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BISSAU IN TRANSLATION. MISHAPS AND CHALLENGES OF AN ONGOING RESEARCH¹

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¹ This article is an adapted and expanded translation of the research "Bissau em tradução. Percalços e desafios de uma pesquisa em andamento", the material is in the process of publication.

Abstract: This article is an excerpt from thirteen months of research carried out in Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau, located in West Africa, on translation zone (SIMON, 2013) and translation space (CRONIN; SIMON, 2014) in transnational contexts. From the quest to understand the effects caused by translation practices in multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious contexts, this text presents the translation spaces of Bissau from the perspective of the history of cultural translation with a decolonial bias. The theoretical approach concerning cultural translation is developed from the perspectives of Simon (2008) and Pym (2017), highlighting the conceptual basis of cultural translation by Bhabha (2014). Regarding the methodology, the research reconciles different procedures for generating and collecting data in line with oral history, taking as a space-time cut the space of translation and the place of memory of the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais", located in the central region of the capital, from February 2021 to March 2022. The methodology in oral history, I took into account the perspectives of the perspectives of Meihy (2011), Freitas (2006), Meihy and Ribeiro (2011), and Seawright (2017) in order to obtain the necessary resources to define the types of interviews and the stages of the interviews to be carried out. I present, along with the fieldwork, some interview clippings provided by our research collaborators, aiming to describe how the concept of cultural translation only makes sense when the discussion focused on cultural differences and multiple negotiation processes. In conclusion, This paper presents the main mishaps and challenges encountered during the implementation of the research in Bissau, the transcultural capital of West Africa.

Keywords: City in translation; Cultural translation; Translation space; Multilingualism; Sherry Simon.

INTRODUCTION

Located on the west coast of Guinea-Bissau, Bissau is on the banks of the River Geba, close to the Atlantic Ocean. Known as the Autonomous Sector of Bissau (SAD), it is the capital and largest city in the country. Made up of a population that mixes national and international migrants from different ethnicities and nationalities, Bissau presents an urban landscape resulting from the migratory movements of the last decades. The conjunctions of peoples, spoken languages, and transnational cultures led to a communion of voices, knowledge, and symbolic representations, a fact understood by Sherry Simon (2012, p. 126) as the "urban spirit" in a multilingual context.

Seen in this light, Bissau is a multilingual city. Multilingualism is observed in the daily conversations of its residents, the advertisements printed on the walls, the non-governmental institutions, square names, streets and shops, the architecture of its churches, and the miscegenation of its people. However, Bissau "is not just multilingual: it is transnational" (SIMON, 2012, p. 126). Regarding the transnational city, Simon points out the following:

[...] it is a space for greater awareness of language, where exchanges are accelerated or blocked, facilitated or forced, questioned and criticized. The transnational city is, of course, a multilingual city, but seen from the perspective of movement and texture in the life of urban language (SIMON, 2016, p. 16).

As observed in the clipping above, the transnational and multilingual city promotes a reflection on the territorial and linguistic use of urban spaces. However, the simple discussion of this theme does not imply recognizing the linguistic rights of all the languages circulating in the city. Linguistic entitlement is achieved to the extent that the city's languages participate in everyday

conversations related to cultural citizenship. For Simon,

Citizenship requires, first and foremost, engagement with others in creating shared social spaces. For non-official languages to have the right to expression, they must be translated into the official language (SIMON, 2012, p. 127).

Starting from the perspective described by Simon, this article aims to discuss, through the results of ongoing scientific research, how languages dialogue, interact and produce translation practices in the urban spaces of Bissau. For this, I resort to the narratives of those who daily explore the multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious spaces that constitute the country's capital.

Thus, the central axis of this article is the question of the material space of translation, particularly the spatiality of the urban environment seen as a space for translation and a place of memory. This way, the general objective of this article is to present a partial balance of the scientific research developed at the Universidade Lusófona da Guiné (ULG) on "Bissau in translation". For this, I present some results obtained with the linguistic mapping proposed by ULG in November 2020. The objective partially related to the definition of existing translation spaces in Bissau. Therefore, I propose as specific objectives of this article to discuss the concepts of translation zone (SIMON, 2013), translation space (CRONIN; SIMON, 2014), and cultural translation (BHABHA, 2010); and analyze the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" as a space for translation;

Given the international historical context in which we live, motivated by the growing interdependence between states beyond the traditional axes of influence that have flourished around the term globalization, the phenomenon of migration has become increasingly accentuated, increasing the flow of migrants in large cities, causing greater

diversity, transfer, and circulation of languages in urban contexts. In the specific case of this article, this phenomenon promoted the interaction of language, space, and memory, thus allowing the rewriting of the history of the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" of Bissau from a spatial perspective of the city, where different transcultural historical-cultural languages are present.

Therefore, the present article is justified for offering to the public interested in the studies of urban spaces a reflection on the city as a place of enunciation. It also delves into its spatiality as an object of research and translation, being an intermediate place to rewrite the cultural history to from post-colonial epistemological perspectives. Thus, the ongoing research becomes relevant as it evidences the historical-sociocultural conception of translation spaces and places of memory in Bissau, taking into account its identity and transcultural context.

