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TRANSLATING *AMA: A STORY OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE*: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Abstract

More than 4 million enslaved Africans came to Brazil between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Almost a million of them came from the west coast of sub-Saharan Africa, known as the *Coast of the Mine*, which included present-day Ghana, Benin and Togo. In 2002, a South African engineer named Manu Herbstein, who had relocated to Ghana, decided to write a novel about this violent history. *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* narrates the capture and forced displacement of Ama, a young woman from the Bekpokpam people, through the networks of enslavement that connected West Africa to Brazil. This project interrogates the methodology and cultural imperative of translating this novel into Brazilian Portuguese as part of decolonising storytelling practices and as a means of reinforcing identity connections between Brazil and Ghana.

Keywords: translation, Ama, Atlantic Slave Trade, cultural memory, cultural integration, Portuguese, Venuti

INTRODUCTION

Initially published in English in 2002, *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* is the debut and award-winning novel of South African writer Manu Herbstein. Combining the conventions of historical fiction with the structure of a Bildungsroman, the work reconstructs the late eighteenth-century world

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of the Atlantic slave trade through the experiences of its protagonist. The story revolves around Nandzi, later renamed Ama, a young woman from the Bekpokpam (Konkomba) people in northern modern-day Ghana. Her life was violently upended when the Dagomba captured her, the Ashanti appropriated her as tribute, Europeans purchased her at Elmina Castle and then transported her across the Atlantic to Brazil, where Ama endures enslavement until she dies in old age. In addition to describing the journey of a single woman, the book highlights how African societies are intertwined in systems of tribute, conflict and trade. It also provides in-depth ethnographic information on the various cultures of West Africa's *Coast of the Mine*.

Manu Herbstein, born in 1936 in South Africa, has lived most of his adult life in Ghana and holds Ghanaian citizenship. He developed his career in engineering but only turned to historical fiction close to retirement – a moment when, as Essof (2003) puts it, he transformed himself from a civil engineer into a griot charged with reciting history and weaving tales.

Herbstein witnessed interethnic violence between the Konkomba and Dagomba communities in 1994 while living in northern Ghana. Thence, he looked to historical and anthropological sources, including David Tait's *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, in recognition of his limited knowledge of these conflicts. This research revealed ancient systems of slavery, tribute and conquest that influenced the area's history and later served as the basis for the development of the fictional character Ama. As Herbstein himself explains, "I asked myself what it must have been like to be a Konkomba girl, so captured… As I did so, I created Ama, and she wrote the book for me" (Herbstein, 2006).

His first and award-winning novel, *Ama* (2002), demonstrated extensive historical research combined with a genuine concern for authenticity and respect for the cultures represented. His supporting documentation – including maps, archival materials, cultural glossaries and historical commentary – is accessible through a companion website curated by the author (www.ama.africatoday.com), which serves as an extension of the novel as well as a pedagogical and historiographical resource. The novel's trajectory, which brings Ama's story to a close in Brazil, reflects major patterns of the Atlantic slave trade, offering an opportunity to recover the historical experiences of African-descended Brazilians silenced by state mandates in the 20th century.

Translating *Ama* into Brazilian Portuguese serves to address historical and moral issues, not just as a literary task. The translation recovers lost

family histories and brings back the voices that have often been ignored in national memory. It does this by presenting the story in the language of the largest African diasporic community in the world. The authors are currently working on the translation discussed in this article. As of November 2025, it is almost done with its revision process. The project allows for self-examination of the politics of language and representation. Its dual role as both translator and researcher places it at the intersection of theory and practice.

BRAZIL IN THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

This fiction tells the untold story of many Brazilian ancestors. According to the 2022 Census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 56.1% of Brazilians identify as Black – either as *pardo* (45.3%) or *preto* (10.2%) – indicating that most of the population has African ancestry (IBGE, 2023). In this context, *Ama* should be understood not only as a literary achievement, but also as a politically and pedagogically engaged work that speaks directly to the enduring legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Beyond a narrative of recovery and reparation for forgotten history, the literary form facilitates emotional engagement beyond the scope of historical documentation. As Jill Lepore (2012) asserts, "What fiction offers is the opportunity to feel the emotional truths that history can't always convey" (Lepore, p. 23). This literary dimension can meet a latent demand for the construction of a vivid imaginary around the humanised figure of the lost ancestor, so that the reader's memory, culture, worldview, emotions and dreams can be rescued even if in fiction. Such reading demystifies the binary generalisation that reduces the complexity of colonial slavery to simply victims and perpetrators, through the illustration of a system in which social roles are distributed by an economic logic that transcends individual will.

