and UFRJ (Miceli, 1989; Machado, 2009). Assuming various roles, from modernizers to classics, the French tradition has been mobilized by different generations of Brazilian scholars, as we can see from Moreira’s (an experienced scholar) translations of Reclus, Sorre, and Tricart in the first years to the Ph.D. student Antunes’s translations more than a decade later. Other interesting aspect revealed by the translations is that France still attracting Brazilian students of geography, for from seven translators from French, one is a native speaker (Sylvain Souchaud) and two did not study in France (Moreira and Simone Batista), while four of them (Maria Regina Sader in the 1980s, Haesbaert in the 1990s, Ribeiro in the 2000s, and Breno Pedrosa in
the 2010s) were trained in traditional French ‘centres of calculation’ such as the Institut d’Études Politiques, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, and École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). Indeed, seven of the eleven translators and/or commentators studied abroad, and from four who translated from French, two of them studied at the Alliance Française (Haesbaert in Paris and Ribeiro in São Gonçalo). One cannot forget that Alliance Française was established by Pierre Foncin in 1883. A geographer and colonialist, his aim was to diffuse French culture and civilization through language (Barko, 2000). This thinking was also shared by Paul Vidal de la Blache, as he argued for the strategic dissemination of the French language in order to soften the contradictions between metropolitan interests and local population in the colonies (Vidal de la Blache, 1897).

As the French language is also closely related both to my own and to Pedrosa’s Ph.D. theses, during our trajectories we both translated figures such as Vidal de la Blache, a central figure in how Fernand Braudel forged his concepts of the longue durée and geohistory, and Jean Dresch, whose impact on the Marxist and anticolonial approaches was significant (Ribeiro, 2008; Pedrosa, 2013). A similar argument could apply in relation to English, and would explain Sauer’s translation by Werther Holzer in 2000, whose doctoral thesis two years earlier explored the concept of landscape to understand sixteenth-century travel chronicles in Brazil (Holzer, 1998). This was the only translation of an English paper, which suggests a measure of distance between the Anglo-Saxon tradition and contemporary Brazilian conceptions of the classics.

This brings me to the fact that one of the few issues which does not contain translation (2002, n. 8) is due to an attempt to create Our Brazilian Classics. This addressed one of the most Brazilian thinkers from the 1930s to 1960s: Josué de Castro’s geopolitical agenda linked hunger, race and underdevelopment, and came to obtain international recognition (Davies, 2019), but the rising of military censorship in 1964 and the strong presence of spatial science through the mid-1960s and 1970s interrupted a deeper spread of his works. The fact that a Brazilian scholar only appears again in 2017 (Milton Santos) reveals that the concept of a classic for GEOgraphia is not to do with national authors such as Delgado de Carvalho, Pedro Pinchas Geiger, Lysia Bernardes, Olga Maria Buarque de Lima Fredrich or Lívia de Oliveira, for example.

In terms of the seduction exercised by imported theories, it is useful to compare the opening issue of Boletim Geográfico — edited by IBGE from 1943 to 1978, a journal that was deeply invested in translations, publishing almost 450 of them (Ribeiro, 2018) — with the inaugural edition of GEOgraphia. It is significant that they translated the same author (Paul Vidal de la Blache) in different periods (1943 and 1999). Both newly created journals used the strategy of translating a renowned author to obtain legitimacy and prestige within the scientific field. In Bourdieusian terms, this “transfer of symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 2002: 5 [1990]) shows the French influence on Brazilian geography, including in commercial terms. Following this francophone trend, Haesbaert’s persistence in translating Vidal de la Blache three times across three years (1999, 2001, and in 2002 [with Souchaud]) is related to the fact that the last Brazilian translation of Vidal de la Blache, As características próprias da geografia [The particular characteristics of geography], became a key piece in his canonization among us since then. Amid the full efervescence of radical approaches at the end of the military dictatorship in 1982, the descriptive method and the definition of geography as the “science of places, and not of men” (Vidal de la Blache, 1982: 47 [1913]) were not well
understood (cf. Ribeiro, 2020). Thus, Haesbaert’s translations signalled the beginning of changes in the Brazilian reception of Vidal de la Blache, inducing new translations and interpretations came from other translators. For instance, the translation of the first part of the well-known paper on *genres de vie* by Sader and Batista in 2005; a cultural essay about popular knowledge about landscapes, places, and routes in understanding France’s rural past in 2006; the geographical contribution to social phenomena in 2007; and his methodological and historical opening lecture at the Sorbonne in 2008. The three latter were translated by myself. In turn, Haesbaert returned to the scene in translating nationalist topics addressed in excerpts from the book *États et nations de l’Europe autour de la France* (2009).

23 With eight texts in ten years, these translations met a sort of pent-up demand, a need to build new narratives about the classics in general and Vidal de la Blache in particular, something that came to fruition with the *Vidal, Vidais* collection in 2012 (Haesbaert et al., 2012). Prefaced by Paul Claval, this book represents how stimulating the *Our Classics* rubric was in the sense of translating and reviewing history of geography via translations. Taken as a whole, there is a convergence of concerns among geotranslators about the key texts for the constitution of geography as a modern science, its originality and its legacy for current generations; the lack of foreign material available in Portuguese; the influences exerted by translated authors on geographers trained in Brazil; and the aim for translations to be first steps towards in-depth studies.

24 Thus international references are triggered as much as criticized by Brazilian geotranslators. To quote some examples, in 1999 Nigel Thrift — whose article *Taking aim at the heart of a region* had been translated into Portuguese three years before (Thrift, 1996 [1994]) — is criticized by Haesbaert (in close dialogue with Gomes [1996]) in his commentary on *Tableau de la géographie de la France*, for his simplistic reading of Vidal de la Blache. In contrast, Haesbaert emphasizes the relevance of the French geographer thanks to the scope of his method, writing, and interdisciplinarity.