Regarding the methodology, the research integrate different procedures for generating and collecting data in line with oral history, taking as a space-time frame the space of translation and the place of memory of the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais", located in the central region of the city capital, from February 2021 to March 2022. Using the methodology in oral history allowed me to build the research's documentary corpus based on the fundamental notion of "living documentation" (SEAWRIGHT, 2017). It is, hence, this "living documentation" that "is part of the history of individual, shared memories and relationships" (AGUIAR, 2021, p. 102). Thus, they compose the narratives of the research collaborators in order to weave a network of transversal connections between the interview corpus, documentary and photographic records,

During the elaboration of the research proposal, I proposed a work schedule that contemplated the mapping of the translation

spaces, the places of memories of the city and the stages of execution of the interviews, defined as pre-interview, interview and post-interview. In the pre-interview, I defined a dynamics in which I could consider a stage of preparation of the ground with which we had the first contacts with the research collaborators and we could explain what the project consisted of and the relevance of their participation in the process. I prepared the interview sheets, the general and individual scripts of the interviews, and based on the profile of the research collaborators, I decided to work with two types of interviews: the oral tradition and the life trajectory, by recording the interviews.

Regarding the structure of this article, the diachronic character of the study allows the writing to take place horizontally. Therefore, I present the introduction of the article with the central theme, I try to situate the context, delimit the theme, describe the general and specific objectives, state the methodology and structure of the work. Then, I discuss the concepts of translation zone, translation space and cultural translation, with emphasis on the categories “translation as violence and coercion of urban space” and “cultural translation as a feature of a life trajectory”, to analyze the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" as a space for translation. Finally, I bring in the final conclusions some mishaps and challenges encountered during the execution of the first stages of this ongoing research.

BISSAU AS A TRANSLATION ZONE: TRANSNATIONAL SCENES IN URBAN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Bringing into the debate the use of translation to reflect the linguistic transactions that occur in the urban spaces of Bissau means referring to the idea of a translation zone. The concept was developed by analogy with Mary Louise Pratt's striking contact

zone concept. In *The Eyes of Empire. Travel and Transculturation Reports* (1999), Pratt defined the concept of the contact zone as “the social spaces where cultures meet, clash and clash, often in highly asymmetrical power relations such as colonialism and slavery”, (PRATT, 1999, p. 87). The concept proposed by Pratt is understood here as synonymous with cultural boundary. In this sense, it will be associated with the interactive dimensions of colonial encounters, questioning “how colonial subjects are constituted in and by the relations between colonizers and colonized, or travelers and visited, in terms of interaction and exchanges within asymmetrical power relations” (MACHADO, 2000, p. 283). Thus, the conceptions about displacements, interactions and contacts described in detail in Pratt's work served as a theoretical-methodological impulse for the author to correlate travel literature with translation, and translation, as it is one of the biggest activities in the area. contact, benefited from Pratt's concept by establishing new transdisciplinary connections.

In 2006, researcher Emily Apter returned to the concept of contact zone (PRATT, 1999) to introduce the term translation zone, linking the concept and its importance to studies in Comparative Literature. For Apter, the notion of “translation zone” is defined in the following terms:

Broadly conceived [...], the translation zone applies to diaspora language communities, print and media public spheres, institutions of governmentality and language policy-making, sterner of war, and literary theories. with particular relevance to the history and future of comparative literature (APTER, 2006, p. 6).

Apter's conceptual proposal brings to the discussion a reflection around the engagement of public and private institutions with regard to the promotion of linguistic and translation policy, which allow recognizing the degree of

importance of both the translating languages and the translated languages, constituting practices of hybridisms and creolization linked to polymorphic translation, characteristic of linguistic environments in interactive contexts of transnational relations, as we will see later. With Apter's perspective, borders became flexible, being able to "imagine a comprehensive intellectual topography, a zone of critical engagement that is neither restricted to the limits of the nation nor an amorphous condition associated with post-nationalism,

In 2013, Canadian Sherry Simon, in her article *Zona de Tradução*, revisits the concept of Apter to dialogue with the research she had been developing on the interaction of urban spaces with translation processes in the cities of Calcutta, Trieste, Barcelona and Montreal. To Simon:

"Translation zone" refers to an area of intense interaction between languages. The dimensions and nature of this area can vary considerably: it can span a large geographic extent, such as multilingual empires, such as the Russian, Habsburg, or Ottoman empires, or multilingual nations, such as India; may apply to specific border transactions, such as the US-Mexico border; and can refer to the microspaces of multilingual cities (related terms: translation space, translation area, border zone, border region) (SIMON, 2013, p. 181 apud AGUIAR, p. 88).

The conception presented by Simon dialogues with the ongoing research in order to understand that the existence of a translation zone is conditioned to the logic of reticular territories, to the existence of an intense traffic of languages, to the critical look of the observer on the geographical extension of this space, the different terminologies applied to the term and the conduction of urban microspaces that lead to various in-between places. In the case of this research, I approach the concept

2 Available in: <https://www.novafriica.co.ao/politica/guine-bissau-quanto-e-que-esta-terra-arranca-video-sic-noticias/>. Accessed on 01 Oct. 2021

of translation zone to the macrospatial dimension that geographically composes the Autonomous Sector of Bissau (SAD). Said that, I am interested in describing this macrospace as a territory constituted by translation practices guided by migrants who crossed national borders towards Bissau, since this is a unique space for the analysis of the points of intersection (or transculturation) between the local and the global in the production of record of migratory cultural life in dialogue with vernacular cosmopolitanisms.