Against this binary perspective, the multiple layers of this global structure are presented as being supported by the market, displacement, sexual violence, brutality and ideological justification. Translating *Ama* into Brazilian Portuguese is more than a linguistic task of making foreign literature available; it is an act of cultural insurgency and historical reparation against state policies that, for over a century, have contributed to the systematic

marginalisation of Afro-Brazilian descendants. In this context, the translation directly addresses Brazil's history of symbolic removal, which involves the intentional erasure of Afro-descendant presence from archives, textbooks and the official narrative of national formation. The act of translation serves as a form of resistance against this erasure, bringing back voices that have been historically silenced.

The idea of Luso-tropicalism, conceived by Gilberto Freyre in the twentieth century, is important to understanding this erasure. It depicted Portuguese colonialism as racially harmonious and culturally mixed, a view later criticised for obscuring the structural racism and violence of the slave system. Translating *Ama* in Brazil challenges the legacy of Luso-tropicalism by confronting the myth of racial democracy.

Additionally, translating into Brazilian Portuguese instead of European Portuguese is both intentional and political. It connects the text to the language and historical experiences of Afro-Brazilian communities, whose voices the translation seeks to bring back to the forefront.

NARRATIVE OVERVIEW OF AMA

Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* is divided into four parts: Africa, Europeans, The Love of Liberty and America. It follows the journey of an African woman as she faces geographic displacement and struggles to regain her voice. Each section presents a unique challenge for the translator, who must convey this journey in a way that respects its linguistic and ethical dimensions, capturing the trauma and resistance present in the original text.

AFRICA

The novel begins in the eighteenth century among the Bekpokpam people of northern Ghana, a free community where rituals, medicine and spirituality intertwine. Nandzi, a young woman from this tribe, navigates traditions that both protect and limit her choices. She dreams of a love-based marriage rather than one based on obligation. Unfortunately, her desire for independence comes at a high cost. While tending to her sick brother, she is kidnapped by Dagomba warriors. Her lover, Itsho, dies while trying to rescue her, marking the start of her life as Ama – the enslaved.

For the translator, this section requires more than just ethnographic accuracy. It demands the skill to translate an African cosmology without distortion, allowing readers to hear the rhythm of a worldview often misrepresented by colonial language. Words like tribe, fetish or ritual carry a weight of prejudice, and translation needs to dismantle those biases. Translating proverbs, spiritual practices and ritual objects becomes an act of cultural restitution. Here, translation acts as a counter-history – showing that Africa is not merely a background of victimhood, but a landscape of civilisation and thought.

EUROPEANS

After her capture, Ama is taken to Yendi, the capital of the Dagomba kingdom, and later offered as tribute to the Asante Confederacy. In Kumasi, surrounded by royal splendour and sacrificial rites, she witnesses the clash of wealth and horror. When the Asante king dies, many enslaved people are sacrificed for his funeral, a scene deftly depicted by Herbstein with both anthropological accuracy and moral insight. Ama's beauty and intelligence gain her temporary favour at court, but envy and plots soon lead to her being sold to European traders and imprisoned in the stone dungeons of Elmina Castle.

This is where the novel's emotional and ethical core truly emerges. Pieter de Bruyn, the Dutch director of the fort, renames her "Pamela", framing ownership as a form of affection. He treats her kindly, yet this kindness is rooted in power; he calls her beloved while controlling her imprisonment. Their relationship serves as a metaphor for colonial power itself: tenderness built upon oppression.

For the translator, the task is to communicate civility without sanitising it. The exchanges between De Bruyn and Pamela must retain their contradictory nature – words that seem loving but carry the burden of domination. The Portuguese translation must reveal the violence that polite English often conceals.