[Vidal de la Blache] left us a particular language, a discourse that did not disdain metaphor as a way of improving rationalist readings of the world, and that unfolded in ‘thick descriptions’ which go further than the empiricism and subjectivism for which he is often accused. (Haesbaert, 1999: 140, my translation)

25 In 2002, Febvre’s controversial notions of determinism and possibilism were rejected by Haesbaert (with Sanguin [1993]) in his introduction to *Political geography – on the subject of the writings of Mr. Friedrich Ratzel* (Haesbaert, 2002). In his commentary on Dresch’s *The decline of capitalism* (2009 [1945]), Pedrosa pointed out (supported by Suret-Canale [1981]) how limited Lacoste’s interpretation of imperialism and underdevelopment in the Third World was. In a passage that synthesizes the spirit of *Our Classics*: “Classics shouldn’t be only glorified, but read (...) to avoid errors and to avoid thinking that certain phenomena only exist in our own time” (Pedrosa, 2009: 179, my translation).

One year ago, I diverged from Lacoste and his reading of Vidal de la Blache and its Brazilian effects by arguing that even those who accentuated how political geography has adopted the worst of strategies. In trying to depoliticize Vidalian thought, [Lacoste] impoverished and underestimated it. His efforts to rehabilitate him [reediting La France de l’Est] do not seem to have been successful — chiefly in Brazil, where Vidal de la Blache continues to be seen as the misplaced and irrelevant bit of courses on Introduction to Geography and History of Geographical Thought. He is seen as the ultimate
figure of a ‘naïve and boring’ geography, and for this reason should be forgotten as soon as possible. (Ribeiro, 2008: 125, my translation)

Leaving the French orbit, German authors appear discreetly at the beginning of Our Classics. In translating Hettner’s and Humboldt’s fragments in 2000 and 2004 respectively, Moreira wrote just two pages of commentary, whereas Sergio Nunes Pereira’s explanation was replaced by an interview with Sebastien Vélut (ENS) about Humboldt, undertaken by Aldo Dantas (Rio Grande do Norte Federal University [UFRN]) in Paris (Velut, 2004). Nevertheless, Moreira and Pereira’s choices sought to put the German tradition in its well-deserved place (for its impact on the French School of Geography, see Broc, 1977, and Berdoulay, 1995 [1981]), something undervalued in Brazilian geography due to Francophony, among other reasons. Such translations also suggest how varied the flow of classics in a peripheral country is. Its origins are not in German, but were extracted from a Spanish collection that circulated extensively across Latin America during the 1980s: *El pensamiento geográfico. Estudio interpretativo y antología de textos* [Geographical thinking. Interpretive study and anthology of texts] (Mendóza *et al.*, 1982). Even though this anthology has accomplished the feat of translating almost fifty papers, from Humboldt to Radical tendencies, the similarity between Spanish and Portuguese languages should be considered when attempting to illuminate how Hettner and Humboldt landed in 21st century Brazil con acento castellano. Nevertheless, the varied flow described above still has Europe as its guideposts. On this basis, it is not a surprise to discover that Pereira did his doctoral work in Spain at the University of Barcelona in 2001-2002. Thus his preference for translating the language of Gabriel García Márquez is not casual, but the result of his training network.

Still regarding the Germans, although Kant and Benjamin are familiar to Brazilian scholars thanks to the translations done within the field of Philosophy, to my knowledge it was the first time that they were translated by a Brazilian geographer. If The Lisbon earthquake’s translation (2008) is a curious text due to Benjamin’s geographical tone, in translating *Introduction to Physical Geography* in 2007, *Project and announcement of Physical Geography* and the *Physical Geography*’s index in 2008, UFF master’s student Leonardo Arantes — who wrote a dissertation on Kant’s contribution to geography, including a period at the Eberhard-Karls Universität Tübingen in 2008-2009 — calls attention to Kant’s teaching of geography and reveals the significance of space and nature for the understanding of modern epistemology, including his debatable views on Geography, History, and Anthropology and its effects on the historiography of geography (see, for instance, Hartshorne, 1939; Schaeffer 1953).

Nevertheless, the first paper by Ratzel to appear in Portuguese, *The ground, the society, and the State* (1888-1889) was translated (from French) at the end of the military dictatorship by the Master’s student Mário Antônio Eufrásio at the USP Revista do Departamento de Geografia in 1983 (Ratzel, 1983). It comes from *Le sol, la société et l’état* (1900), which circulated in French at the turn of the twentieth century in the middle of the disputes between human geography and social morphology in the pages of *L’année sociologique*, a journal established by Émile Durkheim in 1897 (see Robic, 2014). Unfortunately, the content of that Brazilian version and the translator’s agency were forgotten in the name of the *Ratzel* collection edited by Moraes, which became a prestigious teaching collection named *Grandes Cientistas Sociais* [Major Social Scientists] published by Ática Publisher from 1978 to 1990. Yet, despite the fact that the work was
done by professional translators (Fátima Murad and Denise Bottman), none of the papers were translated from the original German, but from Italian, English, and French translations (Ratzel, 1990). Furthermore, Moraes’ explanation was restricted, grosso modo, by both the Marxist criticism and the canonical litterature (Febvre and Sodré, for instance) of that time (Moraes, 1990). There is no mention of the two important papers written in English by Bassin few years ago, for instance (Bassin, 1987, 1987a).

The intellectual changes began soon after. The 1990s were an important moment in the history of Brazilian geography, a kind of transition between the Marxist pioneers from the end of the 1970s and the new impulse from the 1990s on. So, exploring Spanish, French, English, and German references, in 1992 the master student Luciana de Lima Martins (UFRJ) puts in question generalizations and stereotypes written by Febvre, Semple, and the Brazilian Marxists (Sodré, 1976; Moreira, 1980; Moraes, 1995 [1981], 1990; Andrade, 1987). Published in the most traditional Brazilian journal of geography, the Revista Brasileira de Geografia, her words anticipated the aims and challenges of the next generation. One could replace ‘Ratzel’ for ‘Vidal de la Blache’, ‘Hettner’ or ‘Kropotkin’, and the goal would remain the same.

