

# Writing and Living on the Stage of History: Women and Intercultural Transits between Portugal and Brazil in the Early Nineteenth Century

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This article studies the intercultural trajectory of a Portuguese female aristocrat of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Her trajectory of intercultural transition from a Portuguese provincial lady into an independent owner of a sugar mill in tropical Bahia is documented through family letters, which provide a polyphonic representation of a movement of personal, family, and social transculturation over almost two decades. Maria Bárbara began her journey between cultures as a simple spectator-reader, progressively becoming a commentator-actor-protagonist-author in society, in politics, and in history. These letters function as a translation that is sometimes consecutive, other times simultaneous, of the events lived and witnessed. This concept of intercultural translation is based on the theories of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006, 2008), who argues that cultural differences imply that any comparison has to be made using procedures of proportion and correspondence which, taken as a whole, constitute the work of translation itself. These procedures construct approximations of the known to the unknown, of the strange to the familiar, of the 'other' to the 'self', categories which are always unstable. Likewise, this essay explores the unstable contexts of its object of study, with the purpose of understanding different rationalities and worldviews.

**KEYWORDS** Brazil, Portugal, power, gender, intercultural translation

## Introduction

This article studies a trajectory of intercultural transition from a provincial Portuguese lady into an independent owner of a sugar mill in tropical Bahia, translated into an

epistolary narrative that is almost always simultaneous, or immediately consecutive, to the journey itself. This intercultural transit is documented through family letters, with a special focus on the numerous missives written by Maria Bárbara Garcez Pinto de Madureira, whose culture, style, and originality of expression are surprising in a woman from the rural Portuguese gentry of the late eighteenth century. Maria Bárbara composes a participant vision, lucid and aware of the dramatic events which preceded the independence of Brazil, often opposed to the versions propagated by conflicting factions, not hesitating to clarify and admonish her husband and his peers at the *Cortes* (Parliament) in Portugal about the realities of the colony. Maria Bárbara began her journey between cultures as a simple spectator-reader, progressively becoming a commentator-actor-protagonist-author in society, in politics and in history, always attentive to political, military, and administrative matters.

The process of intercultural translation here narrated, both in the first and third person, accompanies the negotiation of a new, hybrid, and assertive identity. The concept of intercultural translation used here is based on the theories of the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who argues that the existence of differences — epistemological as well as in common sense, practices, values, and experiences of daily life (in other words, in culture) — implies that any comparison has to be made using procedures of proportion and correspondence which, taken as a whole, constitute the work of translation itself. These procedures construct approximations of the known to the unknown, of the strange to the familiar, of the ‘other’ to the self, which are always unstable. The constant exercise of translation reveals that the procedures developed to discover other forms of knowledge end up being similar to those each type of knowledge uses in order to understand the experience of the world in general (Santos, 2008: 29–30). By admitting the diversity of narratives and expressions of situated knowledge, the analysis in this essay is not immobilized by strict positivist objectivity, but is rather connected with the concrete and situated contexts of its object of study, with the purpose of understanding different rationalities and worldviews. Because ‘the work of translation is the procedure left to us to give sense to the world after it has lost the automatic direction and sense that Western modernity intended to give it by planning history, society, and nature’ (Santos, 2006: 124; my translation).

## Biography of an intercultural correspondence

The 127 letters collected in the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* (Cardoso & Pinto da França, 2008)<sup>1</sup> cover a chronological period that ranges from 1807 to 1823 and are written by various members of the Pinto da França and Garcez families, from the small rural nobility of the north of Portugal, most of whom had already emigrated to Brazil, or were linked to this territory by the emigration of close relatives. The first volume, ‘From the French Invasions to the Court in Rio de Janeiro’, contains the sixty-eight letters written between 1807 and 1821, mostly between Maria Bárbara’s husband, Luís Paulino de Oliveira Pinto da França — a Portuguese army officer,

<sup>1</sup> All references are to this edition and the respective volume and page will be stated in the text in brackets. Translations are mine.

patriot, politician, courtier, jurist, and poet —, and his father and brothers-in-law from the Garcez family.

The recurrent themes in this first set of missives are the resistance to French invasions, when Luís Paulino was still in Portuguese territory and, after his move to Brazil in 1813, courtly life in Rio de Janeiro, with its sumptuous palace festivities, political intrigues, and games of influence, as well as the first signs of change and winds of independence with the 1817 uprising in Pernambuco, in whose suppression Luís Paulino played a leading role, winning himself even greater honours and promotion in his military career. The letters from Bahia, where Luís Paulino was living during the 1820 liberal revolution in Portugal, are dominated by the political transformations which engulfed the whole family.

The second volume, 'Letters from Bahia: Liberalism and the Independence of Brazil', includes fifty-nine letters written during the crucial period of June 1821–September 1823. Most were sent to Luís Paulino, now residing in Lisbon as a deputy to the first liberal *Cortes*, by his wife, Maria Bárbara Garcez, his children, and in-laws, who had remained in Brazil. However, all the letters sent in reply by Luís Paulino from Lisbon were lost. The geographic origin of the letters is Salvador da Bahia and the sugar mills of Aramaré and Caboto, between Santo Amaro and Cachoeira, in the so-called 'Recôncavo Baiano', near the Paraguaçu River. This second set of letters is dominated by the narrative of the conflict which preceded Bahia's joining the cause of independence, with deep participant knowledge of the ongoing historical events, as well as issues concerning the management of the family's sugar mill. When Brazil reaches independence, letters resonate with the family's dilemma of opting between two motherlands, Portugal and Brazil. It is also in this second volume of letters that the exceptional female figure of Maria Bárbara Garcez starts to play a leading role.