When De Bruyn dies and his successor nullifies her chance for freedom, assaults her and throws her back into the dungeon, the façade of kindness shatters. In translation, the ethical challenge is to portray brutality without sensationalism, to convey language wounds with dignity. The aim is not to replicate pain, but to prompt the reader to recognise it.

THE LOVE OF LIBERTY

Ama is forced onto a ship ironically named *The Love of Liberty*. There, hundreds are chained in darkness, sharing the same foul air. The space descends into a realm where words turn into groans. "The air she inhaled was foul with unwashed bodies and filth." The translator must keep this line's raw honesty; its bluntness conveys its truth.

On board, Ama conceals her English skills as a means of survival. She observes, learns and remains silent until she can no longer bear it. When she intervenes to defend a girl from assault, her fluency reveals her identity, and Captain Williams recognises her as De Bruyn's former companion. He promises to "protect" her, but his protection is merely another transaction within an economy of exploitation.

Above deck, life goes on in a grotesque imitation of normalcy. The sailors curse, sing and gamble, their voices rising above the groans from below. Most speak in the rough vernacular of the sea – short, functional, lacking embellishment – but one sailor, a young deckhand from Ireland, speaks with a thick accent that even distorts plain words. His speech, partially foreign to his peers, creates an odd echo within the ship's soundscape.

For the translator, this accent presents a delicate ethical dilemma. Rendering it in neutral Portuguese would strip it of its essence; creating an artificial dialect would reduce it to mockery. The chosen solution was to reflect the sailor's speech through subtle regional nuances of Brazilian Portuguese, evoking roughness without pinpointing a specific location. The aim is not to highlight difference through caricature but to help readers sense the foreignness, the gap between his world and Ama's. In this choice, the translator becomes an acoustic mediator, conveying sound across languages.

The noise of the ship forms a hierarchy of languages: the captain's sharp commands, the doctor's impersonal tone, the sailors' coarse banter and the muffled voices of the enslaved. Ama listens intently, mapping the language of her oppressors. Her choice to remain silent is strategic; she understands that speaking could expose her. Yet her silence shatters when the ship's surgeon, impressed by her calmness and intelligence, recruits her as his interpreter among the captives.

This new role is paradoxical. Once stripped of language, Ama becomes a translator – a link between suffering and procedure. Through her, the doctor requests water, food, punishment or mercy. Every word she translates carries the weight of her experiences. For the translator of the novel,

this moment reflects a parallel: Ama's work on *The Love of Liberty* foreshadows the translator's own ethical responsibilities – bridging worlds that should never have been separated, translating what defies expression.

Her translation, like any, is never neutral. When she decides which cries to convey and which to leave out, she engages in the politics of survival. The translator faces the same challenge: what to disclose and what to suppress. Too much literalness can render the text excessively foreign; too much restraint runs the risk of making it overly familiar.

As the voyage progresses, illness spreads. The crew's banter turns to rebellion; their dialect thickens with fear. The accented sailor begins to speak in his sleep, muttering words no one comprehends – his speech isolated within the vast, indifferent sea. In Portuguese, this moment is captured with a subtle regional tone, enough to suggest otherness without mockery. This choice transforms accent into atmosphere – an audible reminder of the diverse voices that once resonated across the Atlantic.

AMERICA

When *The Love of Liberty* docks in the Bay of All Saints, Ama feels an unsettling sense of recognition. The rhythm of the waves, the scent of the land and distant drums all remind her of home. Bahia appears as a transformed Africa, a place where memory has learned to speak a new language.

Ama is sold to a plantation near Salvador, where she must learn to endure once again. Life on the engenho follows a harsh pattern – fieldwork, commands shouted in Portuguese and the constant struggle between obedience and survival. Yet even there, fragments of her former life resurface. She meets Olukoya, a wise babalorixá (spiritual chief), who helps her reconnect with her ancestors, showing her that faith can endure even in captivity.

Ama also works inside the casa-grande, where she occasionally speaks with Alexandre, the master's son. Their conversations are not warm but rather enlightening: through his ignorance and privilege, Ama sees how deeply the system of oppression shapes every word, gesture and silence.

Candomblé becomes Ama's true path to return. During a ceremony, she discovers a meaningful way to honour her roots – a Brazilian faith that integrates different African traditions under new names, worshipping the orixás. According to the 2022 Census, Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions account for about 1% of religious practice in Brazil, with around two million followers. For Ama, each chant and drumbeat feels like

translating her past into the present – a transformation of remembrance into resistance.

