

Literary translation: Between intellectual cooperation and cultural diplomacy

The *Ibero-American collection* (1930-1940)

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Intellectual cooperation and cultural diplomacy are generally addressed by historians of international relations and by scholars working in global history. In this contribution, I approach them from a cultural but socially oriented perspective. I examine the history of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) with a focus on the translation activities it promoted and the functions the latter fulfilled in society. To this end, I first present the main activities that configured the IIIC's translation policy. Then I delve into the political dimensions of intellectual cooperation, many of which shaped the translation projects developed by this institution in turn. Finally, I focus on a specific translation project, namely, the *Ibero-American Collection*. Its editorial history is reconstructed to show the ways this collection fulfilled functions that surpassed its foundational purpose, including unplanned functions related to Latin American regional cooperation and to the promotion of a Latin American regional identity.

Keywords: translation history, cultural diplomacy, intellectual cooperation, Latin American literatures, International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, translation policy, global literary space

1. Introduction

Intellectual cooperation and cultural diplomacy are generally addressed by historians of international relations and by scholars working in global history. In this article, I approach them from a cultural but socially oriented perspective and with a focus on translation as a form of intervention in international cultural relations. Given the proximity to the political sphere, I argue that this object of study can shed light on aspects of translation flows and cultural transfer processes that are not always made explicit in the literary and cultural domain.



In this contribution, I examine the history of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) with a focus on the translation activities it promoted and the functions these fulfilled in society, especially as spaces in which the territorial imagination can be (re)shaped. To this end, I first present the main activities that configured the IIIC's translation policy. I then delve into the political dimensions of intellectual cooperation, many of which shaped the translation projects developed by this institution in turn. Finally, I narrow my object of study by focusing on a specific translation project, namely, the *Ibero-American Collection*, and I address the reasons why it can be read as a space in which Latin American national and regional identities were (re)negotiated.

2. Reconstructing the IIIC's interventions in the field of translation

The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (1926–1946) was an international intergovernmental organization that has often been referred to as UNESCO's precursor (Renoliet 1999). It was created after the First World War, alongside several organizations promoted by the League of Nations, in order to foster mutual understanding and promote world peace. The IIIC's work included intervention in various cultural and intellectual subfields, including education, archeology, science, cinema and radio. Literature and translation were also considered means to promote understanding between peoples, as reflected by the existence of a specialized section of the IIIC called the Section for Literary Relations. Presided over by Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral in its first years of existence, and then by Franco-Brazilian writer and journalist Dominique Braga from 1928 onward, the Section devoted generous attention to translation. In this article, I will discuss some aspects related to the IIIC's translation policy by mainly drawing on two archives: the IIIC's archive, currently hosted by UNESCO in Paris, and the fonds of the League of Nations Secretariat, preserved in the UN Archive in Geneva.¹

The IIIC's translation policy (Meylaerts 2011) can be separated into its internal translation practices and its forms of intervention in the field of translation. From an internal perspective, the IIIC used both French and English, the two official languages of the League of Nations in documents and correspondence. In other words, the IIIC's daily work extensively relied on the use of French as a lingua franca. It would nevertheless be oversimplifying and misleading to state that

1. Both archives have been (partially) digitized and are available online. They can be accessed through the following links: <https://atom.archives.unesco.org/> and <https://archives.ungeneva.org/>

this aspect made translation unnecessary. Translation tasks were indeed fulfilled by secretaries or stenographers who spoke several languages. However, the prevalence of a lingua franca is certainly one of the factors explaining why organizing translation in the IIIC's daily affairs was seldom necessary, and it is also precisely one of the reasons why France financed the founding of the IIIC and pushed for it to be set in Paris (Renoliet 1999).

If translation is not considered as part of the IIIC's internal services, but as an intellectual activity, it can be said that the IIIC made significant efforts to intervene in the domain of translation externally. The first steps in designing a program of activity in this domain were taken in 1926, when, with the assistance of French writer and translator Valéry Larbaud, the IIIC organized several meetings of experts in translation and conducted an extensive enquiry on the state of translation in various countries. These meetings and rounds of consultation produced a myriad of intervention proposals that may be divided in two categories: first, measures aiming at creating or improving what we may call "cultural infrastructures" and, second, activities devoted to promoting specific translation projects. By "cultural infrastructures" I am referring to measures of systemic scope, that is, measures intended to benefit a range of actors in diverse contexts. In this group, we might include proposals to improve knowledge of existing translations through the publication of lists of available translations in different languages, as well as proposals to improve knowledge between actors interested in translation and foreign literature by publishing directories with the names and addresses of translators, publishers, journalists, and literary critics. Measures to improve the quality of translations, such as the creation of translation awards, the promotion of translation criticism in magazines, and the foundation of an international organization specialized in translation, can also be included in this group, as can the study of the legal problems that translation faced. On the other hand, as the promoter of specific translation projects, the IIIC considered the publication of several collections of translations, including classics, contemporary literature addressed to the general public, and regional literature.