Maria Bárbara Garcez was born in Penafiel, near Porto, in 1779, and at fourteen married Luís Paulino, the friend and classmate of her older brother, José Garcez. They would have two sons (Bento and Luís Paulino Junior) and two daughters (Sabina and Maria Francisca). During the French invasions her husband sent her to safety in Salvador da Bahia, following the Portuguese royal family's escape to Brazil. In 1813 she would join her husband in Rio de Janeiro. There she took part in courtly life until 1819, when she moved back to Bahia, never to return to Portugal, despite her permanent protestations of homesickness. Widowed in 1824, she had long been responsible for running the Aramaré sugar mill, which she continued to do with great energy until her death in 1851. The style of her numerous letters is surprising due to its culture, lucidity, and originality of expression for a woman born in a northern province of Portugal in the second half of the eighteenth century, to a family from the rural nobility, a social group where ignorance was rampant, especially among women. However, it was from this class of provincial nobility, often permeated with pre-revolutionary ideals, that 'progressive' politicians would be recruited to join the forces of Liberal leadership. In her letters Maria Bárbara cites Camões, reproduces Latin aphorisms, and persistently mentions the new romantic concepts of motherland, nation, independence, and constitutional power. She does not shy away from expressing an intense affection for her husband and the most violent feelings against his enemies.

Above all, Maria Bárbara's correspondence gives readers the opportunity to follow 'live' the trajectory of intercultural transition of a provincial Portuguese lady

who was transformed into a *senhora* (literally 'lady', but meaning 'owner') of a sugar mill in the Recôncavo Baiano, during the war of independence, narrating in the first person the process of negotiating her new identity. The socio-cultural origin of Maria Bárbara, the so-called 'provincial nobility', was a vast, heterogeneous, and scarcely documented class, which lived in a situation of constant economic precariousness, limited to local preponderance. Their sons were invariably sent to military service, to be magistrates, or for ecclesiastical careers, in order to maintain the family house and the mirage of social ascension. All they could do for their daughters was to find them wealthy husbands or send them coercively and without any vocation to a convent. For the Garcez and Pinto da França families, whose houses survived with great difficulties, Brazil represented an opportunity for economic recovery, emphasized by the presence of Luís Paulino in the court and his privileged access to the monarch. For these reasons, progression in careers and the acquisition of positions and capital took up a considerable part of the transatlantic correspondence, together with requests of all sorts, by relatives, friends, and neighbours.

Unlike his in-laws living in Brazil, and the cause of severe criticisms, Luís Paulino did not spare himself the expenses inherent to anyone who intended to 'represent' in a city where luxury was extraordinary. The public exhibition of status — Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic capital (1997) — was responsible for the highest expenses, which the return to Bahia in 1819, where Luís Paulino would be 'the most important figure after the governor' (I, 154), as inspector-general of the cavalry, caused to reach a peak. While Luís Paulino narrates with pride the distinctions his wife received from the 'Grandeess of the Kingdom' through his intermediation (I, 177), Maria Bárbara's brothers see him as a vain megalomaniac, about to ruin himself and his family, as the shipwreck the couple and their two daughters suffered on the voyage between Rio de Janeiro and Bahia seemed to show, such was the haste to take up the position granted by King João VI or, in the words of Antão Garcez, 'running in search of honour and money' (I, 172).

In nineteenth-century Brazil, the significance of ostentatious wealth was reinforced, as well as its symbolic function in social life. In 1820 Luís Paulino writes to his brother-in-law José, in Portugal: 'My relatives here are surrounded by the purest and best nobility, they live in abundance and splendour and thus, having nothing to be ashamed and nothing to afflict me, I cannot be better' (I, 185). He also states that 'Anyone who does not spend, does not maintain the dignity of his representation nor preserves his friendships, and I have many and good ones in the Court' (I, 179). However, through the reading of the correspondence exchanged by the couple between 1821 and 1823, one concludes that this ostentation was based on loans and mortgages, and that letters of credit and favours from money lenders actually sustained the social status of the family. For those involved in this correspondence, Brazil is much more (or much less) than a 'new world'. Brazil is but a means to the end of building fortunes quickly and easily, or to recover those which centuries of indigence and maladministration had dilapidated. Real or still utopian fortunes were acquired through trade, traffic, favours ('mercês'), political games, production of sugar, or matrimonial strategies: all these possibilities are referred to and weighed in letters of the most declared and cruel pragmatism.

## Gendered representations, practices, and identities

The first volume of the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* is undeniably dominated by male characters. Of the sixty-eight letters compiled, sixty are written by men and focus on politics, money, and games of influence. Symptomatic of this is a missive exchanged in 1818 between two of the Garcez brothers, in Rio de Janeiro and Penafiel: after long pages concerned with requests, favours, family intrigues, strategic alliances, questions of money, and inheritances — which seem to dominate life, whether in Portugal or in Brazil — the letter concludes with the short reductive sentence: ‘Concerning women, my friend, they are all the same thing’ (1, 109). In all letters, the courteous imperative of writing to women, whether they are spouses, mothers, or sisters, is not forgotten, but it is never more than a postponed intention, openly neglected due to lack of time (and of value, it can be assumed), or restricted to some rhetorical closing formalities. In the discourse of these subjects of all action and writing — which men appear to be — what representation do women deserve, as mere objects of men’s decisions and their sparse attention? In effect, women are represented as passive objects, who should be placed in the few acceptable spaces society reserves for them, under the assumption that ‘daughters in Brazil by the age of 12 are women’ (1, 46). Unmarried nieces had to be supported with some charitable but minimal income, taken from the sugar mill’s revenues which escaped primogeniture. Those married nieces who contested in vain the discrimination resulting from primogeniture were called ‘torments’ (1, 51). If, despite the best efforts, negotiations for a useful marriage failed, it was still possible to send the single woman to an affordable convent. In general, women were praised for their moderation, resulting from their Portuguese education, as opposed to the taste for luxury and indolence, which were said to be characteristics of Brazilian acculturation.