On the same plantation, Ama discovers Tomba, one of the captives she recognises from the Atlantic crossing. Their bond, forged through shared suffering and bravery, evolves into companionship and trust. Together, they strive to maintain their dignity amidst oppression. When an overseer assaults Ama, Tomba retaliates by killing the man, inciting a rebellion among the enslaved. Their escape attempt towards a quilombo fails, and Tomba is captured and executed. His death leaves Ama with both sorrow and clarity – the understanding that freedom, even when denied, can persist in memory.

For the translator, this section highlights the challenge of closeness. The Portuguese language is already part of this world; it does not need to be translated into it but rather through it. The task is to capture the essence of survival – the rhythm of Candomblé, the strength of Afro-Brazilian speech and the underlying defiance in Ama's voice. Terms like terreiro, axé, orixá and quilombo are preserved, as they act as living bridges between languages and histories.

In her later years, Ama becomes blind but remains sharp. She begins to dictate her story to her son, Kwame – her voice flowing through his hands, her life finally shaped into words. In this act, Ama becomes both storyteller and translator of her own narrative. Her voice spans the same distance that the translator must bridge: between silence and speech, as well as between the stolen past and the language that restores it.

IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATION FOR THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT AND THE INTEGRATION OF THE MEMORY OF SLAVERY

The absence of post-abolition reparatory measures following the Lei Áurea (Golden Law) of 1888 left millions of formerly enslaved people in a state of social and economic limbo, without land, education or institutional support (Schwarcz, 1993). In 1850, the Lei de Terras (Land Law) restricted black people's access to property, and during the First Republic, this exclusion was amplified when the State sponsored, through land donations, the arrival of European farmers via policies whose slogan was the "whitening" of the population (Skidmore, 1993), further displacing Black Brazilians from the formal labour market and from access to public resources. To exacerbate

injustices, the deliberate burning of slavery-related archives under the order of Minister Rui Barbosa between 1890 and 1891 (Duarte; Scotti; Carvalho Netto, 2015) enacted the erasure of Black genealogies, making it nearly impossible for Afro-Brazilians to trace their ancestral roots. Within this historical context, in which expunction is more than material and is also used as a tool of symbolic segregation, *Ama*'s translation emerges as an irruptive gesture that simultaneously rescues suppressed stories of ancestors and contributes to the Brazilian struggle to expose historical violence.

In fact, a revitalised, ethically driven encounter emerges as the Brazilian Portuguese translation of Herbstein's novel (re)assumes its critical force: it is symbolic and reparative, filling in the historical gaps of the suppressed African heritage. Through the form of fiction, *Ama* returns memory, depth and ontological weight to genealogies that have been hidden or erased by the politics of forgetting and the bureaucratic negligence of institutions. By lending narrative substance to the lives of people who have been relegated to statistical data – and whose experiences were either suppressed or glossed over in the footnotes of colonial historiography – the novel does far more than tell a story; it opens up a space where imagination performs the work that historical documentation cannot. Thus, the translation appears not only as a linguistic transfer, but also as a politically and affectively charged intervention, disrupting hegemonic archives. It relocates subaltern voices to the epistemic centre of Brazil's still-unfolding battle to reclaim and humanise its Afro-descendant past.

In this sense, *Ama* connects strongly with a growing body of African and Afro-diasporic literature that reclaims historical memory through fiction. The moral imperative to restore erased voices can be seen in the works of Conceição Evaristo, whose idea of *escrevivência* turns life experience into shared testimony, and Itamar Vieira Junior, whose Torto Arado (2019) challenges Brazil's ongoing plantation structures. Similarly, on the African and transatlantic side, writers like Chinua Achebe, Maryse Condé, Toni Morrison, Yaa Gyasi and Alain Mabanckou have each, in their own way, reintroduced Black identity and ancestral trauma into the global literary archive. The translation of *Ama*, thus, engages with this continuum, placing Herbstein's Ghanaian Brazilian narrative within a shared network of cultural reparation.

