

Holanda, Sérgio Buarque de. *Roots of Brazil*. Trans. G. Harvey Summ. Ed. Daniel E. Colón. Foreword by Pedro Meira Monteiro. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

Finally! A chorus of Luso-Brazilianist scholars doubtlessly exclaimed this upon hearing that Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's classic work of national interpretation, *Raízes do Brasil* (1936), would at long last be published in English. *Raízes* stands alongside Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (1902) and Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-grande & senzala* (1933)—both of which, incidentally, have been available in English for decades—as one of Brazil's most enduring historical reflections. Unlike da Cunha and Freyre's verbose, heavily footnoted studies, Buarque's *Raízes* is, in Antonio Candido's words, “[a] short, discreet book” marked by “a parsimonious elegance and a rigor of composition” (xxii). In short, *Raízes* is a true *essay*, an inviting and accessible introduction to Brazil's Iberian and colonial “roots” that can be digested in one or two extended sittings, or read chapter-by-chapter, an hour or so at a time. It is closer in spirit, composition, and length to Paulo Prado's *Retrato do Brasil* (1928) or Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950)—which Silviano Santiago compared to *Raízes* in his *As raízes e o labirinto da América Latina* (2006)—than it is to da Cunha or Freyre's monumental works.

Raízes do Brasil has been enormously influential in conditioning how Brazilians—and Brazilianists—understand the country. As Pedro Meira Monteiro observes in his Foreword, *Raízes* “is one of those works that shapes its readers' imagination ... serving as a mirror in which, while seeking their own image, Brazilian readers have also found their own attitudes and inclinations” (ix). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine discussions about Brazil and *brasilidade* without Buarque's “cordial man,” his analysis of the country's competing “work” and “adventure” ethics, or his melancholic observation that “we [Brazilians] remain exiles in our own land” (1). For reasons of influence, and for the text's interpretive and stylistic virtues, it is baffling that it has taken this long for *Raízes* to be published in English. Daniel E. Colón, Pedro Meira Monteiro, Scott Mainwaring, and Notre Dame University Press deserve a great deal of credit for finally bringing this fundamental text to an English-speaking audience.

Raízes do Brasil is well served by G. Harvey Summ's fluid and readable translation, which Colón completed and revised. As Colón observes in his "Note to the Translation," "[t]ranslation is an imperfect science and a precarious art" (xxxviii). In confronting terms in which the author invests a great deal of significance, translators make word choices that highlight certain shades of meaning while obscuring others. This occurs occasionally in *Roots of Brazil*. In mentioning some of these instances, I do not question the overall quality of Summ and Colón's work, but rather hope to contribute to a discussion on the translation (linguistic and otherwise) of Buarque's text that has effectively been initiated with the publication of *Roots of Brazil* in English.

In the book's first chapter, "European Frontiers," Buarque introduces the notion of Iberian personalism, which he contends manifests itself in Brazil and Spanish-speaking Latin America in "the unique weakness of all forms of organization and of all associations, which imply solidarity and order among people" (3). In introducing this argument, Buarque writes of a "cultura da personalidade, que parece constituir o traço mais decisivo na evolução da gente hispânica" (Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009 32). Summ renders Buarque's "cultura da personalidade" as "cult of the personality" (2). For me, this is a bit too suggestive of a "cult of personality" surrounding a charismatic politician or celebrity. As Alfredo Bosi reminds us in *Dialética da colonização* (1992), the term *culture* is invested with interrelated meanings that together convey a broad range of lived experience, marked by material, expressive, and religious dimensions. In other words, *culture* entails, but is not limited to, the idea of *cult*. I might, therefore, have translated "cultura da personalidade" as "culture of personality."

One paragraph later, Buarque introduces a term that for Silviano Santiago is key to understanding *Raízes*: "uma palavra bem hispânica—'sobranceria'—palavra que indica inicialmente a idéia de superação" (32). Summ renders this as "a very Spanish word—*sobranceria*—a word that initially indicates the idea of arrogance" (3). This translation falls short on two counts. First, the term *sobranceria* is more common in Portuguese than in Spanish. It seems more exact to translate "hispânica" as "Hispanic," given that Buarque writes *sobranceria* according to Portuguese orthography (in Spanish it would be rendered

sobrançeria), and that Portuguese is, in point of fact, as “Hispanic” a language as Castilian. Second, while *sobrançeria* suggests arrogance, it also implies self-sufficiency, resistance, stubbornness, and especially the “autonomy of each person” (2). Give all this, and the broadly dialectical structure of Buarque’s argument, which is nicely mirrored in his own word choice (*superação*), I consider the Hegelian “overcoming” preferable to Summ’s “arrogance.”

Finally, Summ’s handling of the possessive pronoun *nosso/nossa* is inconsistent. While apparently trivial, this is in fact a significant point. In “European Frontiers,” Summ renders Buarque’s “*nossa América do Sul*” as “South America,” which fails to convey Buarque’s *identification* of Brazil with an overarching South American civilization that is rooted in Portuguese and Spanish colonization, and opposed to a North American “other” (*Raízes* 39; *Roots* 10). In making this broad distinction, Buarque follows Spanish American thinkers like José Enrique Rodó, as both Pedro Meira Monteiro and I have argued (see, among other titles by Monteiro, “As raízes do Brasil no espelho de Próspero.” *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, 2009, n. 83: 159-82; Newcomb, *Nossa and Nuestra América: Inter-American Dialogues*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011). This problem reappears in Chapter 2, “Work and Adventure,” in which Summ translates Buarque’s “*nossa América*”—which recalls José Martí—as “the lands of America” (*Raízes* 43; *Roots* 10).

These observations aside, G. Harvey Summ’s translation, along with Daniel E. Colón’s revisions, effectively bring Buarque’s elegant but conversational Portuguese to English. Luso-Brazilianist scholars are well served by *Roots of Brazil*, which can be productively assigned in any number of humanities and social sciences courses, and recommended to colleagues, friends, and students curious about Brazil and eager to get a master’s perspective.

Robert Patrick Newcomb
University of California, Davis