(…) re-reading Ratzel became a comprehensible task today. Despite his scholarship’s undoubted relevance (…), his contribution to geography remains very much under-explored. Indeed, until recently Ratzel was an enigmatic and forgotten figure. The reasons for this silence can be found in his commentators, for they didn’t bother to distinguish their own ideas from those of Ratzel himself. In selecting Ratzel’s ideas, they fail to make clear the influence of their own interests. Therefore, they perpetrate a mistaken image of Ratzel’s work. (Martins, 1992: 108, my translation)

In 1993 Martins obtained a Master’s Degree precisely about the German geographer, and for her Ratzel is far from orthodox or inflexible (Martins, 1993). Some years later, she launched (supported by the teacher of German Ferdinand Reis) what is almost certainly the first translation of Ratzel from German into Portuguese in Brazil: Amigos, o sublime não mora no espaço [Friends, the sublime does not live in space] (Ratzel, 2001 [1903]). Published in GEOgraphia’s Our Classics, she strategically selected a paper, aiming to reach a very clear target: the distorted “French-Brazilian” interpretation of Ratzel.

Ratzel’s extensive production suggests a modern integration of facts and the quickness of social development in the context of the unification of Germany. Considerations on the state, history, human races, the teaching of geography, and landscape features across his oeuvre, in addition to his concern with the creation of a shared identity for the nation in making. Read through the French litterature, particularly Lucien Febvre’s La terre et l’évolution humaine, Brazilian historiography of geography sees Ratzel as a determinist, in opposition to the possibilism — a term created by Febvre himself — attributed to Vidal de la Blache. (Martins, 2001: 115, my translation)

Despite having witnessed huge technological changes associated with transport and communication in the mid-19th century, at the beginning of a new century (1903) Ratzel seems to suggest quite a different argument in comparison with his Brazilian features. Part of a collection of “smaller writings” [kleinen Schriften], by choosing a paper such as Amigos, o sublime não mora no espaço, Martins wants to show a different angle on Ratzel.

Since becoming independent, science has not explained the mystery of our existence (…) In the most various of scientific fields, a great part of the intellectual work is still spent demonstrating firm progress beyond what is called the mythological level, and showing that human intelligence has dethroned God (…). But it was in vain: the deeper scientific thought led to God, the age of religion never
ended and will never end, and what is named the age of science is not above God but in him. (Ratzel, 2001: 119-120 [1903], my translation)

In 2001, the Venezuelan journal *Acervo. Revista de Estudios Históricos y Documentales* translated into Spanish, from the German, a chapter from a forgotten Ratzel book describing his Mexican travel as a journalist in 1874-1875 (Ratzel, 2001 [1878]; see Seerman and Mathewson, 2011). In 2001, *Terra Brasilis*, the first Brazilian journal dedicated exclusively to the history and theory of geography, published a paper focused on the influence and adaptation of Ratzel’s anthropogeography in the institutionalization of geography in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Barros, 2001). This Latin-American *Zeitgeist* around Ratzel is not mere coincidence. On the contrary, it reinforces the idea that translation and science are two central parts in the history of geography in peripheral countries.

**Growth, new arrivals, and consolidation (2010-2019): more than translating**

From 2010 to 2019, *GEOgraphia*’s Our Classics published 25 issues, 28 translations from 19 different sources, 19 translators, 17 comments, 13 authors translated from 5 nationalities (German, French, Russian, British, and Brazilian) and from 4 languages (German, French, Russian, and English). The main sources, translated authors, and translators are Hettner’s *Geography, its history, its essence, and its methods* book (7 times), Hettner (7 times), and Leonardo Arantes (14) respectively. Overall, German authors appear 16 times (7 Hettner, 5 Ratzel, 2 Humboldt, 2 Ritter), French 7 times (2 Reclus, 2 Vallaux, 1 George, 1 Lefebvre, 1 Ronai), Russian 3 times (2 Kropotkin, 1 Sochava), and both Brazilian and British just 1 time (Mackinder and Santos).

While the number of languages is the same as in the first decade (four), the number of sources has decreased. The reason for this is that Arantes plunged into four of Hettner’s chapters from the same book, and divided Ratzel’s *Lebensraum: eine biogeographische studie* into three parts. These numbers point to a small difference in terms of nationalities (from four to five), but a significant increase in matters of translating and translators. So, while the number of translators was eleven during 1999-2009, the next decade saw fourteen new translators appear, without considering the five that decided to continue their work (Haesbaert, Ribeiro, Holzer, Pedrosa, and Arantes). Eight of them came from outside UFF, compared to three out of eleven at the beginning. *Our Classics* was also attractive because it allowed some of the first translations and papers published by graduate students and new PhDs. But the question remains: balancing between the need for pedagogical material and the publish-or-perish spirit, *Our Classics* also appealed to professors: whereas four professors and seven graduate students or new PhDs participated in translations and comments in the period 1999-2009, from 2010 to 2019 eleven professors and eight undergraduate / graduate students or new PhDs did so.

In general, the differences between 2010-2019 and 1999-2019 are as follows: firstly, in comparison to the French tradition the German predominance is noteworthy, particularly Hettner and Ratzel. Secondly, the presence of younger authors, many born in the 20th century — including Maurice Ronai, the only one still alive among all the scholars translated. This could be interpreted as a drive to bring classics closer to the present. Thirdly, the authors translated clustered on the left of the political spectrum.
including Reclus and Kropotkin, as well as Lefebvre, George, and Santos. Finally, commentaries are longer, more detailed, and more combative than before. As a whole, I can note a change in the sense of how classics have been conceived, which means that geotranslators are not satisfied just to introduce them. Rather, they have interpreted them, intervening in their previous reception as much as questioning canonical thoughts in the history of Brazilian geography. I will now analyse some examples.