The educational, social and political urgency of this translation, which becomes evident upon examining the historical background, is supported by Brazil's Law No. 10.639/2003, which mandates the inclusion of the

history and culture of Afro-Brazilians and Africa in the national curriculum. This legislation marks a breakthrough in the fight against systemic erasure, acknowledging a resistance to centuries of educational neglect that rendered Africa invisible or represented it as grotesquely caricatured in Brazilian school curricula (Munanga, 2004). However, despite its progressive intent, the implementation of the law has faced persistent challenges, including curricular gaps, a lack of teacher training, a scarcity of culturally responsible materials and, more recently, the resurgence of far-right ideological movements that actively promote historical revisionism (Gomes, 2012). In this context, there is a growing effort to promote in public discourse the relativisation of the brutality of the slave trade and to lay the blame at the feet of the Africans involved, while overlooking the structural racism that continues to flourish based on Brazil's colonial legacy (Nascimento, 2016).

Translating *Ama* in this context is, therefore, not a neutral academic project, but a politically engaged exercise in the production of counter-narratives. An African-centred viewpoint of the novel counters revisionist misrepresentations by directing the focus on the material, spiritual and human costs of enslavement, narrated from within the cultures most affected by it. The translation is hence a key pedagogical device – not just for compliance with the legal requirements established by Law 10.639/2003, but also for equipping young people with the critical literacy to counter the current surge in historical "negationism" (Salgueiro, 2013).

Herbstein's writing provides a fearless account of the various forms of violence that characterised the transatlantic slave trade, presenting physical, psychological and sexual violence as not just episodic happenstance, but as structural instruments of control, dehumanisation and cultural disarticulation. Such systematic translation of African bodies across the Atlantic is represented in turn as a calculated form of reification – a process that reduces and commodifies, intending to dislocate people from their linguistic, spiritual and territorial referents – a mechanism that Saidiya Hartman (1997) identifies as inherent to the project of enslavement. However, even as it exposes this human market machinery, *Ama* refuses to reduce African subjects to passive victims. Instead, the story plunges the reader straight into the social and political organisation, traditional medical knowledge, social rites and cosmologies of a variety of African communities. Comparing scenes of mercantile objectification with nuanced representations of African agency and cultural sophistication, the novel contests reductive

historiographies and foregrounds the intellectual and affective dimensions of pre-colonial African societies – dimensions that the slave trade systemically worked to erase.

Considering these reflections, this study proposes to explore the theoretical, ethical and stylistic complexities inherent in translating *Ama* into Brazilian Portuguese. Rather than limiting itself to a task of semantic transposition, this translation project embodies a critical exercise in cultural mediation, where narrative textures, affective intensities and historically situated worldviews demand inventive and context-sensitive solutions. Accordingly, we strive to retain the emotional intensity, political urgency and cultural nuance of Herbstein's narrative while making his work accessible to readers of Brazilian postcolonial literature. By examining translation strategies, explanations and the ideological positioning necessary to relocate African perspectives within Brazilian contexts, this study evaluates the multiple layers through which the translated work can contribute to educational practices and socio-political debates, as well as foster African literary engagement with Brazil. Above all, we argue that this translation is more than a work of literary dissemination (though it is also that); it is a textual form of reparation – an act of deliberate cultural and pedagogical recovery, inviting Brazilian readers to encounter the submerged voices of their own ancestral past anew.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach followed in this translation project aligns with current ethical and decolonial trends in literary translation studies, particularly in the work of Antoine Berman (1995), Lawrence Venuti (1995, 2008) and Gérard Genette (1997). At the heart of our methodological strategy is the ethical standpoint that it is crucial to preserve the alterity and cultural specificity of the original text while also enriching the Brazilian reader's understanding by providing them with critical tools to engage with historical, linguistic and cosmological references that are alien to their culture.

Berman's ideas shape this project around the notion that every translation is a trial of the foreign. The translator must resist the urge to make the foreign feel familiar (Berman, 1995). His critique of ethnocentric distortion informs our efforts to maintain the unique textures, sounds and values of

the African world that Ama represents. For Berman, ethical translation focuses on "hospitality". It means allowing the other language to coexist with one's own without losing its uniqueness. This concept is key to our method, where we preserve African cosmologies and cultural meanings in their original complexity instead of simplifying them for a Brazilian audience.

