

The “Poetic Of Residues” of Carolina Maria De Jesus in the Unedited Diaries / A “Poética De Resíduos” de Carolina Maria De Jesus em The Unedited Diaries

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ABSTRACT

Carolina Maria de Jesus' writing is marked by a characteristic hybridism between complex constructions, sophisticated words and linguistic deviations from the cultured norm of Brazilian Portuguese. Such language inhabits an in-between place: it lies on the threshold between Carolina's subaltern condition and her aspiration to belong to the dominant group. The paradoxical nature of Carolinian writing represents a complex challenge for the translation field. To reflect on this process, the present work aims to discuss the translation into English of the last released part from the author's diaries. How do we find Carolinian “poetics of residues” (FERNANDEZ, 2008) in The unedited diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus, a book translated by Nancy P. S. Naro and Cristina Mehrtens? The research is qualitative in nature and, within the scope of Translation Studies, falls within the field of comparison of translations and their source texts (WILLIAM; CHESTERMAN, 2002). The results point to attempts to conserve this kind of poetic, so that the reader of the target version can also be faced with the coexistence between the cult and the marginal of the Carolinian style.

KEYWORDS: Carolina Maria de Jesus; The Unedited Diaries; Translation.

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RESUMO

A escrita de Carolina Maria de Jesus é marcada por um característico hibridismo entre construções complexas, palavras sofisticadas e desvios linguísticos da norma culta do português do Brasil. Tal linguagem habita um entrelugar: está no limiar entre sua condição subalterna e sua aspiração a pertencer ao grupo dominante. Esse caráter paradoxal da escrita de caroliniana representa um complexo desafio para o campo da tradução. Para refletir sobre tal processo, o presente trabalho tem como objetivo discutir sobre a tradução para o inglês da última parte lançada dos diários da autora, lançada postumamente. Como encontramos a "poética de resíduos" (FERNANDEZ, 2008) caroliniana em *The unedited diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, traduzido por Nancy P. S. Naro e Cristina Mehrrens? A pesquisa é de natureza qualitativa e, no âmbito dos Estudos da Tradução, se insere no campo de comparação de traduções e seus textos fontes (WILLIAM; CHESTERMAN, 2002). Os resultados apontam para tentativas de manutenção dessa poética, de modo que o leitor da versão de chegada também possa se deparar com a convivência entre o culto e o marginal do estilo caroliniano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Carolina Maria de Jesus; Meu estranho diário; Tradução.

1 Introduction

The production of reflections based on the writing of Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914- 1977) continues to expand as new layers of her work are brought to light. The "trash poet," as she called herself, developed an extensive oeuvre, going from fiction to non-fiction. Besides her diaries, she wrote short stories, proverbs, novels, song lyrics, and poetry, not to mention her unpublished writings.

The author attracted the Brazilian public attention with the release of her famous book *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada*, published in 1960. This is a poignant account that exposes the marginal condition that runs through the existence of Carolina - a black woman, a favela dweller, and a waste picker. The writing about her experiences in the extinct Canindé favela, in São Paulo city, where she lived, can be understood as a macrocosmic projection of the collective reality of an exclusionary Brazil in terms of gender, class, and race. It is a text that also reveals the "complex nature" of the Carolinian poetic construction: "a mix of diary, biography and novel" (FERNANDEZ, 2008, p. 141).

The curiosity that her work arouses goes beyond national borders and, through the practice of translation, new perspectives emerge on her work. *Quarto de despejo* becomes a kind of instant phenomenon, and shortly after its release the book was translated into thirteen languages and sold in forty countries (LEVINE; MEIHY, 1995). The researcher and biographer of the writer, José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy writes about this growing recognition: "It was not only nationally that Carolina became successful. She was quickly translated into at least thirteen languages, surpassing all Brazilian writers in terms of international knowledge" (MEIHY, 1994, p. 5,6). Due to the success of

Quarto de despejo translations, especially into English, Carolina has conquered an emblematic space in the scope of the translated national literature.