The transatlantic narratives written by women, which are found in the first volume of this collection, are the eight brief notes Maria Bárbara sent to her parents and brothers in Portugal. In these short missives, Maria Bárbara reiterates her homesickness and constant remembering of her family; refers to current family events in Brazil; laments the undefined illnesses and melancholia from which she allegedly suffers; alludes to the fall of Napoleon and the life of the royal family in Brazil; describes religious and palace festivities; dedicates long lines to family intrigues and games of influence in the court; and laments the ‘poverty’ in which she lives, because of the generosity and excessive rectitude of her husband (1, 86). Curiously, these observations are the complete opposite of what Luís Paulino writes to his father-in-law, just a week later: ‘Yes, I am a victim of great desires and enterprises and I do have the ability for everything that is proposed to me’ (1, 91).

The letters collected in the first volume show that the activities of women such as Maria Bárbara and her peers were restricted to complete leisure, summer seasons by the sea of Botafogo beach, social visits, reading, and commenting letters, with many satirical references to the habits of provincial Portugal. In 1814, the recently-arrived Luís Paulino wrote: ‘The description of the market, clogs, heavy coats, and rustic gentry makes any mulatto slave from this land laugh, as they are more polished and sugary and more rhetorical than your wise Friar Bártolo in his sermons’ (1, 99). Certainly, it would have been humiliating for the author of the letter, the

brother-in-law José Garcez, in Penafiel, to know that his description of Portuguese habits was the target of public scorn by 'Viscountess Vila Nova and other of her lady friends who were with her [Maria Bárbara] when the letter arrived' (1, 99). In a single paragraph, Luís Paulino declares his divorce from provincial Portugal and exalts the social circle which brightened the daily life of his family, aware that the community of origin would immediately take notice of the fact.

The indolence of Maria Bárbara is revealed by the various arguments she evokes in order not to write more often to her family in Portugal (a permanent lament about 'tears', 'wrinkles', 'sadness', longing, family, time, ill health), in contrast to the extraordinary volume of correspondence she addresses to her husband, after his departure for Lisbon. Nonetheless, much of the apathy and unhappiness expressed in Maria Bárbara's letters derives from the need to comply with the social conventions and expectations of the recipients' common sense. In other words, Maria Bárbara wrote what was expected from someone with her social role as a modest wife, a devoted and obedient daughter, reluctantly removed from her family by her conjugal duties. In reality, the (few) letters written by Maria Bárbara and the (few) references she gets from her husband and brothers prove that she played a very active part in family conflicts and intrigues, not restraining herself from taking sides and forging alliances. It is Luís Paulino who provides the first clue about the 'lady of the sugar mill' who will dominate this correspondence from 1821 onwards, when he writes that he does not have the time for managing the family's sugar mill, a task he had implicitly delegated to his wife, or that she had already taken for herself, well before becoming a widow (1, 140).

In male correspondence, women assume a leading role only in the context of matrimonial alliances, in which marriage is exclusively connected with obtaining property and/or social ascent. Here, women are simple transacted objects, necessarily lucrative for the families involved, in a reality that can be summarized by the sentence with which Luís Paulino alludes to the intention of his brother-in-law to contract matrimony: 'He has always wanted to marry, as we know, to get money' (1, 93). In effect, the matrimonial trajectory of the brothers Henrique (a courtier, brigadier in the Brazilian army and commodore of the Order of Christ) and António Garcez (a judge in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro), the two most present in this correspondence, is very illustrative. Henrique Garcez married a rich widow, 'old and ugly', with many children: 'Henrique can [...], if the lady, who is not a young girl, dies, bring 100,000 cruzados to the kingdom [...] They tell me that the boy "brings in" a few thousand *cruzados* [Portuguese currency of the time]. May God help him!' (1, 93, 97–8). António Garcez's first fiancée eventually chose another man, since 'the heart won and not the law, because modernism has arrived everywhere' (1, 83). At forty, however, he married a sixteen-year-old girl, 'from a good, non-noble, family [...], not beautiful, but polite [...], who will help me in old age' (1, 101, 163). In a letter to his brother in Portugal, the groom describes with calculating coldness the circumstances that ruled his wedding, as well as the relations he would otherwise have with women:

I will come to possess the best part of 60,000 *cruzados* upon the death of her father, who is old, and her mother, as soon as he is gone, will come under my protection, and of this amount I will receive in goods twenty. So, it might not be much, but there are no others, and if there are girls of that age, they want boys, which I am not. From now on courtship

will end, even so because I will only be able to fuck by paying or by theft, but by theft there comes a guy which would make my life much shorter [...] I assure you I am not in love, I hold the young girl in high esteem and passions last until the 30s [...] I have already told you that my Teresinha brings in properties the value of 50,000 *cruzados* and promises me the house as soon as we are married, and that comes to 22. To that they are bound. On the same day before tying the knot, this agreement will be satisfied. It comes to 70 and a bit, and upon the death of the old ones, it will be 30 to 40. (I, 144, 163)

He also states that he has been dealing with this 'business' for two years, with 'experience and security,' and that he was satisfied with the prospect that the bride would not demand luxuries as 'she has been brought up in the European system, because her mother is from Lisbon. Her father is a son of the islands [Azores or Madeira]. This is a dowry in Brazil, where it is rare for a family not to have "goats" [mixed blood creoles]' (I, 163). It is clear that the value of the bride increases in inverse proportion to the acculturation and miscegenation of her family. Once the matrimony was celebrated, he describes with the same crudity and in the same paragraph both the pettiest wedding gifts and the consummation of the marriage ('at one a.m. tears started, for joys to follow afterwards', I, 166).