Echoing Berman's claim that a translation "cannot be left naked" (Berman, 1995, p. 13) and utilising Genette's paratext as a critical threshold of reception thinking (Genette, 1997), our project developed along two axes: the translation of the narrative text itself and the strategic elaboration of mediating paratexts to guide the reader's engagement with the foreign cultural universe presented by the novel.

In this sense, Genette's theory of the paratext, which includes prefaces, glossaries, footnotes and commentaries, provides an important framework. The paratext acts as a "zone of transition" between the text and the reader. It guides interpretation and helps negotiate cultural meaning. For a work like *Ama*, which lacks much of its African historical and spiritual context in mainstream Brazilian education, these paratextual elements do more than just introduce or explain. They influence how the work is received, transforming reading into a cross-cultural encounter. Translation involved both micro-level linguistic decisions and macro-imaginative and cultural yearnings. First, a close textual reading of Herbstein's account served to identify "significant passages" (Berman, 1995) whose textually dense and culturally resonant qualities warranted particular attention. These covered, inter alia, West African funeral customs, representations of African traditional medicine, linguistic hybridity and female violence in the specific context of the Atlantic slave trade.

In relation to these segments, we assessed not just whether domestication or foreignisation would provide the best means of conserving the ethical and aesthetic power of the source. Still, we also looked to encourage the informed engagement of our readers rather than unthinking readability (Venuti, 1995). A commentary was made registering the decision-making processes, which was annotated, including interpretative obstacles and theoretical reasons behind significant passages. The key novelty of this study, instead, resides in the strategic configuration of the translation's paratextual apparatus. Aware of the pedagogical gap in Brazilian education that silences African history and cultures (which was only partially remedied with Law 10.639/2003), we did not plan the paratext as an accessory, but, essentially in our case, as an epistemic mediation tool.

We, thus, generated two primary paratexts: a critical preface and a comprehensive glossary of cultural allusions. The critical preface, which is located in the front matter of the translated volume, has a multiple overlaying purport, and it is here examined from the following standpoints: (1) introduction of the Brazilian reader to Manu Herbstein's background and his historiographic motivations; (2) situation of the novel in the wider African historical fiction; (3) presentation of the ethical stance and the translation strategies in the current project; and (4) brief historiographical commentary on slavery's afterlife in Brazil in terms of an immediate dialogue with the African story and the Brazilian historical imagery. The glossary, added at the end of the translation, works as an intercultural conduit, and it helps to make the autochthonous specificities more transparent while keeping the integrity of the semantic obscurity. Every glossary entry was elaborated to bring together philological precision with didactic readability, referencing scholarly works in African Studies, Ethnology and Linguistics.

Besides the main paratextual features, the use of footnotes has productively gone beyond mere lexical explanation in this translation. Based on Salgueiro's (2013) notion of translation notes as epistemic mediation tools, as well as Genette's (1997) concept of paratext as an interpretive threshold, the notes were devised to draw attention to an ethical and decolonial reading process. In order not to disrupt the flow of the narrative, each footnote served to place African perspectives centre stage, to reframe culturally specific categories and to provoke Brazilian readers to critically re-signify their historical and ideological understandings of the text.

In keeping with Lefevere's (2007) notion of translation as rewriting, we viewed this not merely as a linguistic exercise, but as a conscious performance of cultural relocation and narrative redemption. The translation itself is considered an independent literary text – a product of the contemporary struggle in Brazil for racial justice and historical recognition. By mobilising the paratexts as critical tools, we not only filled in linguistic and cultural gaps, but also engaged in a dialogical relationship with the Brazilian reader, one that was more politically informed and affectively involved.

In Herbstein's narrative, the use of profanity and vulgar expressions is common in passages that convey psychological and physical degradation. Terms like "shit", "bastard" and "rapist" punctuate the acts of linguistic violence during physical abuse, highlighting the emotional authenticity that characters exhibit throughout the plot.

Due to the historical and sociolinguistic context peculiar to Brazilian Portuguese, the translation of these terms required a conscious effort to maintain the emotional weight and adhere to the rules of the target language. According to Berman's (2012) tenet of ethically responsible literalness and Lefevere's (2007) functional analysis, we made a concerted effort to choose target-language equivalents not only in meaning and significance, but also in tone.