By translating the second paper from the original German by Ratzel to appear in Portuguese, Marcos Bernardino de Carvalho (2010) argues that although simplifications around Ratzel remain, a strong movement has begun to rediscover the German scholar, which including Brazilian pioneers such as Martins and renowned intellectuals as Raffestin. In this context, some aspects should be addressed: Carvalho’s translation from the remarkable *Sobre a interpretação da natureza* [On the interpretation of nature] (2010 [1904]) — whose content examines the functions of art and language in geographical representation —, I observe the same intention as in Martins’ translation, to expand the reception of Ratzel’s work beyond his political legacy. That is why he states that “We believe that this current translation could contribute still further to the reconsiderations which have been fostered around the German thinker” (Martins, 2010: 147). Secondly, by using the term *caricature* in relation to Febvre’s determinism-possibilism dichotomy (Carvalho, 2010: 143), he was in line with Mariana Lamego, whose Ph.D. thesis in the same year demonstrated that the quantitative revolution had become a *caricature* — she uses the word in the title itself — thanks to Brazilian Marxist geographers (Lamego, 2010). Finally, just as Carvalho had already written in his two papers on Ratzel (Carvalho, 1997, 1997a), all the pioneering Brazilian Marxist books about the history of geography (Sodré, 1976; Moreira, 1980; Moraes, 1981; Andrade, 1987) had been deliberately ignored.

In a similar vein, in their commentary on a sequence of unprecedented translations of Hettner into Portuguese — in which one can follow Hettner’s theoretical efforts to shape Geography as simultaneously a human and natural science in order to explain spatial differences across terrestrial surface (Hettner, 2011, 2011a, 2012, 2013) —, Sahr (a German professor settled in the South of Brazil at Paraná Federal University [UFPR]) and Arantes traced a rich panorama describing his education and life (two travels to South America in 1882-1884 and 1888-1890, for instance), publishing projects (the founding of Geographische Zeitschrift in 1895), and Hettner’s definition that chorology is the object of geography. In doing this, they take no notice of Marxist references (Sahr and Arantes, 2015). Three years later, in his comment on Ritter’s paper *The historical element in geographical science* (2018 [1835]), Arantes professes not to understand how a significant concept like the “annihilation of space by time” (developed by Marx and rediscovered by Harvey a century later), that emerges from technological progress in communications and transport (under the aegis of the Hegelian *Weltgeschichte*) could be neglected (Arantes, 2018: 139-140). By examining the milieus of reception concerning Ritter’s paper, Arantes notes that

> in the Ibero-American context the situation is still more complex: Ritter’s thinking was equally unnoticed even by crucial works on history and epistemology of geography as Santos (1979), Moreira (1981), Capel (1982), Andrade (1987), Moraes (1989), Gomes (1996) and Valcárcel (2001), though some of them have addressed similar issues to Ritter. (Arantes, 2018: 139, my translation)

As scientific production cannot be interpreted separately from its historical background, by gradually occupying the main university departments during the 1980s
and 1990s, Critical Geography was responsible for promoting a silencing revolution in a country where geography had always been a State affair. Thanks to this, a reading of the Brazilian territory from below and from its contradictions became possible, and I do not doubt that most of the Brazilian left geographers remain imbued with that spirit. However, under the sign of the Cold War, Decolonization, and the struggles against military dictatorship for the re-establishment of democracy, in general terms the Brazilian Marxist pioneers’ books on the history of geography published in the 1980s represented classics such as Ratzel, Vidal de la Blache, and Mackinder as a sort of negative tradition, thanks to their associations with imperialism and capitalism. At the beginning of the current century, benefited from digital archives, international exchanges, and research internships abroad, a rising new generation has begun to deal with the classics in a different than before. Part of my own commentaries on Mackinder’s translation O ensino de geografia sob a ótica imperial e os usos que podem e devem ser feitos da instrução visual [The teaching of geography from an imperial point of view, and the use which could and should be made of visual instruction] (2014 [1911]), the next quote attends to how complex classics are even when we disagree with their political tendencies — the use of the landscape to inculcate imperialist ideologies through children’s educational material, in this case.

It is worth asking: what are the political reasons behind geographers’ growing interest in their history? After all, it is not just a question of recapturing a heritage in the name of a tradition that can be permanently updated. The question is to understand how the classics were implicated in colonialism, but without falling into clichés, as well as to recognize their comprehension in the making of the modern world. In clear and explicit terms, one has to separate the wheat from the chaff, for if we [contemporary geographers] rejected a priori our predecessors due to their conservative political positions, we [the field of geography] are in danger of getting into (or are we already in?) a constant identity crisis. (Ribeiro, 2014: 154, my translation)

39 One piece of evidence that reveals the increasing Brazilian interest in translation and history of geography as in the impact of the Our Classics itself lies in the doctoral student William Antunes. By translating Camille Vallaux’s As aspirações regionalistas e a geografia [Regionalist aspirations and geography] (2015 [1928]) — helped by Haesbaert and Juliana Nunes Rodrigues (UFF), both of whom studied in France —, and one of his reviews on Vidal de la Blache, Febvre, and Arbos (2017 [1923]), I interpret his choice of Vallaux as an effect of the sequence of translations of Vidal de la Blache, representing a will to see the French School of Geography from a different angle, as we know that Vallaux is a scholar à part entière in that context. In addition to this, I observed that the profile of geotranslators is iterative. For example, Ribeiro in 2007-2008, Pedrosa in 2013, and Antunes from 2013 to nowadays attended the same research group in Paris (the EHGO), decided to translate into Portuguese the French sources they studied in our doctoral theses, and chose the same journal to publish them.