A study conducted by Feitosa (2008) points to the author as the second most translated Brazilian writer, behind Clarice Lispector. About this movement of dissemination of her writing, Carolina comments:

It has been two years since I stopped being a garbage collector to become a writer. I consider myself exotic. There are people who leave universities to become writers. And I left the favela. I left the garbage, left the dump room. And my name goes around the world. With the translations of my book I was favored by a class of noble and good white people. And I was prejudiced by a class of uneducated, mediocre, opportunistic white people who thought Carolina Maria de Jesus, is an idiot/ But... I gave them a lesson of honesty. It takes me a minute to warm up and a hundred to cool down (JESUS, 1996, p. 201).

In fact, her name went around the world. The translations of Carolina's work into English have stimulated a significant interest of the academic community in the English-speaking world (LEVINE; MEIHY, 1995), to the extent that the number of papers written about her in English has been greater than those written in Portuguese (FEITOSA, 2008). There are reports of Brazilians who only came into contact with the Carolinian writing when they came across her texts in academic circles in the United States. As Bernardo (2019, p. 6) points out, "the translations brought great prestige to Carolina abroad and this caused the author to be 'rediscovered' later by Brazilian academia [...]". In Brazil, after the dizzying success of *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina and her work are gradually forgotten. However, as mentioned before, different facets of the writer have been revealed, which generates the need for new perspectives about the Carolinian text. We have witnessed in recent decades, therefore, a "rediscovery" of the author in the Brazilian literary system with the help of the practice of translation.

2 Beyond the Carolina from *Quarto de Despejo*

Carolina's memorialistic accounts continue to be released and to be translated into English. A second part of the diaries, *Casa de Alvenaria: diário de uma ex-favelada*, is released in 1961.

The book follows the author's routine after the release of her *bestseller*. In one of the efforts to rescue and rediscover the multifaceted writing of the author, 1996 saw the release of *Meu estranho diário*, whose proposal is to present Carolina's writing without the interferences that were made in previous editions of the diaries. The edition, organized by researchers Robert Levine and José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy, is made up of excerpts from the diaries that cover the writer's life at different times: before and after she became well-known, up to her move to a farm, where she lives for the rest of her life. The English translation, *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, is made by Nancy P. S. Naro and Cristina Mehrtens and is released in 1999. The prefaces of the Portuguese and English versions of this published part of the diaries reaffirm the concern to avoid, as much as possible, interventions in the Carolinian writing style, marked by a sharp critical and poetic sense and characterized by a writing that mixes deviations from the standard norm of the Portuguese language with a vocabulary filled with far-fetched words. In the preamble found in *Meu estranho diário*, we find the ordering criteria of this work, among which are: "the publication of complete texts, without any grammatical or stylistic revision of the diaries, which are brought to public as they were found" (JESUS, 1996, p. 10. 10). In the introduction of *The Unedited Diaries*, it is pointed out that: "Our translation of Carolina Maria de Jesus's newly discovered diary pages deliberately preserves the author's distinctive writing style" (JESUS, 1999, p. 4).

Although she only attended school for a short time, Carolina was both literate and also eager to consume and produce literature. At the same time, the author did not have mastery of the Portuguese language formal code, so that her texts are marked by orthographic deviations related to agreement, punctuation, accentuation, deletion or addition of letters, etc. Fernandez (2008) develops the concept of "poetics of residues" to refer to this characteristic hybridity in Carolina's work: the "strange coexistence between [...] the standard norm of the Portuguese language and the linguistic deviation of marginal speech." (FERNANDEZ, 2008, p. 126). Just as Carolina goes in search of waste to survive, through her trade as a waste picker, her writing style is also residual. As Fernandez points out, this is a kind of "literary recycling", through which the writer collects and assembles "pieces of other people's discourses". In this scavenging process "she goes about pasting scraps or remnants of ideas and forms into her writing experiments" (FERNANDEZ, 2018, p. 38).

According to the researcher, this hybrid writing reflects Carolina's condition of marginality combined with her desire to "expand her territory of life, beyond the language-space of the favela," so that "the attempt to write 'literarily' serves as an escape line" (FERNANDEZ, 2008, p. 138).

Carolinian language thus inhabits an in-between place: it is on the threshold between its subaltern condition and its aspiration to belong to the dominant group.