For example:

Original	Translation
"Oh, shit," said De Bruyn and went to the window.	*"Ô merda," disse De Bruyn e foi até a janela*.
"You shit. You shit-arse. You rapist. You bastard. You pig. You filthy pig," she exploded.	*"Seu bosta. Seu cuzão. Seu estuprador. Seu desgraçado. Seu porco. Seu porco imundo," ela explodiu.*

Here, terms like "bosta" and "cuzão" were selected not only for their semantic correspondence, but also for their colloquial intensity within Brazilian Portuguese.

Herbstein's novel is polyphonic and takes advantage of much variation in dialect and variation in sociolect to define character and "shift power". Sailors, colonial administrators, African captors and enslaved Africans all speak in voices that are inflected by their geography, social standing and ethnicity.

Relying on Lefevere's (2007) concept of sociolect translation, we chose a Brazilian Portuguese that could mimic various social differences. This meant converting spoken Irish slang used by sailors into spoken slang from rural Brazil and translating informal English into an equivalent for Brazilian Portuguese.

Examples include:

Original	Translation
"What, missus, so eager t'be let out of yer prison?"	*"O quê, muié, cê tá doidinha pra sortar os presos?"*
"That'll larn yer fer yer imprudence. Take that fer yer cheek. An' take that on yer cheek."	*"Cê vai aprendê que cê foi imprudente. Toma essa na sua cara. E toma mais essa na sua cara."*

Such sociolect translation strategies preserve linguistic colour, as well as hierarchies of class, power and race that the original work so carefully constructs.

An additional layer of complexity emerged from Herbstein's narrative technique of focalised omniscience, in which the narrator, while remaining third person, consistently modulates perspective according to the consciousness of the focalising character in each chapter or section. This modulation is linguistically marked in the source text through vocabulary choices that align with the worldview and socio-cultural position of the character in focus.

A clear example appears in the shifting lexical field used to describe enslaved people. As the narrative moves through different characters' perspectives – beginning with Damba, the Dagomba soldier – Herbstein's word choices subtly reflect an emerging moral awareness. At first, Damba views the people he captures with the practical detachment of a warrior and kidnapper. However, when he witnesses Nandzi weeping at her lover Itsho's funeral – a funeral he quietly permits out of a sense of mercy – his outlook begins to change. This developing empathy is echoed in the narrator's increasing use of the term "captives" rather than "slaves", signalling Damba's growing recognition of their humanity and the emotional cost of treating them as mere spoils of war.

Conversely, in passages where the focus shifts to Abdulai, a senior Asante war captain and slaver, the terminology used is quite different. When the focus is on Abdulai, the word "slaves" is frequently used by the narrator, embodying his tactical and mercantile perspective of individuals. To Abdulai, prisoners are immediately dehumanised to nothing more than goods, judged only for their commercial value and ability to raise his social status in the Asante Empire. This lexical contrast is also not random: it is ideologically charged. It works to reflect the ethical and epistemic approaches held by the two speakers as they evaluate the slave trade.

For the Brazilian Portuguese translation, this narratological subtlety required meticulous lexical calibration. Following both the ethical imperatives of Berman (2012) and the narratological standards articulated by Bal (1997), we adopted a dual-lexicon strategy: "cativos" was consistently used in passages mediated through Damba's point of view, preserving his evolving humanisation of the prisoners; "escravos", on the other hand, was reserved for sections focalised through Abdulai, where the language of dehumanisation remains dominant and unapologetic.

This decision was not only linguistic; it was ethic-political, in line with the broader commitment to reproducing the heteroglossia and polycentric discourse of the original text (Bakhtin, 1981). By retaining these focalisation-sensitive lexical shifts, the translation upholds Herbstein's conscious resistance to a single story in the flattening mould of enslavement. It exposes the Brazilian reader to the novel's structure of moral dissonance and perspectival multiplicity.

To overlook such nuances would risk eliminating the ethical shades and narrative layers that Herbstein so carefully builds and would threaten the tenuous historiological and affective nuance of the novel. With this narratological proficiency, the translation does not simply render the story; it rebuilds the narrative structure of empathy, complicity and moral awakening that Ama has at the centre of the literary and political programme that his novel represents.