Like Luanda, Maputo and Dakar, Bissau is seen as a mostly urban multilingual, multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic macrospace, where exchange is accelerated or blocked, facilitated or forced, questioned or criticized based on its different transnational relations. Next, I propose by using the recorded images of the city, a description, albeit succinct, of Bissau as a translation zone.



Figure 1: Aerial image of the Popular National Assembly, Bissau

Source: Albano Barai, March 2020²



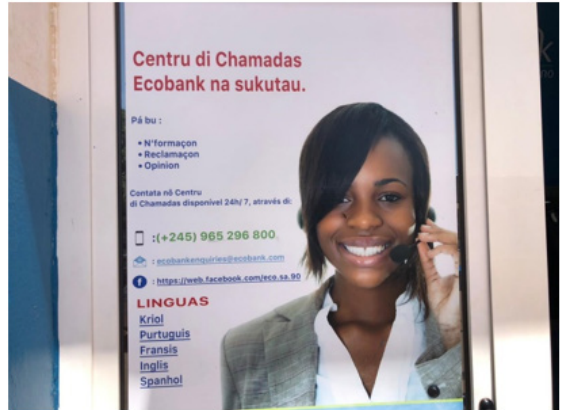
Figure 2: Square, central region of Bissau
Source: own elaboration, November 2020



Entrance to the Port of Bissau



International Bissau Institute Management and Technology School



Advertising from Ecobank Guinea-Bissau

Figure 3: The circulation of languages in Bissau
Source: own elaboration, from February to June 2021



Hotel Hong-da - Center of Bissau Bissau

Located on the west coast of Guinea-Bissau, Bissau is on the banks of the River Geba, close to the Atlantic Ocean. Known as the Autonomous Sector of Bissau (SAD), it is the country's capital and largest city. Made up of a population that mixes national migrants (49.1% of the population) from the eight regions of the national territory and foreign migrants (2.6% of the population) of different nationalities (INE, 2009)³, Bissau has symbolic physical representations such as the Bandim

³ The data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) are questioned by the present research for two explicit factors detected during the fieldwork: 1. The Census reflects the population reality of 2009. Since then, the institute has not promoted or updated the data; 2. With the implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Member States of the African Union (2018), migrants from different West African countries moved to Guinea-Bissau, fleeing political conflicts or seeking new life opportunities. Of the migrants interviewed here, some confided that they acquired Guinean nationality directly, and others stated that they do not have national documentation. In this way, there is a difficulty on the part of the Ministry of the Interior to monitor the entry,

Market, the National Popular Assembly, the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" and other places of linguistic negotiations similar to the Praça, a region located in the center of the city. Such places are part of the city's geographic set and are part of the country's recent cultural history.

In addition to the national language (Portuguese), Guinean Creole (the majority language), Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Mandarin circulate. In this mosaic of languages, the hybrid language Wolof (a mixture of French and Senegalese Creole) is present, albeit in a minority. Multilingualism is present in all spaces of Bissau, configuring itself in a representative linguist landscape, as can be seen in the register of the images above. These are symbolic and physically charged spaces with the activity of translation, where it is possible to listen, observe and analyze how languages circulate, dispute territories and interact, constituting what Michael Cronin and Sherry Simon (2014) define as a translation space. The translation space is at the heart of the relationships between areas and places in the city, understood by places that provide a sharing of human experiences of those who circulate and interact contently in the public and private spaces of Bissau.

BISSAU AS A SPACE FOR TRANSLATION: SCENES OF HUMAN CULTURAL LIFE IN URBAN CONTEXTS

As described so far, the concept of space has a significant degree of relevance to this research. However, reflecting on the term from the perspective of Translation Studies pre-establishes a multidisciplinary dialogue that involves several areas of Social Sciences and Humanities. In addition to the proposal by Cronin and Simon (2014), I try to follow the trails of Milton Santos (1978) and Lúcia Santaella (2007) regarding the vision of space

as a human experience. In Santaella's words:

The space that we experience [...], is the space of the sky, or the sea, or the landscape, or the city seen from a tall building, the space built from the streets, from the buildings seen from the outside or experienced inside, the space of maps, plans, cosmographies and geometries, interstellar spaces, the space possessed by objects or acclaimed by countries or even the space devoted to the gods. Finally, space seems to us to have a variety of forms and relationships between space and place, in which places cannot be separated from their context of experience (SANTAELLA, 2007, p. 164, my emphasis).

Taking into account Santaella's conception, I try to relate the observations and analyses of the urban spaces of Bissau from a geographical reading, however conditioned to the cultural and life histories that were built from the differences, the asymmetries, the social relations and the existing linguistic conflicts around these spaces. As Milton Santos (1978, p. 122) recalls, "Space is a true field of forces whose formation is uneven. This is the reason why spatial evolution does not present itself in the same way everywhere". This asymmetry is the result of a collective praxis that reproduces everyday relationships, becoming increasingly acute in spatial contexts such as those of Bissau. Seen from this perspective, Cronin uses the concept of translation zone in border areas and multilingual cities to extend his spatial conception on the term translation space. For Cronin:

Thinking of the city as a translation zone in the context of globalization helps scholars to reflect on how cities currently function as spaces of translation, how they functioned this way in the past, and how they may evolve in the future. The construction of the global city as a translation zone offers, in conceptual terms, a 'third way': on the one hand, an idea of the city as the coexistence of linguistic solidarity and, on the other hand, the paradigm of assimilation of the "cauldron" of hostility of dominant

languages (CRONIN, 2006, p. 68, apud AGUIAR, p. 91).