40 In my judgment, Our Classics has been a magnet in a double sense, in attracting and “training” different generations towards translation. In the period 2010-2019, I note this movement thanks to the two short prefaces by Ratzel from Politische Geographie (1897 and 1903) translated by Souza’s and Reichenheim’s undergraduate and graduate students, as well as the translation of Mackinder co-signed by the undergraduate student Leroy Honorio Azevedo. In other words, what I am trying to express is that translation is more than an aleatory act, but rather the outcome of a Latourian network (Latour, 1987) woven on multiple scales, dealings, and institutions whose scrutiny
allows me to elucidate a kind of regime of translation (and of reading and production as well) in the periphery of science. In Brazil, translation has been a way to allow a larger public to access foreign debates, and a way of increasing geographical skills as a whole. Yet, translation is not a passive tool to transmit imported ideas but a “method” to destabilize them. As it surpasses being a simple “medium” for making concepts travel from a language to another, translation represents a privileged and strategic means by which a young generation express dissatisfaction and re-reading canons on both national and international scales. A good example is the critical reading of the concept circle of affinity, coined by French geographer Vincent Berdoulay in his study on the making of French School of Geography thirty years ago (Berdoulay, 1995 [1981]), including its mechanical appropriation by some Brazilian geographers.

Truly, it is in Vallaux’s work that one finds the Classical Geographical critical thinking. It notes that the history of French Geography is written by Sorbonne doctoral students and researchers; consequently, those who are not part of it such as Camille Vallaux, Albert Métin, and Louis Gallouédec are seen as marginal. In fact, ‘marginal’ is a buffer used by historians to protect classical figures. Naming some as ‘distant’ or ‘marginal’ was a way for some historians of geography to protect a circle of geographers. This historiographical style is being reproduced within Brazilian Geography through the famous expression of the cercle vidalien. Buffers are always employed to isolate, and even sterilize, the work of certain authors, as well as to preserve the image and historical regime of canonical geographers. (Morais, 2015: 201, my translation)

Returning home after a long exile, imposed by the military dictatorship, in Europe, Africa and North and South America during the 1960s and 1970s — where he had an opportunity to discuss Brazilian underdevelopment and the theory of subimperialism with other exiles like Ruy Mauro Marini, as I learned thanks to the Thiago Machado’s commentary in his translation from Sub-imperialism, as viewed by a geographer (Santos, 2017 [1975]) to Portuguese (Machado, 2017) —, Milton Santos soon realized the need to “construct a decolonized Brazilian geography” (Santos, 1982: 216) based on the study of national realities and the building of a universal theory made in Brazil. It would need to be able to disrupt the indiscriminate replication of foreign concepts. This is a complex topic and I have no space to develop it. Yet, it is inseparable from my main argument, i.e., one can no longer neglect the role of translations in the shaping of Brazilian consciousness of geography’s classics and of the history of geography as a whole. In any case, from a peripheral standpoint, I am convinced that the project of decanonization of geography (Keighren et al., 2012) will only make complete sense if accompanied by geography’s decolonization (Ribeiro, 2015a).

Although not directly related to decolonial thinking, Our Classics’ translations and commentaries come from of a group whose political intention is to make an appeal that the history of geography should be approached from alternative viewpoints. To do this, one important procedure is examining which texts have been highlighted or neglected, who are the agents in this process, and for what reasons. After all, we should remember that the selection of sources is each researchers’ prerogative and, as such it reveals their intentions. Even when the author is a classic such as Humboldt, the diversity of his work and the desire to explore it from different angles drove Arantes to go beyond the geography of plants, for instance (Humboldt and Bonpland, 1805). In doing so, Arantes contributed from the Tropics in the re-readings around Humboldt on an international scale (Wulff, 2015; Péaud, 2019). Hence, in criticizing the colonial system
and its aftermaths, although Humboldt’s positions on these themes are a matter of dispute (Pratt, 1992; Sachs 2003), the next quotation is very important not to forget.

The fact is that the idea of colony is immoral in itself. It lies on the basis that some land became controlled by another one, and consequently so the prosperity as the industry can only progress to a limited degree. (...) [Europeans] compete to know which nation treated black people with more humanity, i.e., they make a joke of the word humanity and ask themselves if it is nicer to be cut up or skinned, if the Spaniards were crueler in Peru than in Venezuela, or if the Spaniards were worse in America than the English and French in West India! (Humboldt, 2016: 173-174 [1803], my translation)

This politicization of the classics or, in other words, their desacralization, is really relevant to the history of geography as a whole, and the circulation of Reclus and Kropotkin among Our Classics represents an appealing by promoting a displacing from a conceptual and theoretical focus (usually associated with the history of geography’s approach) to the study of political subjects related to the present day. Additionally, anarchist geographers are essentials for questioning determinist historical argument by which the 19th century intellectual atmosphere was exclusively compromised by imperialism and social darwinism (see Ferretti, 2017). The Brazilian anarchist reception experiences its best moment thanks to a lot of material translated by leading anarchist Plínio Augusto Coêlho, as well as to young scholars gathered around the Biblioteca Terra Livre’s collective site.

Warning of the dangerous marriage between patriotism and borders, and their role in processes of exclusion and inequalities, in his O patriotismo é incompatível com o amor pela humanidade? [Is patriotism incompatible with love for humanity?] (2018 [1904]) Reclus condemns the core of an ideology in which geographers had worked to institute: the national territorial state.