As can be grasped in the above list, the IIIC's proposals in the field of translation comprise a wide, ambitious, and innovative program of intervention, especially if we take into account their contemporary "working horizon," to borrow the concept employed by Chevrel and Masson (2012, 12): in the late 1920s and early 1930s, full translations, partial translations and adaptations were not clearly distinguished, and publishing houses and libraries did not systematically distinguish translations from originals (even today, we sometimes lack proper distinctions). In this framework, the IIIC aimed to improve perceptions of translation as well as the working conditions of translators. Several measures proposed to improve the quality of translations were quite innovative for the early 1930s:

instead of discussing translation criticism in terms of the reception of literary works, the IIC saw criticism as a means to improve the quality of translations. Thus, their intent was to shine a light on, discuss, and problematize specific translation choices (For the different meanings attributed to translation criticism and its historic development, see Paloposki 2012). The proposal to create a translation award is also telling of its innovation, especially if considered that most awards for translations did not appear in France until the 1980s, with the exception of the Halpérine-Kaminsky Award, created in 1937 (Banoun, Poulin, and Chevrel 2019, 186–187). Not all of the IIC's ambitious proposals were approved, although their discussion is relevant to reconstructing the processes by which translation was institutionalized as a domain of policymaking. The design and implementation of the IIC's translation policy was the result of conflict and collaboration between intellectual concerns and politico-administrative ones, which included political and economic factors as well as strategic considerations related to the IIC's desired forms of agency (Carbó-Catalan and Meylaerts 2022) and its rivalry with its associated body in Geneva, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (Grandjean 2018, 2022). Among the measures that were implemented, we may highlight the creation of the *Index Translationum* as the first international bibliography or list of translations (Banoun and Poulin 2019, 47–54; Intrator 2019, 121–126), the study of the legal aspects of translation that would saliently contribute to subsequent revisions of the Berne Convention (Löhr 2011), and the publication of two literary collections, the *Ibero-American Collection* (Dumont 2013, 184–193; Pita González 2019a, 15–20) and the *Japanese Collection* (Millet 2014; Saikawa 2014, 208–238).

Justification for the IIC's early interest in translation lies in the fact that translation emerged as an ideal field of intervention. On the one hand, translation is an activity that involves the interests of several actors in the literary domain. The author may want to avoid appropriations of his or her work, both in terms of modifying its content or in terms of other parties obtaining economic benefits; the publisher needs to be able to know whether it is possible to publish a foreign work and under which conditions; and the translator has the right to see his or her work acknowledged and remunerated. As an organization devoted to the intellectual field as a whole, the IIC was better suited than professional associations of publishers or authors to take into account all interests involved. This included also considering the interests of those professionals who were not yet organized, as was the case with translators. The presence of authors, publishers, professors, and other intellectual professions within the so-called committee of experts in translation, whose members acted as consultants for the Section for Literary Relations, attests to the network of interests involved in translation. Among its members were Valéry Larbaud (French writer and translator), Marike Stiernstedt (Swedish

writer), Gabriela Mistral (Chilean poet and diplomat), Anton Kippenberg (German publisher), Enrique Díez Canedo (Spanish writer, translator, and literary critic), André Levinson (Russian journalist, writer, and drama critic), Serge Eliséeff (scholar and Japanologist), and János Hankiss (Hungarian professor of literature).

On the other hand, translation was an activity that could hardly be managed by national institutions:

Tant qu'on en demeure aux questions d'édition et de diffusion du livre publié dans la langue du pays sur le territoire même de l'état, les organismes nationaux seront toujours mieux outillés qu'un appareil international, pour exercer une action efficace, adaptée au caractère des institutions autochtones » *lais cet ensemble de lois, d'usages et de corporations se voit infirmé dès qu'il prétend sauvegarder les œuvres du pays au-delà des frontières. (...). D'où la nécessité évidente d'une action concertée, d'une entente internationale.*²

(“Report to the Sub-Commission on Arts and Letters on the Activities of the Literary Relations Section of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation” 1927, R1050/13C/60353/24804, UNOG)

While the adoption of the Berne Convention in 1886 was an important milestone in the international harmonization of copyright law, its gaps, as well as translation-importing countries' reluctance to adopt it, hampered the consolidation of a shared standard. An international organization like the IIIC, with its international composition and clout, could mediate between countries and propose measures that would facilitate translation in different directions as well as the development of shared values and practices.