The perception of translation spaces brought by Cronin will be expanded later in the article *A cidade como zona de Tradução* (2014), published in partnership with Sherry Simon. For the authors, the concept of translation space is related to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and struggle with each other, sometimes in highly asymmetrical relationships” (CRONIN; SIMON; 2014, p. 121). In this bias, translation is seen as a dialogic tool for critical engagement of these spaces. At the same time, these spaces are seen above all as something situational, which refers to geographic places that refer to a cultural product of the city’s own history. Therefore, the concept of translation space proposed in this research refers to the microspaces of Bissau where there is a warm interaction between languages that circulate, that are heard and recognized, but that do not necessarily dialogue. For them to be able to dialogue, there must be translation practices, that they be translated. Seen this way, when did the proposal to research the translation spaces in Bissau arise?

To answer this question, I turn to the month of October 2020, when I arrived in Bissau to take on the vacancy of Portuguese-speaking reader, a position linked to the Brazilian Readership Program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time, the Brazilian Readership was based at the Universidade Lusófona da Guiné (ULG), the largest private institution of higher education in Guinea-Bissau. When I arrived at ULG, I had the perception that I was in a translation space (CRONIN; SIMON; 2014, p. 121, apud AGUIAR, 2021, p. 91). Seen

this way, the first six months of the Readership served me to observe the circulation of languages at ULG. Then, the Portuguese Language Center, in which I was linked and assumed the coordination, prepared a linguistic mapping of the university. Starting from the question “What mother tongue(s) do you speak?”, we detected the presence of 13 languages in the ULG: Guinean Creole; fula; balanta; mandinga; paper; mandjaku; bijagos; limp; fluff; Portuguese; French; English and Spanish⁴. Although there was a circulation of these languages in the academic space, the Guinean Creole language prevailed over the others.

Still regarding the instrument applied in the linguistic mapping of the ULG, I took the opportunity to add the following questions: What are the three places in Bissau that you consider part of the urban history of the city? Who are the three people you keep in touch with most often, other than those who live in your house, and who like to talk about the places and stories of Bissau? Although the research collaborators were ULG students and the results did not represent a significant percentage of the residents of the capital, the numbers could support the hypothesis that Bissau is a “translation zone” and, therefore, it is constituted by several “spaces of translation” to be searched. Said that,⁵. Among the mapped spaces, I cite: Bandim Market, Popular National Assembly, National Heroes Square, former Cinema of the International Sports Union of Bissau (UDIB), Coimbra Hotel, Nossa Senhora da Candelária Cathedral, Bissau Velho and Porto de Bissau.

Based on the stated concept of translation space, I present below a research clipping on the “Praça dos Heróis Nacionais”, the result of

4 As described in the initial pages of this article, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) registered, in the 2009 census, the presence of 15 languages spoken in the Bissau-Guinean territory, taking into account the languages spoken by national ethnic groups and the Portuguese language, considered the official language of the country.

5 It must be noted that the eight spaces presented in this article reflect the highest numbers of entries and records cited by the censuses during the application of the research instrument. In addition to these spaces, 18 more places were mentioned with little incidence of registration, which characterizes a low circulation of languages.

the first analytical results of fieldwork, carried out from February 2021 to March 2022. During this period, I used the methodology of oral history to develop the research based on interviews, historical documents and photographic records collected during the first stages of the work. Such instruments served to constitute the research corpus and discuss the categories of analysis that would later be incorporated in the reinterpretation of the spaces that constitute the cultural history of the city.

"PRAÇA DOS HERÓIS NACIONAIS": THE TRANSLATION AS VIOLENCE AND COERCION OF URBAN SPACE



Figure 4: "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais"
Society for the Promotion of Guinea Bissau⁶

Located in the central part of the city, "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" is the starting point for any expressions or manifestations of a political, economic, religious, artistic, educational or cultural nature in Bissau. As can be seen in Figure 5 (ESTÁCIO, 2011), "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" is inserted in a geographic space that constitutes a set of public and private institutions historically linked to the political power of Guinea-Bissau.

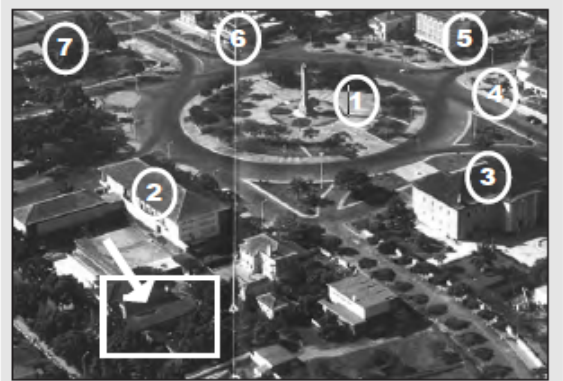


Foto do livro "Guiné-Bissau", de Michel Renandeu - Editions Ebroisse, que, com a devida vênica, reproduzimos.