One should recognize that the homeland and its derivative, patriotism, are a deplorable survival, the result of an aggressive selfishness whose sole result is destruction, the ruin of the human works, and the annihilation of men. But people are naive, and under a word like “homeland” they were drawn to comprehend a thousand beautiful (and sweet) things. However, these things do not include at all the land divided into litigating parties (...) And it is for preserving, or for extending these absurd territorial limits that wars have followed wars. It was necessary for every limit to be established on a defunct past limit, as with every city gate in the past. (Reclus, 2018: 113 [1904], my translation)

From Kropotkin, after having converted Adam Smith’s apology for the modern division of labor to a defense of the integration of labor, which includes a refusal of the automatization of human work in The decentralization of industry (Kropotkin, 2018 [1898]), his Wars and Capitalism (2014 [1914]) — translated by anarchist geographer Amir El-Hakim de Paula, in order to “further insert Kropotkin’s arguments into the various training courses for geographers” (El-Hakim de Paula, 2014: 172) — came a denunciation of how wars had been sponsored by banks and states targeting monetary and territorial goals, and how media groups connive in them. Combining politics, economy and industrial competition, a brief comparison between Ratzel’s, Vidal de la Blache’s, and Mackinder’s reasoning will reveal an enormous difference concerning international relations:

For many years China has been divided by a cartel represented by big banks from England, France, Germany, and United States. Since the Chinese Revolution, Russia and Japan need to be part of this cartel. They want to earn to expand their spheres
of exploitation and territories at once. Arranged by bankers, China’s partition is the order of the day. (Kropotkin, 2014: 179 [1914], my translation)

Finally, the work of geotranslators allows us to reason with the concepts of classic and canonical, mostly in emphasizing the role of place in how we define and represent them. Put differently, underlining the geography of the history of geography makes it much more complex than any chronological and teleological narrative could conceive. In Brazil, the lack of familiarity with Vallaux, as well as a small number of studies on Kropotkin, lead me to say that they are neither classics, nor canonical. Humboldt, Ritter, and Reclus are classics, but are so far from being canonical. Ratzel, Vidal de la Blache, and Sauer are also classics, but were canonized. In sum, the classification of geographers in classic or canonical has to do with the treatment they received according to their respective receptions. In this sense, Our Classics merits special attention, for so the agency as the agenda pursued by geotranslators reveals a critical alternative gesture in comparison with what was consecrated — canonised, in a word — by the Brazilian historians of geography in the past. Therefore, classic and canonical are not neither abstract nor aprioristic notions. In order to fully make sense, they should be situated in the places and contexts which welcomed them. In any case, the European hegemony in terms of translated authors, despite its critical Brazilian reception nowadays, is a strong indication of the centrality of the “Old World” over Brazilian imagination. In the same vein, the failures of the Our Brazilian Classics rubric shows an indifference towards the rich diversity of Brazilian geographers themselves.

Conclusion

My paper has addressed the Brazilian history of geography from the angle of translations and translators. Taking as a source the Our Classics section published by GEOgraphia between 1999 and 2019, my goal has been to discover in quantitative and qualitative terms who these classics were, who translated and commented on them, and for what reason. To explain this empirical material, I joined translation studies and decolonial thought highlighting translation as a geographical object and the translator as a fundamental agent, both in the circulation and the production of science (Venuti, 1995, 1998; Rupke, 2000; Mignolo, 2000, 2012; Bachmann-Medick, 2009). In this spirit, the condition of being at the periphery within the academic division of labor is a crucial historical and political structure, so that it is impossible to recognise the Brazilian translation tradition — from Boletim Geográfico (1943-1978) to GEOgraphia (1999-2019) — outside of this framework.

From a quantitative standpoint, GEOgraphia published 47 issues, 25 translators (including 3 foreigners), 48 translations from 5 languages (German, French, English, Spanish, Russian, and) and 33 different sources, as well as 36 commentaries and 20 authors translated, being French (9 times), Germans (6 times), Russians (2), North-American, British, and Brazilianian (1 time each). The three main classic authors are Vidal de la Blache (8 times), Hettner (8 times), and Ratzel (6 times). The main translators were Arantes (17 times), Haesbaert (10 times), Moreira (4 times), and myself (4 times), meanwhile the major sources are Hettner’s book Geography, its history, its essence, and its methods (7 times), Annales de Géographie’s journal (5 times), and Ratzel’s Lebensraum (3 times). Overall, books appeared 20 times, whereas journals appeared 10 times — considering only the sources that were not repeated.
Taking translation at once as a politico-cultural process and a socio-geographical movement, of 22 Brazilian professors, graduate and undergraduate students (plus three foreign translators) 13 of them studied abroad, being 10 ten in Europe (France, Spain, Germany, England, and Portugal), 2 in the United States, and 1 in Europe and Cuba, whereas the other 9 stayed in Brazil. I conclude that although the international experience is not a necessary presupposition to translating, it is an important stimulus to do it. Furthermore, these numbers reveal the intellectual and symbolic power exercised by Europe on Brazilian translators in the first decades of the 21st century. Anglo-Saxon geographers attracted very little attention. As a consequence, though Francophony remains very prevalent (20 times), the incidence of German scholars (21 times) befits Germany’s status in pioneering the institutionalization and theorization of modern university geography in the 19th century. Similarly, the frequency of Reclus (4 times) and Kropotkin (2 times) is a sign that the Brazilian negligence over anarchist geographers is being reversed, as well as a will to explore their politico-intellectual expertise in time of crisis like the current.