However, Luís Paulino and Maria Bárbara vehemently reject this alliance, which they describe as 'embarrassing', since the pecuniary value of the bride was not accompanied by an aristocratic title, a condition which seemed a *sine qua non* for the couple's aspirations. This assumption is confirmed by the marriages of their oldest son and daughter, Bento and Sabina. For the firstborn son, Luís Paulino had ambitious matrimonial objectives: he chose for his bride the daughter of the Baron of Santo Amaro, a marriage that would propel the family into the heights of the local nobility. However, Bento decides to marry the daughter of a military officer, of identical social status, which unleashed the unrestrained fury of his father. Nonetheless, this case illustrates the growing affirmation of affective individualism, which sometimes led to personal destinies prevailing over the interests of the family. To compensate for this setback to his strategy of social ascent, Luís Paulino explicitly conferred even more magnificence to the marriage of Sabina to Rodrigo António Brandão Pereira Falcão, the future Baron of Belém, a wealthy man who, with all the wealth he would inherit, would become one of the richest noblemen in the kingdom. The ostentation of luxury and the lavish description of the wedding, referred as an actual commercial contract, are characteristic of life in Brazil, with which Luís Paulino is visibly fascinated. The formalities and pomp of this ceremony are meticulously described in a letter to his brother-in-law, with clear instructions that it should be read to Maria Bárbara's family in Portugal. Luís Paulino thus confirms and publicizes his success in the common purpose of everyone taking part in the intercultural Portugal-Brazil passage: obtaining (a visible) fortune and social ascent.

Almost simultaneously, Maria Bárbara writes about the same subject to her brother, in a much more laconic tone, referring only to the 'custom and pomp' of her daughter's wedding (I, 202–03). She expresses concern about the future of Sabina, a concern which her brothers in Brazil openly shared among themselves, since it was already public knowledge that the groom had various illegitimate mixed-race children. However, she is constant in supporting her husband's disdain for the women 'inferior in nobility and age' whom the 'men of the family' had married. Without a

doubt, Maria Bárbara shares the ambitions and prejudices active in the common-sense attitudes of her social group, transferred by circumstances to a 'new world' where, if truth be told, little had changed at all.

As a cause and consequence of the dominant social-material ambition, nineteenth-century Bahian society was strongly hierarchical. At the top of the Recôncavo's society was the rural aristocracy, who aspired to the same conditions as the Portuguese nobility. Kátia Mattoso reiterates that in Brazil a noble could be recognized by his lineage or by placing his goods and education at the service of the country. Even if an individual was not a noble by lineage, he could be rewarded by the Emperor in accordance with his willingness to serve the Empire (Mattoso, 1997: 154). Mattoso highlights that, despite aspiring to the status of nobility, the Recôncavo Baiano mill owners constituted essentially an aristocracy of wealth and power, which performed and assumed many of the roles of the Portuguese nobility. It was this aristocracy which gave Bahia its touch of opulence. Mattoso also argues that endogamous marriage was one of the principal tactics used by these clans to expand their possessions and reinforce social and political ties among the local aristocracy (1997: 154ss; 1988: 136–59).

However, all these concerns of the Pinto da França and Garcez families would be soon left behind, with the explosion in Porto of the 1820 Liberal Revolution, which led to the parliament being summoned, the king's return to Portugal, and ultimately the independence of Brazil under the rule of D. Pedro. In this troubled moment of History, a renewed female character would also emerge in the micro-cosmos of the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira*, as independent as the new nation.

### On the stage of history: a narrative of intercultural transition

The second volume of the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* (1821–23) is dominated by Maria Bárbara Garcez, now forty-three years old and plenipotentiary administrator of the Aramaré sugar mill, acquired by her father-in-law in the previous century. Due to the strong links she had created with Brazil, and feeling indispensable in the running of the mill, she did not accompany her husband to Portugal when he was elected a deputy to the 1821 constituent *Cortes*. These circumstances are at the origin of her twenty-five letters collected here, part of the vast volume of correspondence exchanged between the couple, before Luís Paulino's untimely death from tuberculosis, in January 1824. Maria Bárbara's letters are now distinguished by her vivaciousness and descriptive rigour, very distant from the idle notes of courtesy and lament previously sent to her family in Portugal. They also function as a key for deciphering many of the implicit meanings that are strewn throughout the correspondence of male figures, by unveiling both the true reference of many of their allusions, and the true state of the family finances, in contrast with the descriptions of pomp and circumstance which Luís Paulino repeatedly sent to his in-laws.

In her texts, Maria Bárbara attacks and accuses with singular fervour the political enemies of her absent husband, inciting Luís Paulino to vengeance and action, complaining about the general laxity of customs and justice. As a mill owner, Maria Bárbara lived constantly in transit between the city of Bahia and the sugar mill at Aramaré, where she would remain alone for long periods, against the will of her children and relatives, since the interior of the state and the Recôncavo Baiano were

already in the power of independence forces. The journey between Salvador da Bahia and the Aramaré mill, deep in the heart of the Recôncavo, was not exempt from difficulties and was made by boat as far as Santo Amaro, and afterwards by horse or oxen-pulled carriage for around 20 kilometres. One of the risks of isolation is revealed when Maria Bárbara falls sick with 'fever' and no doctor from Salvador agrees to travel to see her during the 'monsoon', which was falling incessantly. Incidents such as this and the episode of the shipwreck remind us that Brazil was still to a great extent a hostile territory, hard to domesticate by the white colonial elite.

The letters exchanged with both her husband and sons may be read as a 'commercial correspondence', in which Maria Bárbara mentions precise figures and amounts of harvests, announces the acquisition of cattle, decides on rents to pay and receive, and narrates the severity with which she rules and disciplines servants. Through Maria Bárbara's self-representation, it can be concluded that her sons reported to her for everything, and that the men's incompetence had made her indispensable for the survival of the mill. She justifies in this way her choice to remain in Brazil and let her husband leave alone for Portugal, exacerbating her concern with the family and slaves, and the need to create savings and assurance for the future. The 'sacrifice' of remaining in Brazil acquired an added value in moments of despondency and danger, such as those which followed the departure of Luís Paulino for Portugal or which would arise out of the chaos created by the war of independence: 'Of Mother I can tell you nothing, because for four months I have heard nothing of her, as there are no communications whatsoever [...] I hope to God that nothing has happened to my Mother, because she is a lady of great respect and judgment; therefore she has to be respected. And also her staying out there [in the mill] means that the goods will not be confiscated' (II, 138–39), thus Bento wrote in March 1823.