Vista aérea e parcelar da cidade de Bissau, identificada de acordo com a numeração: (1) antiga Praça do Império; (2) edif. da antiga Associação Comercial e Industrial e Agrícola da Guiné que, após a independência da Guiné-Bissau, acolhe a sede do P.A.I.G.C.; (3) antigo Palácio e residência do Governador da Guiné; (4) edif. da antiga Biblioteca e Museu que, em 1991 acolhia o Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros da G-B e onde, em 2006, estava o Primeiro-ministro, donde ser conhecido por "Primatura"; (5) edif. da TAP; (6) antiga Pastelaria Império; e (7) complexo da União Desportiva e Internacional de Bissau. No quadrado, a casa da "Nha Bijagô", na antiga Av. Cinco de Junho, depois "Mouzinho de Albuquerque", mais tarde "Américo Tomás", aquando da visita do Presidente da República Américo Tomás³⁶⁶ e, desde 20.01.1975, Av. Pansau Na Isna.

Nota: A seta indica a referida "meia-água", já parcialmente destruída.

Figure 5: Description of the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais"

Source: Estácio (2011)

But, after all, how is translation represented in this urban space governed by political interest that only aims to strengthen power relations with the hegemonically dominant classes of Guinean society? In this context, the names given to the square reflect the power of translation as a form of violence and coercion, corroborating the historical erasure and political change imposed by public and private powers interested in maintaining a hegemonic status quo. In this regard, Sherry Simon turns to the cities of Central Europe where political regimes have intervened for decades in the political and linguistic processes of the region, questioning the following:

What types of translation are possible in the fragmented linguistic worlds of Central European cities? For the cities of

⁶ Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/SocietyforthePromotionofGuineaBissau/photos/a.259069984647565/1176541809567040/>. Accessed on: 01 Sep. 2022

Mitteleuropa, translation in the 20th century must, above all, be identified as a form of violence and coercion. Caught between the opposing forces of the Soviet and German empires, the cities of Central Europe were subjected to successive takeovers, and the conflict of both world wars resulted in widespread suffering and death. World War II saw the extinction of Yiddish-speaking culture in Eastern Europe. The very names of these cities reflect the power of translation as erasure and reform (SIMON, 2012, p. 133, apud AGUIAR, p. 154).

In the same way that it happened in some translation spaces in Eastern Europe after the Second World War, "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" changed its name twice between 1934 and 2022. Initially named "Praça do Império", the space was part of a set of works driven by the Portuguese through the project "In the construction of Portugal beyond the sea". From 1934 to 1970, several squares and monuments were built in Bissau, according to data provided by the Information System for Architectural Heritage (SIPA) of the Ministry of Culture of Portugal. In the specific case of our object of analysis, the inauguration of Praça do Império was related to the construction of the commemorative monument to the "Esforço da Raça". In 1934, the first stone for the construction of the monument was laid, a project signed by the architect Ponce de Castro, whose stonework was sent from the city of Porto. The Society for the Promotion of Guinea Bissau describes this monument as follows:

The monument to the effort of the race was inaugurated in 1941. Located in Praça do Império, in front of the government palace, it is a work of Art Deco inspiration, with an unusual design and large-scale monumental dimension in a dense and somewhat general expression. Neo Baroque. A series of curvilinear elements, in stone and copper inlaid, symbolizing the epic of the great

Portuguese navigations, based on a Cross of Christ designed by the engineer José Guedes Quinhones, author of the urban plan for Bissau and supporting a vertical element frontally, in a kind of pillar celebratory. Work by the architect Ponce de Castro, the stone modules were worked and sent from the city of Porto. Its construction took seven years, from the laying of the first stone in 1934.⁷

From 1973, with the declaration of independence of Guinea-Bissau, several squares were renamed or destroyed. Several Portuguese monuments and statues were torn down and removed from public spaces. Thus, the "Praça do Império" was renamed "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" and the monument "Esforço da Raça" was renamed to the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais", having been the only Portuguese monument that remained almost intact in Bissau, only one star was incorporated as a symbol of the struggle for independence. Each change mentioned in the toponymy of the square and the monument represents a transfer of political and linguistic power, projecting a different historical vision for each context in which memories became stratified.

When I insist that translation has the force of coercion, it is because it corroborates in the sense of erasing the writing of local history, of cleaning it out, of renaming urban spaces. With the end of Portuguese rule, the main square of Bissau was renamed according to the new historical period, and the old Portuguese national heroes were disqualified and replaced, as well as new national liberating icons were glorified and perpetuated. With the end of colonial rule, the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" was covered by a new language, a new identity and political configuration. As we will see in the images below, the square has become a space for translation where people of different ethnicities and nationalities exchange views

⁷ Available in: <https://www.facebook.com/SocietyforthePromotionofGuineaBissau/photos/a.259069984647565/1070605390160683/>. Accessed on: 01 Oct. 2022

and experiences, simultaneously establishing new forms of politics and power relations.



Monument to the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais"

Source: Society for the Promotion of Guinea Bissau



Eid al-Fitr commemorative date

Figure 5: Images of the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais"

Source: own elaboration, April 20, 2021

Although the Bissau-Guinean society did not directly participate in the process that resulted in the redefinition of the name of the aforementioned public space, recurrent of a new model of political power increasingly focused on the imposition by the hegemonic agents towards civil society, the population of the Autonomous Sector of Bissau (SAD) continually appropriates the main square in the country, transforming it into a place of

memory (NORA, 1993).