There are many reasons that drove Brazilian geographers to translating, including to avoid generalization and caricatures, augment education material available in Portuguese, expand the teaching of the history of geography, putting in evidence master and doctoral researches done by geotranslators themselves, valorize and foster international training and networks, and extending publishing trajectories. Yet, as Nossos Clássicos’ are followed by critical commentaries, the translations acted as an “alibi” (the quotation marks are mine) to rethink national and international narratives which were widespread in Brazil via books such as Introdução à geografia: geografia e ideologia [Introduction to geography: geography and ideology] (Sodré, 1976), O que é Geografia? [What is geography] (Moreira, 1980), Geografia: pequena história crítica [Geography: a short critical history] (Moraes, 1981), and Geografia, ciência da sociedade: uma introdução à análise do pensamento geográfico [Geography, the science of society. An introduction to the analysis of the history of geographical thought] (Andrade, 1987), as well as by A geographical introduction to history (Febvre, 1991 [1922]) and La géographie ça sert d’abord à faire la guerre [Geography serves first to wage war] (Lacoste, 1976). Insofar as these books invented and reproduced the possibilism-determinism dichotomy, the presence of Vidal de la Blache and Ratzel among the most translated authors in GEOgraphia indicates a new generation of scholars’ dissatisfaction with these canonical interpretations. More focused on multilingualism and more tuned into international networks than a previous generation, they prefer working with original texts and translations from the original languages instead of second-hand interpretations and translations. Thanks to their own commentaries, geotranslators evade invisibility and intervene in the reception of their translations and the history of geography knowledge itself. So, Brazilian geotranslators align with Anglophone work that seeks non-canonical geographies and, in certain ways, other geographical traditions (Keighren et al., 2012; Ferretti, 2019).

In contrast, the act of translating from a nation and from a peripheral language is more implicit than explicit, more unconscious than conscious. Neither neutral nor transparent, the power relations involving center and periphery might have been described by geotranslators anyway. After all, I cannot ignore that European languages and cultures have exercised a fetishist attraction on the New World’s imagery. Conceived by Quijano as the “colonization of the imaginary” (Quijano, 2000), this...
mechanism has obstructed a critical awareness of translation itself. Knowing that most of the translators studied in European universities: i.e., they were confronted with all sort of linguistic adversities, the failure to address issues around the power of language and scientific asymmetries between center and periphery, should be reconsidered. Yet, that lack is neither a Brazilian particularity, for we know that the Academy as a whole has disregarded translations, nor imply that the work of geotranslators has not been critical. At this point, I am just calling attention to the need of facing translations beyond linguistic and aesthetic characteristics. Isn’t Schulte right to warn that translators have failed to educate their readers? (Schulte, 2012. See, also, Venuti, 2004).

The situation described above is in line with the eurocentric selection of geotranslators. Indeed, just three of the twenty translated authors — Sauer, Sochava, and Kropotkin — come from outside Europe. Regrettably, our Latin American neighbors, and their dominant language (Spanish), were solemnly overlooked. Anyhow, decolonizing and displacing the curriculum, as well the concept of classics from outside Europe are on the agenda of the left thinkers. A recent example was given by Brazilian geographers André Nunes de Sousa and Caroline Bulhões Nunes Vaz. By recovering the pioneer of the engineer-geographer Theodoro Sampaio (1855-1937) before the university institutionalization in the 1930s, they provide us an opportunity to re-read the history of Brazilian geography from a Black and Baiano (Sampaio came from Bahia) standpoint. As a result, both the Rio-São Paulo nucleus and the French Mission are dislocated (Sousa and Vaz, 2019). Anyway, within spaces and contexts ruled by white and heterosexual men such as geographical societies and universities over the last two centuries, it is not by chance that only one Black man was translated in Our Classics: Milton Santos.

Another major point of concern is gender. Reinforcing gender discrimination within the science in general and in Brazilian geography in particular (see Silva, 2009), no woman was translated in Our Classics. We are facing a male domination whose modus operandi, insofar as it excludes women from the science, has blocked the simple act of finding them in the annals of geography as we did with male figures — and even more outside the central areas. Even within canonical geography, overlooked names such as Ellen Churchill Semple (1863-1932) (herself a translator of Ratzel from German into English [ver Keighren, 2010]), Jacqueline Beaujeu-Garnier (1917-1995), and Suzanne Daveau (1925-) come to mind. Another negative point is the low participation of women as translators — just five of twenty-five —, which is more noteworthy when we know their significant role in other circumstances, as the Boletim Geográfico’s hundred of translations (1943-1978) or in the translations of Marxist books into Portuguese during the development of Brazilian radical approaches by the end of the 1970s and over the 1980s (Ribeiro, 2018; Siebert, 2019).

In concluding, I want to offer a personal perspective on how, in general terms, Brazilian geographers seem to be suspicious of the political, critical, and progressive possibilities of the history and theory of geography. If this is the case, it must be overturned as soon as possible. Through my reading of Paulo Freire (Freire, 2013 [1968]) — whose relevance is crucial to understand the denialism that sees authoritarianism derived not only from the right, but also from the left —, I see introductory courses such as the History of Geography as useful not because they present rich geographical traditions as an elitist parade of foreign names and discourses that land on us from above. Rather, these courses have the capacity to empower students (many of them from popular classes,
peripheries, and deprived neighbourhoods) by underlining the fact that their labour, their migrant family backgrounds, their urban lives and survival strategies have made them into geographers even before they arrived at university to study geography. This approach returns our focus to praxis. The daily process of teaching History of Geography in this context is embedded in a wider social movement. Papers, seminars, and translations dedicated to this field are not just intellectual discourses belonging to a distant and idealized past, but practices of political and cultural formation which do not lose sight of the present, nor the possibility of rewriting the past. In a country like Brazil, that is structurally slavocratic, violent, and authoritarian, I call this resistance.

In sum, a critical approach vis-à-vis language and translating is the next step for Brazilian geotranslators. Despite the critiques laid out here, GEOgraphia's Our Classics became a fertile space of reading and debates on history of geography in a peripheral country such as Brazil.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIXES

Anexos

Translations (in chronological order)


Commentaries to translations (in chronological order)
Haesbaert, R. (1999). Paul Vidal de la Blache. GEOgraphia, n.1, 139-140


NOTES

1. All archives are available at <https://periodicos.uff.br/geographia/issue/archive>.

2. By phone on 27th February 2021, I owe this interpretation to Eustógio Dantas, who shared with me his experience as professor and administrator in the last three decades at Ceará Federal University (UFC) and at the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

3. It is published on a quarterly basis since 2015.

4. Once GEOgraphia reproduced some translations from other publications, I have decided to not consider them.

5. Informations about the geotranslators training are available on the Plataforma Lattes Brazilian Federal online curriculum: <http://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/busca.do?metodo=apresentar>.