Assuming the role of courageous mother, a leader in the absence of her husband, Maria Bárbara's discourse never shows doubts or asks for authorization. She narrates without wavering the administrative decisions taken, in the context of an evolution or liberation of identity, supported by the ongoing political and historical circumstances. However, in order to moderate her assertiveness, without reaching full emancipation and always remaining within the canons of the expected, Maria Bárbara structures her writing with laments on sadness and illness, as someone working incessantly for the good of the family and the love of her husband.

It was relatively common for the wives of large plantation owners to assume, when widowed, entire authority and control over their property, including slaves. Charles Boxer is categorical when he states that 'there can be no doubt that a widow, rich or poor, could lead a freer life, less confined and demure than a married woman and her daughters' (1977: 75; my translation). In their *História da vida rural no Brasil*, Mary del Priore and Renato Venâncio write that in 1759 there were already six female sugar mill owners in Santo Amaro (and thirty-seven male). In the 1818 Goiás census, various female sugar mill owners can be found, such as Dona Marina Pereira, who had bought her property and owned eleven slaves working on the plantation (Priore & Venâncio, 2006: 29–46, 101–22). In everyday life, women were the centre of family routine and their activities in this sphere had great social significance even when compared to the labour activities in the public space reserved for men. 'Ladies' of the time played a prominent function in the harmony of everyday life

within patriarchal families, and were responsible for a whole range of services and workers in the house, dealing with teams of cooks, nurses and nannies, porters, *ganhadores* (slaves who earned money for their masters), spinners, seamstresses, washer and ironing women, painters, labourers, and barbers (Mattoso, 1997: 157). The nineteenth-century Brazilian novelist Anna Ribeiro de Araújo de Góes argued that women had to be prepared to take the place of men, if the situation required it, which is clear in the plots of her popular novels and moralistic serials. In *Letícia* (1908), for example, the leading character assumes the role of her father after his death, ordering slaves, negotiating with middlemen, and selling the products. Maria Bárbara, however, assumed these functions even during the life of her husband, when neither the untimely end of Luís Paulino nor the danger of expropriation during the war of independence could be predicted. She counted on her husband's complete consent and support, even though she had two adult sons, who reported and justified everything to their mother, eager for approval, as can be seen in the letter Luís Paulino Junior sent her in February 1822: 'The mill is going at full speed and I feel it is fair to say that what I have done in days has not been done in years' (II, 66). Ironically, almost simultaneously, Maria Bárbara reports to her husband the incompetence of their sons as administrators, which has made her vital for the survival of the family resources. Protagonists change, depending on the author of the letter, but it is undeniable that, to the traditional functions as a woman, Maria Bárbara had determinedly added functions of administration and decision-making in the public space of the sugar mill, a masculine territory par excellence, which shows the singularity of her personality as well as of her family and historical circumstances.

In general, those men and women who ran sugarcane plantations were surrounded by a diverse group of specialized workers and sharecroppers, who orbited on the margins, providing the landowner with their services. These included sugar-masters, cleaners, box makers, caulkers, boiler-makers, carpenters, labourers, and boatmen, amongst others. To these were added other groups who stimulated the economic and social life of coastal areas. Merchants, planters, artisans, subsistence workers, sugarcane labourers, and even indigents made up the population who gravitated around small and large properties. The number of slaves which these sectors held (from one to many dozens) allows us to infer an enormous diversity of social origins and situations. Most of the mills were situated in the forest, which is explained by the greater fertility of the soil and the abundance of firewood, necessary for furnaces, which were fed day and night, for eight or nine months at a time. Along with sugar mills, it was also common to set up distilleries, as happened in Aramaré. Sugar mills could not be far from the coastline, as they would not be able to compete with other plantations whose products did not have transport expenses, since there was a single price for export goods. For this reason most mills were located along rivers such as the Paraguaçu, Jaguaribe, and Sergipe in Bahia (Priore & Venâncio, 2006: 42, 36–37).

Without a doubt, the adversities faced by any mill owner in Brazil in a time of convulsion were immense, irrespective of their gender. In all family letters from this time there are constant allusions to debt, credit requests, lack of money, repayment of favours, and the desperate resort to the salary of the firstborn, to moneylenders, and to the improvised sale of boxes of sugar. Maria Bárbara states that, despite being provident and parsimonious, she had even greater difficulty in obtaining credit after

the departure of her husband. To all this are added constant political intrigues, family rivalries, generalized enmities, refusals to 'sign letters' [of credit], violent weather, ill health, and death of animals, in a list of setbacks always concluded by the courageous forecast of good harvests and fortune in an undefined future. But this 'afterwards', when Maria Bárbara would delegate the administration of the mill to her son and leave to join her husband, would never happen. Taking the letters as a whole, it is possible to infer a recurrent rhetorical pattern in Maria Bárbara's discourse: long paragraphs of lamentation for various motives (health, money, work, climate, family, politics, treasons, intrigue, age), all invariably ending in a brief declaration of hope that, according to her, would be exclusively motivated by the desire to meet the concerns and expectations of her husband.