This paradoxical character of Carolina Maria de Jesus' writing represents, therefore, a complex challenge to the translation field. The linguistic elements that characterize this "poetics of residues" in the author's work point to power structures and networks that need to be taken into account in translating. To what extent did these issues, which resonate with the intersectional nature of the Carolinian text, impact the decision-making process about the representation of spelling errors and the use of sophisticated words in the English translations? To reflect on this process, we have selected to analyze excerpts from the English translation of the third part of the released diaries. How do we find the Carolinian "poetics of residues" in *The unedited diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*? A reflection on the translation of this text can shed light on new textures of Carolina's writing.

3 Translation as a counter-narrative

In order to think about the representation in English translations of Carolina Maria de Jesus' characteristic "poetic of residues," it is also significant to reflect on the notion of how translators have the power to project different images of the author and the translated work in the target culture. Furthermore, translation practices may violate or contribute to the maintenance of literary and ideological conventions of the receiving cultural system (LEFEVERE, 2007). In this sense, translators "adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological or poetological currents of their time" (LEFEVERE, 1992, p. 8). With this line of reasoning in mind, what images of Carolina and her writing are projected in the translation *The unedited diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus*? In this sense, the debate about translation in the post-colonial setting is useful. Bassnett and Trivedi, in *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, state:

Translation does not take place in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, but part of a constant process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all sorts of stages in this process of transferring linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is not an

innocent or transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; It rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors, or systems (BASSNETT; TRIVEDI, 1999, p. 2).

Therefore, translation is not a space of neutrality. It is an activity that exerts significant influence on exchanges between cultures that are in an asymmetrical power relationship. Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) raise the question of how the colonizing process provoked modes of acceptance and rejection with regard to the production and reception of translations. More often than not, translation has contributed to support the interests of colonizing cultures. Such a process has also resulted in a translation analysis perspective based on and centered on such interests. Therefore, the basic premise of the debate about translation in this context is that "the act of translating always involves much more than language. Translations are always embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history" (BASSNETT; TRIVEDI, 1999, p. 6). Based on this reflection, it is necessary to consider the cultural and ideological implications involved in the translation of texts by an author, who belongs to a historically oppressed group and uses the language of the favela dwellers, into a hegemonic language. Thinking about translation in the post-colonial scenario implies questioning practices of maintaining the values of cultures that are at the center of power networks. Price (2015, p. 65) analyzes how a decolonial methodology within the field of translation studies can contribute to the construction of "a counter-narrative that deconstructs the colonial systems of meaning." This system involves meanings and images produced by dominant groups about subaltern groups. In this context, the act of translating can violate or resist the internalization of values aligned with colonial power. Venuti refers to this type of translation as abusive translation:

This kind of translating is abusive in two senses: it resists the structures and discourses of the receiving language and culture, especially the pressure towards the univocal, the idiomatic, the transparent; yet in so doing it also interrogates the structures and discourses of the source text, exposing its often unacknowledged conditions (VENUTI, 2013, p. 72).

A translation of this kind makes it possible to create new perspectives on texts from peripheral groups. In the case of Carolina Maria de Jesus' writings, an abusive translation can also expose the intersectional nature of the source text. For Crenshaw (2002, p. 177) "intersectionality is a conceptualization of the problem that seeks to capture the structural and dynamic

consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination." The author emphasizes how different discriminatory systems (racism, patriarchy, class oppression, for example) intersect and interact to create overlapping inequalities. Bearing this point in mind when discussing the translation of Carolina Maria de Jesus, it stands to reason that it is not only a matter of translating the linguistic material, but also of taking into account the representation of an author crossed by different layers of oppression.

4 *Meu estranho* and *The Unedited Diaries*

As emphasized earlier, Carolina Maria de Jesus' writing reflects her desire to write literarily, so the construction of her aesthetic of production is also characterized by the use of far-fetched words. Using the concept of *detritorialization* (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1977), Fernandez (2008, p. 134) concludes that, for not having the formal domain of the Portuguese language, when the writer "practices the act of writing from her meager knowledge of the refined language, she ends up deterritorializing this language, displacing it from its cultured norm and inventing a strange use of the established linguistic code". The researcher compares Carolina's literary creation to her practice as a waste picker: her repertoire is formed by the traces or residues of discourses she comes across in the dump room and the drawing room. In this sense, Carolina not only deterritorializes formal Portuguese, but also reterritorializes it by inserting it into the cosmos of the favela (FERNANDEZ, 2008). In the following charts, we can get a glimpse of how this dynamic occurs in a Carolinian text.