The photographic records in figure 5 refer to May 12, 2021, the commemorative date of Eid al-Fitr, the first day of the month of Shawwal (Islamic Calendar), which marks the end of Ramadan (one-month fast) and the beginning of a feast that breaks the fast. In addition to religious festivals, the SAD community meets every weekend and national holidays around the square. There you can find all ethnicities, speak different languages, listen to different African musical genres and eat from the stalls of street vendors. As pointed out by Nora (1993) and Le Goff (2008), the place of memory and collective memory serve for liberation and not for the servitude of historical processes and identity constructions. In the case of the SAB community, it weaves the cultural memory with each meeting held in this translation space.⁸ which works around the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais".

"PRAÇA DOS HERÓIS NACIONAIS": CULTURAL TRANSLATION AS A FEATURE OF THE LIFE TRAJECTORY

The participation of Demil Sékou, a Guinean born in the city of Gaouai, located in the northern region of Guinea-Conakry, was no accident. Returning to the methodological approach used in this research, I turn to the result of the linguistic mapping applied at ULG in November 2020. As I described at the beginning of this article, I introduced the question "Who are the three people you keep in touch with most often, apart from those who live at home, and who like to talk about the places and stories of Bissau?" This question ended up connecting the research to Demil, as he was mentioned a few times during data collection. In addition, the profile of the selected person coincided with the type of interview that we would use at this

⁸ Originating from the Bissau-Guinean Creole that refers to the street vendor, a person who sells goods wandering through the streets of the urban and rural sectors of Guinea-Bissau.

stage of the research, the interview about the history of the “life trajectory” of the research collaborators. For Freitas:

Life trajectories are more succinct and less detailed testimonies of life history. The option for this type of interview happens when the deponent has little time for the interview, but the researcher considers it important for the research objectives to recover his life trajectory (FREITAS, 2006, p. 23).

Using the ethnographic method of scientific participant observation, I spent several days circulating, observing and interacting with the cell phone credit sellers who work in front of the Orange telecommunications agency, located in “Praça dos Heróis Nacionais”, in order to meet Demil. Even though they had a fixed place to serve their customers, most of them move around the square in search of people arriving by car or passing by. It is no coincidence that they call themselves the Orange dilas. That said, I managed to meet Demil on the third day of emergence. The first interaction we had was uneventful. I mentioned that I would like to interview him and his reaction was immediate: “What do you want to know? I have no time! If I leave here, I don’t win!”

We met on March 5, 2021, around 5 pm in Bissau, on one of the benches in “Praça dos Heróis Nacionais”. It was a nice late afternoon with a cool climate, something rare in Bissau. At that moment, we talked about related topics such as profession, football and music. After the icebreaker, I presented the general lines of the project, explained the degree of importance of the narratives produced by him for the project and informed about the assignment of interview rights. After explanations and removal of doubts, I presented the first work instrument applied to research collaborators: the Interview Form. When I asked him to fill in the document, I ended up feeling uncomfortable on the part

of Demil. Although he spoke well-articulated French, he could not read. For me, it was the first experience lived like this since I started working with ethnolinguistic research. In the end, the situation did not compromise the work, as the methodology was focused on the narrative. The written sources would serve to enrich and contextualize the historical-cultural analyses that are carried out during the methodological procedures, that is, in the stages of transcription, textualization and transcreation of the interviews.

Over the course of 2 months, we had 4 formal meetings, covering 1 hour and 48 minutes of recorded interviews at Praça do Heróis Nacionais and at Padaria do Império, located in front of the square. During this period, we used various stimuli for the development of the narrative, as the time for each interview was short and the working conditions provoked tender reflections on the conduct of the interview. For Freitas (2006), an interview relationship is, first of all, a relationship between different people, with different experiences. The initial ritual of our interview was composed of moments when we evaluated each other mutually, in which the looks, the gestures, the movements, the reactions, in short, each action was observed and detected by both.

Nevertheless, the interview is an “academic ritual – practiced interactively between narrator and narrator – when two or more people are willing to record what they say” (SEAWRIGHT, 2017, p. 203). In oral history, as Meihy well described, “interviews demand a ceremonial that, however simple, transforms the research situation into a social event, albeit an intimate one” (MEIHY; RIBEIRO, 2011, p. 21). In this sense, I resumed the ethnographic method of participation-observation to conduct the ritual of the interview with Demil, following the procedures pre-established by the oral history, but seeking an increasing

approximation with the profile of the people with whom the research collaborator usually deals daily.



Figure 6: Demil in Gaouai, hometown

Source: images provided by the interviewer. Personal archive.

In the first interview, Demil brought a box with several photos from his personal record. Among many, the image above caught my attention. Composed of a regrouping of family photos, they served as a starting point to generate some stimuli for our interaction. I asked how old she was at that moment, if the girl was her girlfriend and her answer mentioned the Muslim culture present in the practice of early marriage; but, without hesitation, Demil Sékou stated:

Yes, she was my girlfriend! Now my wife! These photos represent three different stages of my life in Gaouai, my hometown. My adolescence, my first girlfriend and when I came back last year. On the left is a photo taken by my older brother Kone. He was twelve years old and he was making tea for my grandparents. We all lived in the same house! We were fifteen people, including my maternal grandparents, my parents with four children and my uncles with their 5 children. We were very poor, but we weren't hungry! In the backyard of the house, we had crops

and chickens. Twice a week we went fishing and went to the mosque. The situation got worse when my father passed away! Looks like the family has disintegrated! My uncles appropriated everything we had and my mother got sick. So, I decided to leave the house and leave Diarabi, the girl in the photo.