Fully integrated in the structures of thought and behaviour then in force in Brazilian society, Maria Bárbara is a conventional slaveholding sugar mill owner, essentialist in her animalization of the 'black' collective, scandalized by the mere hypothesis of emancipation.<sup>2</sup> She expresses the common fear that blacks and mulattoes, freedmen, or slaves, would revolt under cover of the ongoing conflict among the white elite, but she understands that in this area there were also political manipulations and alarmist strategies: 'The damned goats and blacks are our sins; if they had the power, unfortunate families would die horribly at their hands' (II, 74); 'God forbid, as is happening now in Pernambuco, that blacks and coloured (thugs of the devil) attack and beat up storeowners' (II, 90);

I do not deny that mulattoes are villainous. They are, and they are proud, but we have good laws, we gave them people to listen to them and punish them. Did you know that the creoles from Cachoeira have petitioned to be free? They are fools, but the whip will settle this. I warn you, however, that in the name of captives, there are people sending petitions to the *Cortes*. (II, 87)

In effect, the numerical weight of slaves in Bahia and the revolts that occurred there could not but frighten mill owners, fearful of a rebellion similar to that of Santo Domingo, which led to the black republic of Haiti. The idea that only European troops could contain slaves, due to the weakness of local forces, was much invoked by defenders of the union with Portugal, and certainly with the intention of capturing the support of mill owners, various voices exaggerated the risk, forecasting as imminent a formidable slave rebellion. However, not everyone was convinced, as can be seen in this quote from Maria Bárbara:

Everyday they pretend that blacks are to be feared so that the troops may stay here. Arm the provincial regiments and have no fear. I have been in Brazil for 12 years and the dangers that could arise because of slavery in the province of Bahia have been much talked about, but during this time what deaths have there been? Nothing, nothing, only good laws and sweetness. Everything else is lies. (II, 118)

<sup>2</sup> The history of the submission of women is loaded with the myth of fragility which historically justified the paternalism of men towards women. Nevertheless, in the history of Brazil, and specifically in the region of Goiás, written testimonies of violence by white women, owners of sugar mills, against black women and slaves date from the middle of the nineteenth century, with many stories of slaves who had eyes, teeth, nails or ears torn off at the orders of their female masters (Godinho, 2006; Silva, 2003).

The use of the word 'sweetness' to describe the laws and customs which governed slavery in Bahia has to be seen as decidedly curious.

Attentive to political, social, economic, and military matters, which now dominate almost all letters, family daily life has become a residual note in Maria Bárbara's correspondence, referred to only when affected by historical circumstances. Her children, her husband, herself, are now social actors in the full meaning of the word, living their daily life on the stage of History, a life permeated with the construction of History itself. The epistolary narrative is strewn with violent scenes, such as the flight of Maria Bárbara to a Dutch ship in April 1822, during the bloody episodes in Bahia which resulted from opposition to the new provincial governor. For all events a commented participant vision is offered, if necessary contrary to the versions propagated by the factions in conflict, such as: 'I saw, I saw in a newspaper an official letter [...] I saw, I saw, I am a true witness' (II, 87). Without advocating independence, rather demanding fair and equal treatment for Brazil, Maria Bárbara does not restrain herself from admonishing politicians and criticizing the excesses of all those involved in the historical moment, without distinction. As a privileged participant-spectator she vehemently instructs and exhorts her husband and his peers in the *Cortes* in Portugal about what she believes is the reality of the situation and the real aspirations of Bahia, as can be seen in these excerpts from May, June, July, and August 1822, on the eve of 'Ipiranga', the independence of Brazil:

You cannot imagine the rivalry between Europeans and Brazilians [...] Do not deceive yourself: nothing can be done with the Brazilians by force. Sweetness and more sweetness, equality and more equality. (II, 106)

Continuous disorders have reduced this beautiful Province to pure misery. Its poor inhabitants have suffered so much. And still they are scolded and insulted. What else do you want from them? Give them chains? This is all that is lacking. (II, 113)

I do not understand politics, but in my opinion, with what little [concern] you have thought of such a delicate subject as this Brazil. Brazilians are infinitely hurt with some of the things that have been said about this fertile kingdom. And in truth, those Deputies who have said that Brazil is some den of blacks, forgive me, for so long they have been wrong, but the worse is that we pay here what is done there. (II, 125)

I cannot remain silent for much longer. I despair to see only lies in that kingdom where truth is hidden, so that poor Bahia is not helped in its calamities. No, no, here they do not want independence. Here they only want to enjoy the privileges that you are enjoying. Brazilians are not stepchildren; they are your own children. (II, 127)

The discourse is increasingly based on dichotomies between 'here' and 'there', between 'that court' and this 'fertile kingdom', reflecting the growing distance and progressive secession between Portugal and Brazil which, being so omnipresent in daily life, was already invading individual feelings and discourse. Despite the fervour with which she defends her country of adoption, Maria Bárbara does not make an apology of independence, nor does she hesitate in expressing profound horror at the cutting down of trees and the occupation of Igreja dos Aflitos by the rebel troops supporting D. Pedro (II, 128), in a curious proto-ecological note. From a wider perspective, she does not perceive how close independence was, nor how generalized and violent the will for freedom was.

Remarkably, in a letter to his father, the eldest son states that Maria Bárbara is 'a lady who does not get involved in politics' (II, 136). In the male correspondence

between the two sons and Luís Paulino, Maria Bárbara is relegated to a mere family role, ignored or reduced to a brief note about her health and her obstinacy in refusing to abandon Aramaré. This alternation between omission and condescendence results from the sons' incapacity to evaluate Maria Bárbara's real qualities and complicity with her husband, an incapacity very much dictated by prejudice. This can be associated with the difficulty in admitting to the paternal figure that she was actually the 'lady' of the sugar mill, due to the incompetence that the two 'Xangô farmers' had shown (II, 63). In reality, the letters which Maria Bárbara wrote to her husband — always confidential and sent with great care, by trusted bearers — did not differ from those of her sons in themes and events narrated, only in the intensity of lamentations and expressions of hate and affection.