Chart 1: movements to keep up with the sophistication

Excerpt from <i>Meu estranho diário</i> (p. 36)	Excerpt from <i>The unedited diaries</i> (p. 23)
Cheguei em casa Cançada e triste porque o poeta não gosta de ver o seu povo oprimido. Ouve um tempo em que o povo trabalhava com limites e viviam contente. Hoje trabalha demasiadamente e são infaustos	<i>I got home Tired and sad because the muse dislike seeing her people oppressed. There was a time when limits were placed on workers' labor and the people lived happily. Today they work too much and are miserable</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors of this article (2022)

Chart 2: movements to keep up with the sophistication

Excerpt from <i>Meu estranho diário</i> (p. 54)	Excerpt from <i>The unedited diaries</i> (p. 40)
É muito mais bonito ver uma mulher disposta do que ver uma letárgica igual a tartaruga. – Eu não gosto das mulheres preguiçosas.	<i>It is much better to see a healthy woman than to see one lethargic like a turtle. -I don't like lazy women.</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors of this article (2022)

Chart 3: movements to keep up with the sophistication

Excerpt from <i>Meu estranho diário</i> (p. 55)	Excerpt from <i>The unedited diaries</i> (p. 40)
Que os ingratos estão chingando o dr. Adhemar. Que era pra eles agradecer a prefeitura e ao prefêito o tempo que ressidiram sem pagar. Mas que o mundo tem mais mal-agradecido do que quem sabe agradecer:	<i>That those ingrates are cussing out dr. Adhemar. That they should thank the town hall and the mayor for living there without paying. But the world has more thankless than thankful:</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors of this article (2022)

In Chart 1, Carolina connects her activity as a poet to social conditions: the oppression she observes produces direct effects on her writing. It is relevant to note in this excerpt the movements made in the translation to accompany the author's waste poetics. We notice, for example, that the use of the word "Cançada", capitalized in the middle of the sentence (a recurring element in the author's diaries), has been retained in English. Such a residue in the middle of the sentence - the capitalization of a letter in an unconventional place - causes a disruptive effect in the text that could be hidden in the translation to maintain fluidity. We note, throughout the English text, however, that this breaking mechanism, found in both the use of uppercase and lowercase letters, which contrasts with conventional usage, is preserved. This conservation occurs in translation either in the same places as in Portuguese, or by means of compensation in other places in the English text.

Moreover, in the passage "Hoje trabalha demasiadamente e são infaustos" (p. 36), we identify the coexistence between the cultured and the marginal that we commented earlier, as well as Carolina's effort to sound literary through far-fetched constructions. In the translation of the first

passage, the impact of the English construction is somewhat softened with "Today they work too much and are miserable" (p. 23). But within the possibilities available, the translation retains the senses. The translations of "letárgica" and "ingratos" in charts 2 and 3, respectively translated as "lethargic" and "ingrates", ensure a relationship with the author's writing of deterritorialization, since they are translations that explore the transparency of the terms and approach the construction of a cultured lexicon intended by the author. Such versions produce a literary effect in the target text as well. We have here, in this way, clear movements to accompany the sophistication so desired by Carolina.

In the following charts, we observe that there are moments when Carolinian deviations are marked in the translation, so that strategies, such as extratextual explanation, are used in this regard.

Chart 4: movements to correct form and/or meaning

Excerpt from <i>Meu estranho diário</i> (p.44)	Excerpt from <i>The unedited diaries</i> (p. 31)	In the footnote
Fui no juizado para ver se o pae da Vera havia levado o dinheiro. Não levou. Fiquei nervôsa. Quando eu voltava parei numa banca de jornaes. Vi um homem chingando os policiais de burros. Que êles prevalecem. No clichê, um policial expancava um velho. o jornal dizia que era um policial do Dops	<i>I went to the court of justice to see if Vera's father had left child support for me. He hadn't. I got irritated. When I was coming back I stopped at a newsstand. I saw a man calling the police idiots. May they prevail.</i> <i>In the clichê,* a policeman beats up an old man. The newspaper said it was a policeman from the DOPS [security police].</i>	Carolina wrote <i>clichê</i> but probably meant "guichê," a word borrowed from the French meaning, in working-class Portuguese: a doorway or closed space.