The tenacity of the narrative's description of the material facets of enslavement – excreta, wounds, sexual violence – has forced us to formulate a stable policy on readings of bodily functions as well as degeneration. In passages about the fetid stink of the Elmina dungeons or the stifling heat of the slave ship, we circumvented euphemism in favour of a more direct, visceral and compelling analogy.

Original	Translation
The air she inhaled was pervaded with a foul smell of unwashed bodies and old shit and piss.	*O ar que ela inalou estava impregnado de um cheiro podre de corpos sujos, de fezes e urina acumuladas.*

Following Venuti (1995), this is a resistant translation strategy, wherein discomfort is intentionally preserved to foreground the violence of the historical experience.

Aligned with Genette's (1997) theory of paratextual thresholds, we designed an extensive system of translator's notes to accompany the Portuguese edition. However, rather than serving as mere explanatory glosses, these notes function as critical interventions intended to decolonise reader perception and dismantle residual Eurocentric interpretative frameworks. Key examples include:

– *Note on the Adinkra Symbol Nkiynkyn*: Pronounced "In-chin-tchim". Adinkra symbols are a collection of visual icons created by the

Asante and Gyaman peoples of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Each symbol carries a specific meaning, often related to philosophical concepts, traditional wisdom, aspects of life or the environment. Traditionally, these symbols are used on textiles, ceramics, logos and advertising, conveying messages through stylised graphic forms.

– *Note on the Tidan Na (Earth Priest)*: Ritual title for the Utindaan – priest of the land among the Bekpokpam. The spiritual heir of the first inhabitant of the territory, the Tindan Na not only presides over agricultural, funeral and reconciliation rites, but also acts as a mediator between the living and the spirits of the land (kiting). His role confers legitimacy on the occupation and use of the land, and he is the true holder of sacred power over it, regardless of political or military hierarchies.
– *Note on the Harmattan*: Harmattan is a dry, dusty wind that blows from the Sahara between December and March, enveloping the landscape in a pale mist of unsettling beauty. Although fascinating, it dries out the air, aggravates respiratory problems and, in weakened bodies, favours infections and epidemics such as meningitis.
– *Note on Bekpokpam Traditional Incisions*: The medicinal incisions performed by the Bekpokpam served as a preventive measure against various diseases, especially the convulsive ones. (Tasin, 2018, p. 112)

This type of paratextual system, shaped by Salgueiro's (2013) theory of cultural translation notes, achieves two goals: the recontextualisation that allows Brazilian readers to participate in African systems of knowledge and the filling of the historiographic gaps in African heritage hidden under the cloak of Brazilian culture.

CONCLUSION

The translation of *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* into Brazilian Portuguese is much more than a mere technical interlinguistic exchange. It is in the sui generis tradition of the greatest memoirs of restitution, justice and insurgence of cultural memory. Situated within translation, postcolonial and Afro-Brazilian studies, this work pursues, in the spirit of Venuti (1995), "resistant translation practice" – an unyielding commitment to the

refusal of the domestication or neutralisation of the cultural and affective alterity of the original text.

In order to produce a translation that works not merely as a literary product, but as a space for dialogic, critical historical reflection, one that would be guided by a methodology strongly anchored in the ethical imperatives defined by Berman (2012), as well as the insights on the narratological prompted by Bal (1997) and the considerations on the paratext provided by Genette (1997). The balance of every lexical selection, narratorial nuance and footnoted gloss had to ensure the political, emotional and epistemic coherence of Herbstein's novel.

The incorporation of cunningly expanded paratexts – glossaries, translator's notes and an introductory essay – and their attendant pedagogical potential indeed answers directly to the curricular imperatives of Law No. 10.639/2003 while contributing to the national ongoing struggle for the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian histories in Brazil's school curriculum and culture.

In centring African views of enslavement and engaging with the violence inherent to colonial history, this translation aims to contribute to the collective process of decolonial reparation. In amplifying a silenced voice and placing Afro-diasporic narratives back at the centre of Brazil's imaginary, the Brazilian Portuguese edition of Ama is not simply a translation; it is an intervention.

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