At the end of this epistolary narrative, which the Pinto da França and Garcez families created in an involuntary manner, the independence of Brazil and the death of Luís Paulino disperse its members. Maria Bárbara becomes an adept of the Brazilian cause and remains in Brazil until her death, as do her younger son and daughter. Bento persists in his loyalty to Portugal and leaves. Sabina follows her brutal husband, a fierce supporter of independence, both dying at an early age. For a happy epilogue, there remains the radiant description which Bertrand Filipe Alberto Patroni made of Maria Bárbara, in *A Viagem de Patroni pelas Províncias Brasileiras de Ceará, Rio de São Francisco, Bahia, Minas Gerais e Rio de Janeiro nos anos de 1829 e 1830*. Six years after the death of Luís Paulino, in a widowhood that would last twenty-eight years, the 'lady' of the Aramaré sugar mill still shines in the Bahian society gathered at the Brito de Iguape farm, between Cachoeira and Santo Amaro:

The illustrious and most beautiful widow of marshal Luís Paulino Pinto da França [...] The company was carefully chosen: all the rich farmers of Iguape appeared there; abundance and joy reigned everywhere; and the goddess to whom so many offerings were dedicated was the soul of that respectable group. I heard her sing a brief aria, the sweetness of her voice enchanted my feelings and gave me the same impression that Venus made on the father of the gods, when her white breasts trembled in the celestial council, which had met to decide the faith of the Lusitanians in the seas of India. (Patroni, 1851; my translation)

## Emergent voices, absent actors, and intercultural translations

The *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* traces the itinerary of a movement between cultures, of a process of intercultural transit and adaptation, though not always successful, narrated by a polyphony of voices. The need to translate into words the practices, values, and realities of a new culture — in other words, the need to carry out an intercultural translation — is most evident in the letters exchanged between both sides of the Atlantic, and in the commentaries on life in Brazil, as compared to Portugal. This polyphonic representation of a movement of personal, family, and social transculturation over almost two decades, functions as a translation that is sometimes consecutive, other times simultaneous, of the events lived and witnessed. This 'consecutive and simultaneous translation' has a profound documentary value as it is not subject to the filters of memory, which always interfere in the process of representation, since remembering is not seeing, but rather reconstructing the experiences of the past, with images, ideas, judgements, and values of the present.

Personal letters, as they are by nature manifestations of the private sphere, have their writing associated with women, especially at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth. Although the anonymous and daily epistolary practice prevailed — a characteristic which does not make it less important, taking into account the new spaces of sociability which letters constitute — the correspondence of many women has become a recognized source of study, especially when dealing with influential characters and their social networks. Women in general were reserved the task of keeping distant relatives informed about family life and circulating recent news. A type of female specialization thereby emerges, where women act as secretaries and simultaneously maintain the ties of family life. In the case of Maria Bárbara, whose domestic routine included not only family care but also supervision of the property and administration of the sugar mill and its slaves, that specialization occurred in a context very different from the rising middle classes in Europe (Gonçalves, 2006: 99ss).

Since letters have the structure of informal communication, they allow their content to perform not only the narrative of emergent voices, but also the narrative of absences, to adapt the concepts developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008: 11–43; 2006: 87–125). In this case, in the *Correspondência* there occurs a narrative of emergent voices and, through it, the subordinate but rising voice of colonial bourgeois women can be heard, epitomized in the figure of Maria Bárbara. What can also be found here is a narrative of absences since, in addition to the emerging voices, or through (and because of) these same voices, one can also access the otherwise silenced narrative of private life, of the personal, of the intimate, of conjugal dialogue, of the daily life of those women emancipated strictly within the current and acceptable social norms. This ‘narrative of normality’, this ‘history of private life’ in such an abnormal historical period, so full of public events, constitutes a great source of crucial knowledge that complements official histories, providing information that is usually absent from the canon of great narratives. It allows us to understand the infinite diversity of human experience and the risk of — with limitations to knowledge and the exclusions imposed by self-enclosed academic fields — wasting experience, in other words, of taking as non-existent or impossible cultural experiences that are actually existent — the ‘absent’ — or possible — the ‘emerging’ (Santos, 2008: 33).

However, the diversity of practices, knowledge, and actors resulting from this narrative by absent and emergent voices could, without a careful critical interpretation, lead to a plurality of aimless, non-communicating narratives and identities, without any constructive interaction. The work of translation is, for this reason, performed by the capacity to relate, to communicate, to create reciprocal intelligibility between different experiences of the world, and to find points of convergence, as well as points of divergence, among them. This happens in the letters analysed here which, albeit opening with a strict Eurocentric vision, gradually bring new elements into the everyday framework and move towards intercultural translation. The letters share concepts and worldviews in the most intelligible form possible for the reader who is distant in space and time. However, there are elements which cannot be translated, for which reason the political incomprehension between the metropolis and Brazil is alluded to, as well as the dichotomy between ‘here’ and ‘there’, the satire by ‘Brazilianized’ ladies of rural Portugal, among so many other examples of

incommunicability. But these gaps in communication are also a fundamental part of intercultural translation.

Translation allows reciprocal intelligibilities to be created between diverse experiences of the world, both available and possible, revealed by narratives of absent and emergent voices. In the case of the *Correspondência*, due to its multiplicity of voices, the process of intercultural translation that occurs does not attribute to any set of experiences either the status of exclusive totality or of homogenous part, as it never gets exhausted in either category. The *Correspondência* also allow us to see the subordinate both inside and outside the relationship of subordination, as in the case of the paradigmatic figure of Maria Bárbara, who is both hetero-represented as a family mother almost deprived of autonomous discourse, and self-represented as owner of a slaveholding sugar mill, eloquent and independent. Studying these and other narratives of absence and emergence increases extraordinarily the number and diversity of experiences available and possible, since the work of translation creates intelligibility, coherence and articulation in a world thus enriched by such multiplicity and diversity (Santos, 2006: 114, 119).