In the Islamic religion, early marriage is part of a culture rooted in the family heart, passed on from generation to generation. In the case of families residing in rural areas, the phenomenon of early and/or forced marriage is accentuated, according to Ahmed (2010). However, the point of analysis of Demil's narrative is focused on the composition of his collective memory. For Halbwachs (2013), the notion of memory is related to the collective phenomenon, socially constituted from the relationships established between individuals and social groups. In this sense, the phenomenon of remembrance and the location of memories cannot be perceived and analyzed if the social contexts that serve as the basis for the reconstruction of memory are not taken into account.

Demil Sékou narrated that he was born in a village near Kounsiteh, located in the city of Gaouai, in the northern region of Guinea-Conakry. During the interview, he continued describing some moments of his childhood. For him, the memories came from playing with cousins and neighbors and from the first lessons in elementary school, where he spoke French more intensely: "when we were 7-9 years old, we used to leave for school very early. There, the teacher taught the words in French, the language we used in commerce and in the mosque. We learned French as we played and ate. Whenever I see the vegetables, I remember the teacher's French classes. Marie. At home and with colleagues, we used to speak Bambara". Demil's words bring traces of his affective memories linked not only to the image and the text, but considering

other sensory perceptions such as smell and taste. Eli Boscato comments on his blog, in the article "Time and our sensorial memory" (2015), that when we eat something and suddenly remember that it tastes like childhood, we feel an aroma and remember a moment, a place, of a person". In this sense, the smells of childhood seem to be the most striking. Today, Demil rescues the memory of Bambara language and uses it as a resource in the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais": "because they speak Bambara, some colleagues from the Mandinga and Fula ethnicities look for me in the square to buy my credits and exchange some words from our ancestors". As Bergson (2008) describes, we only become aware of the mechanisms of memory experience when they come into play, in the present and with an eye towards the future, referred in the article "Time and our sensorial memory" (2015), that when we eat something and suddenly remember that it tastes like childhood, we feel an aroma and remember a moment, a place, a person". In this sense, the smells of childhood seem to be the most striking. Today, Demil rescues the memory of Bambara language and uses it as a resource in the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais": "because they speak Bambara, some colleagues from the Mandinga and Fula ethnicities look for me in the square to buy my credits and exchange some words from our ancestors". As Bergson (2008) describes, we only become aware of the mechanisms of memory experience when they come into play, in the present and with an eye towards the future. in the article "Time and our sensorial memory" (2015), that when we eat something and suddenly remember that it tastes like childhood, we feel an aroma and remember a moment, a place, a person". In this sense, the smells of childhood seem to be the most striking. Today, Demil rescues the memory of Bambara language and uses it as a resource in the "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais": "because

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my credits and exchange some words from our ancestors”. As Bergson (2008) describes, we only become aware of the mechanisms of memory experience when they come into play, in the present and with an eye towards the future. Demil rescues the memory of the Bambara language and uses it as a resource in the Praça do Heróis Nacionais: “because they speak Bambara, some colleagues from the Mandinga and Fula ethnicities look for me in the square to buy my credits and exchange some words from our ancestors”. As Bergson (2008) describes, we only become aware of the mechanisms of memory experience when they come into play, in the present and with an eye towards the future.



Figure 7: Demil in Bissau, urban scenes from the life of a migrant

Source: own elaboration, March 2021

When reflecting on the way of life in Guinea-Bissau and the process of sociocultural adaptation, the opportunity arose to talk about migratory issues. I asked when he arrived in Bissau and why he chose the country. Demil Sékou replied this way:

It was the best option! With the death of my father, my uncles took me out of school to work in the fields. I started working hard when I was 10! My older brothers had gone to Senegal. At that time, they couldn't take me because I was too small. When I turned 17, I decided to leave home. I thought about meeting my brothers again, but I didn't have

the documents to get to Dakar. So, I took advantage of the contact I had with some truck drivers who worked on the Gaouai-Bissau-Gaouai route and decided to take a ride. Entering Guinea-Bissau was much easier! So, I've been here since June 2017.

Demil Sékou's narrative refers to the classic conception of a migrant in search of opportunity and better living conditions. When confronted with Demil's life story, I resort to the thought of Bhabha (2010) when describing the experiences lived by the migrant characters in the novel *Os Versos Satânicos* (RUSHDIE, 1989), in which, when they left the African continent for the Western world, they were faced with a new way of seeing, dealing and interacting with other cultures. Bhabha enunciates the term cultural translation when referring to the world of experiences of these migrants. However, before contextualizing the world that the migrant must confront in the foreign territory, it is worth reflecting on the process that implies for migrants and refugees to be permanently pushed beyond their translation zone.

When narrating the first months in Bissau, Demil describes: “I arrived straight at the Port of Bissau. There, I could work on loading and unloading the roads without being bothered, as I negotiated directly with Guinean truck drivers in French or Bambara without them requiring the documents”. Mapped as a translation space, the Port of Bissau is recognized in the western part of Africa as the port area that has the lowest customs fees in the region, which makes neighboring countries prefer to send their cargo to Bissau. That said, the Port of Bissau is seen here as a multilingual mosaic. In addition to Guinean Creole and regional African languages, Portuguese, French, English and Spanish can be heard. In this space, power relations guide the life stories of those who circulate there. Let's look at Demil's narrative: “I was working on a Guinean truck when I was introduced to

Mr. Francisco Cá. He had a lot of contact at the Ministry of the Interior and that's how I got my Bissau-Guinean identity document. With the document, I was calmer and looked for new air”.