6. His last translation into Portuguese dated from 1982. However, the selected paper, “The particular characteristics of geography” (Vidal de la Blache, 1982 [1913]), and the conditions of geography at the time, were unfavorable to the further dissemination of Vidal de la Blache’s work in the 1908s and the 1990s (see Ribeiro, 2020).

7. Available at: <https://bibliotecaterralivre.noblogs.org/>.

8. It seems that many Brazilian geographers did not read the Pequena história crítica’s preface to the 14th edition in 1995, when the author himself recognizes his book as “a dated one which offers historical information but does not guide for the future” (Moraes, 1999: 9). On the other hand, a new edition of the O que é geografia? was published 2010, and according to his author “it is substantially different from the anterior one. The first half was entirely rewritten, although it continues to be a short historical synthesis to the history of geographical thought (...)” (Moreira, 2010: 7).
Yet, let me stress the very instructive linguistic footnotes by Arantes, as well as the little pearl of clarity and generosity written by Sahr in his idiomatic review of Carvalho’s Über Naturschilderung translation (Sahr, 2010).

ABSTRACTS

Ever since its first edition in 1999, the Brazilian journal GEOgraphia has been publishing a section called Nossos Clássicos [Our Classics]. Made up of foreign-language texts translated into Portuguese, and associated commentaries done by the translators themselves, this material has not yet been studied because translation is still overlooked by both Brazilian geographers and geographical scholars in general as a subject of research. Linking translation studies and decolonial thought as methodological resources, we suggest that in a peripheral country such as Brazil, where translation and science are intimately intertwined by the geopolitics of knowledge, translators have had a crucial role as agents both of the circulation of knowledge and the interrogation of canonical geographies at both international and national levels. We name those responsible for the Our Classics rubric geotranslators, and, analysing the period 1999-2019, our aim is to study who they are, who they translated and what their reasons were for doing this. In doing so, we will shed some light on the circulation of classics in a peripheral country such as Brazil.

Desde sua primeira edição em 1999, a revista brasileira GEOgraphia tem publicado a seção Nossos Clássicos. Composta por material estrangeiro traduzido para a língua portuguesa e acompanhado de comentários críticos redigidos pelos próprios tradutores, esse material ainda não foi estudado, pois a tradução tem sido ignorada como tema de pesquisa pelos geógrafos brasileiros e pela Academia como um todo. Articulando pensamento decolonial e translation studies como referências metodológicas, constatamos que em um país periférico como o Brasil, onde ciência e tradução estão intimamente associadas por causa da geopolítica do conhecimento, tradutores têm exercido papel fundamental como agentes tanto da circulação do conhecimento em geral quanto da renovação da história da geografia em particular ao problematizar determinados cânones que a constituíram. Assim, no período entre 1999 e 2019, graças ao trabalho do que denominaremos por geotradutores, a seção Nossos Clássicos tornou-se fonte privilegiada de leitura e discussão sobre a história da geografia produzida no Brasil e no exterior. O presente artigo visa reconhecer quem são esses geotradutores e quais são suas motivações a fim de iluminar a circulação dos clássicos em um país periférico como o Brasil.

Dès son premier numéro en 1999, la revue Brésilienne GEOgraphia publie une section appelée Nossos Clássicos [Nos Classiques]. Composée d’articles étrangers traduits vers le Portugais, ainsi que de commentaires rédigés par les traducteurs eux-mêmes, ce dossier n’a pas encore été étudié parce que si les géographes Brésiliens que les académiques en générale ont dévalorisé la traduction en tant que sujet de recherche. En articulant les translation studies et la pensée décoloniale en termes de méthode, j’indique que dans un pays périphérique comme le Brésil la traduction et la science sont intimement liées à cause de la géopolitique de la connaissance. Par conséquence, les traducteurs ont eu un rôle crucial en tant qu’agents de la circulation scientifique et de la critique aux géographies canoniques nationales et internationales à la fois. Ainsi, je pense qu’il faut les nommer géotraducteurs. En étudiant la période 1999-2019, le but de cet article est de savoir qu’ils sont, pourquoi ils se sont lancés vers ce genre de travail et qui sont
les auteurs traduits. De ce fait, on a la chance d’éclaircir la dynamique de la circulation de classiques dans un pays périphérique comme le Brésil.

Desde su primera edición en 1999, la revista brasileña GEOgraphia publica la sección Nuestros Clásicos. Compuesto por material extranjero traducido al portugués y acompañado de comentarios críticos escritos por los propios traductores, este material aún no ha sido estudiado, ya que la traducción ha sido ignorada como tema de investigación por los geógrafos brasileños y por la Academia en su conjunto. Vinculando el pensamiento descolonial y los estudios de traducción como referentes metodológicos, encontramos que en un país periférico como Brasil, donde ciencia y traducción están estrechamente asociadas debido a la geopolítica del conocimiento, los traductores han jugado un papel fundamental como agentes tanto de la circulación del conocimiento en general y la renovación de la historia de la geografía, en particular, problematizando ciertos cánones que la constituían. Así, en el período comprendido entre 1999 y 2019, gracias al trabajo de los que llamaremos geotraductores, la sección Nuestros Clásicos se convirtió en una fuente privilegiada para leer y discutir la historia de la geografía producida en Brasil y en el exterior. Este artículo tiene como objetivo reconocer quiénes son estos geotraductores y cuáles son sus motivaciones para iluminar la circulación de clásicos en un país periférico como Brasil.

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