Maria Bárbara Garcez started her trajectory between cultures as a simple spectator and passive reader of her social role. As time passed — though always moving within the strict limits permitted by social-cultural norms — she progressively became a clear-sighted commentator, an autonomous actor, a protagonist of character, and finally the author of her own role, in society, in politics, and in history. A role she always carried out with resourcefulness, despite (or perhaps because of) its being a new role, almost unknown to her and to society in general. As a member of the dominated gender within the dominant aristocracy, Maria Bárbara knew how to move inside the paternalist logic and achieve her objectives, without clashing with the prevailing ideology and frequently using the discourse of power. Maria Bárbara evolved within the limitations imposed by the central canon and took advantage of her privileged social position in order to build her own trajectory.

For all those involved in this correspondence, the narrative of personal experience helped to confer sense and coherence to the often random and chaotic events that constituted their daily experience of reality. For this reason, they classify experiences by placing them within a narrative structure, because telling or writing a story always involves an interpretation; among all the experiences lived, those events and personalities to emphasize have to be selected, and this is in itself an act of interpretation. Personal narratives are never simple reflexes of reality; above all, they are mediated by the need to represent individuals as possessing a certain sense of identity and control of both themselves and others. Each territory provides different means for mediating ideologically experiences, characters, and events. However, when the temporal and spatial territory — like the colonial territory or the space-time of revolution and independence — is still unknown, when it is an unstable space, with diverse mobilities and undefined cultural frontiers, when there are no previous ideological mediators, everything has to be reorganized, represented, and translated into an intelligible code.

Pre- and post-colonial Brazil functions as a contact zone, to use once again Boaventura Sousa Santos' terminology, or as a frontier zone, where the peripheries and margins are the first to emerge. Only a serious work of translation may bring into the contact zone the aspects which each form of knowledge or practice considers

most relevant or central (Santos, 2006: 121). Physical space, identity, and discourse mutually intersect and influence each other, and the different spaces and territories represented by images and narratives are lived and understood in various manners. For Michel de Certeau, space is activated by the rhetorical practices of those who move through it, and the semiotic and enunciative options of the subject in transit privilege, transform and omit spatial elements in order to make them signify something or, to the contrary, nothing at all (1988: 196–98).

Therefore, in the intercultural contact zones, each cultural practice has to decide which aspects are to be selected for translation. In each culture, there are aspects considered too central to be put at risk by the confrontation that the contact zone may represent, or aspects which are considered to be inherently untranslatable into another culture. An example of this, and central to this study of the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira*, is the liberation of women from their state of oppression, a basic premise for the maintenance of patriarchal power. The extraordinary historical circumstances occurring in the contact zone of Brazil might even have facilitated women's emancipation, but the dominant culture never once questioned their status. The issue of what is or is not translatable is not limited to the criteria of selectivity that each practice or knowledge decides to adopt in the contact zone. More than active selectivity, there is what we call passive selectivity. This consists of what in each culture becomes unpronounceable due to extreme oppression imposed for long periods. We are talking about deep absences, vacuums without possibility of being filled, an emptiness which nevertheless shapes the unfathomable identity of the culture at stake (Santos, 2006: 121). In the *Correspondência*, slavery is, without a doubt, the great absent, still unspeakable despite so many emerging narratives. The main silenced character is he who, nonetheless, sustains the entire structure of the mill, of economy, and society: the slave.

In the present case study, there is a clear domination of themes linked to political and family intrigue, money, and social ascent, as if the practices and values of the Portuguese province had been transported unharmed to the new Brazilian territory. Brazil, the immense new space, yet to be fully territorialized, so different and exotic, emerges in descriptions of the sugar mill, the forest, climate, luxury, and indolence, but transformed into a simple supporter or opponent in the omnipresent narrative of enrichment and social promotion. The contact zones thus created are never truly hybrid. Everything which does not fit into this great underlying narrative — the guide to every transit between Portugal and Brazil — is simply omitted, since it does not have any significance for the actors on stage. The processes of production of silence and non-existence which occur in these letters — such as the silencing of women in male correspondence; the general silencing of slaves; all those cultural processes which are neither recognized nor named — contribute to the construction and strengthening of asymmetries in the relationship between cultures, individuals, societies, and genders, typical of colonialism and patriarchy. Because, and citing again Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 'cultures are only monolithic when seen from the outside or far away. When seen from within or in close up, it is easy to understand that they are constituted by various and at times conflicting versions of the same culture' (2006: 121; my translation).

At the moment of writing the letter, what is at stake is not only the preservation of family memories, but also the individual and social identity of its author. Memories

are constructed by social groups because, although individuals are those who ‘remember’ in the literal sense of the word, social groups are the ones who determine what is or is not ‘memorable’ and also the manner in which something is going to be remembered (Burke, 2000: 70). It can thus be stated that memory is a constituent element of identity, both individual and collective, to the extent that it is also a basic factor in the feeling of continuity, coherence, and self-(re)construction of an individual or group. Therefore, the greatest contribution of these letters does not lie so much in their credibility as documents, in the positivist sense, because, as Sidney Chalhoub wrote about literary fiction, it ‘seeks reality, interprets and states truths about society, but does not have to be transparent or a mirror of the social “matter” it represents and plays with’ (2003: 92; my translation). Instead, the interpretation made here of the *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* seeks more complex meanings, by analysing critically the discourse which rules the logic of intercultural narrative and the practices that shape the representation of reality.

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Este artigo explora a experiência intercultural entre Portugal e o Brasil, entre 1807 e 1823, de duas famílias oriundas da pequena nobreza rural do Norte de Portugal, com especial atenção ao percurso intercultural feminino.

A *Correspondência* é uma representação polifónica de um movimento de transculturação pessoal, familiar, social e grupal, ao longo de quase duas décadas, e funciona como uma tradução por vezes consecutiva, outras vezes simultânea, dos eventos históricos testemunhados. O conceito de tradução intercultural aqui utilizado baseia-se no pensamento de Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006 e

2008). Esta análise da *Correspondência* articula os contextos concretos e situados do seu objecto de estudo, com o propósito de construir o conhecimento de diferentes momentos históricos, racionalidades e mundividências.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Brasil, Portugal, poder, género, tradução intercultural