For three years Demil Sékou has been working at "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais" selling cell phone credits. In this translation space, he acquired friendship and respect from colleagues. As can be seen in the photo on the left of figure 7, the dilas use Orange's advertising as a reference point to attract their customers. Regarding the adaptation to the place, Demil describes: "when I arrived, I made an effort to learn Portuguese, but I realized that none of my colleagues spoke that language. Then a client convinced me that speaking Creole would be more attractive to me." The coexistence of linguistic solidarity allowed Demil to build his in-between place (BHABHA, 2010). In Pym's conception, Bhabha builds his narrative based on three possible alternatives: "either the immigrant remains the same throughout the process, or he integrates into the new culture. Or one or the other" (PYM, 2017, p. 267-8). For Demil, mastering languages-cultures is an act of survival, it is building an in-between place that brings together different sociocultural segments of the Guinean urban scene. As Pym recalls, by bringing the untranslatable character of translations to the life story of this migrant, what was once a point of resistance, a denial of total integration and a desire for survival, today becomes the encounter with his own subjectivity (PYM, 2017).

Finally, in the cultural translation proposed by Bhabha, culture is seen as something open, dynamic, flexible, heterogeneous, performative and hybrid, in which the "survival strategy is both transnational and translational" (BHABHA, 2010, p. 241). According to Souza, "it is transnational because it carries the marks of different

experiences and memories of displacements of origin. It is translational because it requires a re-signification of traditional cultural symbols – such as literature, art, music, rituals, etc. [...]" (SOUZA, 2004, p. 125). When Bhabha, therefore, evokes a transnational culture, he is referring to a place of cultural creation (SIMON, 1995) where the space of negotiation defines subjectivity, the in-between, the performative and the transnational.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to broaden the field of debate proposed by Simon (2013) and Cronin & Simon (2014), this text presented a clipping of the scientific research still in progress, started in February 2021 at ULG. The multilingual, multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic context researched allowed me to analyze how the linguistic relationships established in these translation spaces developed intense and unique historical, cultural meanings. However, some mishaps and challenges were presented in the course of this work, as described below.

Regarding the mishaps, we had a work schedule that included the following steps: 1. Mapping of translation spaces and places of memories in the city; 2. pre-interview (preparation stage in which we had the first contacts with the research collaborators; the explanation of what the project consisted of, the relevance of the collaborators' participation in the process was explained, the questionnaires were prepared interviews and general and individual interview scripts); 3. interview; and 4. post-interview. From this schedule, we managed to advance in the first three stages with only four research collaborators, located in the following translation areas: Mercado Bandim, "Praça dos Heróis Nacionais", former Cinema of the União Desportiva Internacional de Bissau (UDIB) and the Hotel Coimbra.

In the first stage of the research, we did not

have so many problems, as it had brought the legacy of the work implemented in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. Thus, the methodological design was well attuned to the local context and the translation spaces detected were located in the Praça, the central region of the capital, where a large part of the city's commercial and administrative services are concentrated. The difficulty arose in the second stage of the research, precisely at the moment of consolidating the field work group to start the interviews, the research of historical documents and the photographic records. Unlike Brazilian federal universities, which consider teaching, research and extension as an educational and institutional philosophy, in Guinea-Bissau universities are exclusively dedicated to teaching. Scientific research is isolated action and financed by international organizations. In this sense, the working group designated to develop the second stage of the research, consisting of 3 Portuguese-speaking professors, 2 sociology professors and 2 ULG students, ended up not offering more time to execute the entire planned schedule. Thus, the first major weakness of the project emerged: the lack of funding to cover the costs of the team of local collaborators.

But what, after all, were the biggest challenges encountered at this stage of the work? In addition to the difficulties mentioned above, we detected that the 12 research collaborators committed to the project used five different languages: Guinean Creole, Balanta, Paper, Portuguese and French. However, the research group had been limited to me and Prof. Imelson Here. Although the 12 employees speak Creole fluently, they had basic proficiency in Portuguese and, depending on their origin, spoke the languages of their respective ethnicities. From this scenario, we decided to initially interview the collaborators so that we could make a more harmonious linguistic mediation, taking into

account the mastery of languages spoken by both collaborators and researchers and always seeking to value the linguistic repertoires brought by collaborators during the interview sessions. In short, we had four interviews, two in Creole, one written on a paper and one in French.

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge encountered in collecting the data was the process of transcreation of the interviews given in Creole, written on a Paper and written using French languages. To assemble this puzzle, we used the linguistic resources offered by representatives of the Papel ethnic group and immigrants from Guinea-Conakry. With the transcriptions made, we started the textualization and transcreation processes of the interviews, having chosen the Portuguese language to transcribe the results, as observed in the clippings presented during this article.

I conclude this article by stating that the partial results of this research lead to the perception that the translation practices observed during the fieldwork were able to illuminate the nature and effects of linguistic interactions by raising questions related to the processes of resistance and social claims linked to these urban spaces. This way, the hypothesis is confirmed that the spatiality of the urban environment of Bissau is seen as a zone of encounter and conflict, of proximity or distance, mediated by the sociocultural interaction of this African city.

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