Source: elaborated by the authors of this article (2022)

Chart 5: movements to correct form and/or meaning

Excerpt from <i>Meu estranho diário</i> (p. 47)	Excerpt from <i>The unedited diaries</i> (p. 34)
Quando cheguei na favela a Vera havia cortado o pé. O João assim que viu-me foi dando-me a notícia Respondi que já sabia. Que eu havia	<i>When I got to the favela Vera had cut her foot. As soon as João saw me he told me I answered that I already knew. That I had been warned. She was sleeping. I looked at the cut. It was</i>

<p>recebido o aviso. Ela estava dormindo. Olhei o corte. Era enorme. Ressolvi ir na farmacia. O farmacéutico não quiz fazer o curativo. Levei ela, na Central. Fizeram o curativo e deu-lhe injeção contra o teto.</p>	<p><i>big. I decided to go to the pharmacy. The pharmacist didn't want to dress it. I took her, to the Central Hospital. They dressed it and gave her a shot against tetanus [misspelled teto 'roof'].</i></p>
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Source: elaborated by the authors of this article (2022)

In chart 4, Carolina narrates her journey through the city as she comes across episodes that announce the scenario of social injustice that permeated her. In this excerpt, we notice that the author uses the expression "cliché" to refer to the place where a policeman "expansava um velho". The term is kept in the body text of the target version with the same spelling. In the extratextual explanation, the translated text gives the information that the author probably meant to write "guichê", and then gives the definition of the word. This kind of deviation is a mark of Carolinian writing, which leads us to reflect on the need to clarify the meanings behind such an occurrence in a footnote. On the one hand, this kind of strategy is a useful resource for dispelling possible misunderstandings of interpretation with regard to the target audience. On the other hand, it is also valid to think that this kind of elucidation may mischaracterize the form of Carolina Maria de Jesus' writing, providing a less impactful reading experience in English. In chart 5, the author reports an occurrence involving her daughter Vera, who suffered a cut on her foot. As with the excerpts in the previous chart, we notice in this chart a correction movement that is made in square brackets. Carolina reports that Vera receives an "injeção contra o teto." In the translation, we find a correction in the body of the text indicating that "teto" is a misspelling: "*tetanus [misspelled teto 'roof']*". The translators could have simply corrected and used the grammatically accepted form in the target language (*tetanus*). However, they bring out the residual trace of the author, validating her identity.

Concluding Remarks

As we have discussed, translations of Carolina Maria de Jesus' texts have enabled new discussions about other facets of her writing. Besides *Quarto de despejo*, we saw the need to put

other texts by the author at the center of the discussions. In this context, the translation of the entries in *Meu estranho diário* is a valuable research locus.

Through the examples presented here, it was possible to see how Carolina's fragmented writing is a representation of the in-between place she occupies as a black woman, a favela dweller, and a writer. We observe in the occurrences commented here that Carolina Maria de Jesus' poetic of residues can be perceived in the translated text of *Meu estranho diário*, since Carolina's effort to write literarily is reflected in the English version. We can understand this facet of this translation as a counter-narrative toward the erasure often performed involving texts of a peripheral nature. The literal translation, which exploits the transparency of the far-fetched words used by the author, is especially effective in this regard. As far as grammatical deviations are concerned, we have seen that there are corrective movements that, in turn, do not nullify, but rather bring to light, the irregularities and slips in the source text. We can think of *The Unedited Diaries* as a translation that, as we consider from Venuti (2013), attempts to resist the power-maintenance practices of central structures by challenging the homogeneous, the idiomatic, and the fluid.

It is worth rescuing Bernardo's (2019, p. 9) critique regarding the attempts to reproduce the spelling errors in *The unedited diaries*: "Any reproduction of these errors would be a creation, for they do not exist in the source language." In addition, the researcher points out that this attempt at maintenance may contribute to corroborate the image of Carolina Maria de Jesus as a semi-literate slum dweller who "could not write in a language proper to what is expected in literary circles. So spelling errors have to be transported" (2019, p. 10). In fact, we reflected earlier on how translations have the power to construct different images of an author in the target culture. However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the strategies used by the translators of *My Strange Diary* can bring the foreign reader closer to the Carolinian poetic of residues - making her/him aware of this fascinating coexistence between the cult and the marginal.

CRedit

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