Promoting translation was a way of pursuing the overarching goal of fostering mutual understanding, but it also served the purpose of consolidating the IIIC as a key actor in international cultural relations. Such actions helped dispel claims of its alleged Eurocentrism and reinforced its international character, which was key to its legitimacy and survival. While the effects that translation activities had in relation to the IIIC's statutory goal of fostering mutual understanding are difficult to measure, the IIIC's translation activities clearly affected the institutionalization of translation and the consolidation of translation and literature as fields of public

2. English translation: “As far as we stick to the question of the publication and circulation of books published in a country's language within the territory of that same state, national organizations will always be better equipped than an international body to exercise an effective action, one that is adapted to the character of autochthonous institutions, but these laws, practices and corporations find themselves invalidated as soon as they intend to protect intellectual works beyond their borders. (...) Hence the obvious need for concerted action, for international agreement.” All gloss translations appearing in the footnotes are by the author.

intervention. As I shall show, they also can be related to translation's entanglement in processes of collective identity building.

3. Nationalism and internationalism, or the self-interested uses of cooperation

Although it had been created with idealist aims, the IIIC was deeply entangled with national strategies of foreign action – its very founding was sponsored by the French government, which aimed to keep the organization under its control and use it to advance French influence, or *rayonnement* (Renoliet 1999, 40–72). Given the legitimacy derived from its international status, throughout its some twenty years of existence, the IIIC functioned as a platform for international sociability and international visibility in turn, that is, as a space where countries could intervene in the way their counterparts perceived them and their cultures. Intellectual cooperation as performed in the framework of interwar internationalism was indeed a form of associating one's own image with values such as cosmopolitanism and pacifism, which operated, drawing on Sapiro's work, as positive axiological operators (Sapiro 2020, 484). Depending on one's position in the international system, different images could be conveyed: becoming the promoters of intellectual cooperation, several European countries identified themselves as cosmopolitan rather than imperialist countries and projected this image abroad. In other cases, stressing one's cosmopolitanism was a way to tackle not imperialism, but one's perceived provincialism, peripherality or invisibility in the global order. This symbolic dimension would problematize a simplistic contraposition between cooperation and diplomacy, where internationalism or cooperation would be associated with ideas of disinterest and the common good, and diplomacy with self-interest. As suggested by Laqua, “il faut étudier la coopération intellectuelle sans perdre de vue l'intérêt des États à utiliser à leurs propres fins ses mécanismes transnationaux” (2011b, 55).³

To understand the way cooperation and diplomacy relate to each other, we must also consider the different temporalities implied in the internationalist discourse: intellectual cooperation was a means to achieve an international imagined community, or an international peaceful society, *in the future*, as suggested by the IIIC's interest in youth education. At the time, however, the world was divided into many nationalisms. Competition has historically been an important “trigger for modernization processes” (Nagel and Werron 2021, 111) and a unifying force

3. English translation: “One must study intellectual cooperation without losing sight of states' interest in using their transnational mechanisms for their own purposes.”

for an international space (Sapiro 2009). While the interwar period is sometimes intuitively associated with internationalism and idealist projects, the activities developed around the League of Nations and its technical bodies were tainted with competition for power and prestige. As Glenda Sluga shows (2013), internationalism and nationalism were not mutually exclusive, but intertwined. The intellectual and the cultural fields were no exception. The IIIC became an arena in which specific forms of competition unfolded. For instance, the *Index Translationum*, which was created in 1932, first included Germany, Spain, the United States, France, Great Britain, and Italy as trial countries (Naravane 1999; Banoun and Poulin 2019). The process of geographic enlargement that led it to cover 14 countries by 1940 was a process of competition for representation that can be illustrated with one example: several debates took place regarding whether Switzerland should have its own section within the *Index*, given that the German Association of Publishers, the Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler, which provided the IIIC with bibliographic information regarding Germany, also included Swiss works published in German. What was initially a technical matter regarding whether political or linguistic criteria should be employed in the elaboration of the *Index* quickly acquired political connotations as the linguistic criterion risked denying representation to member states. For instance, during the *Index*'s preparatory stages, it was quickly gleaned that the publication of translation statistics could shape prestige (especially for dominant source languages) and perceptions of openness toward and interest in other cultures (among dominant target languages).

With these examples, we can see how translation statistics can shape territorial imagination. As I show in the next section, the editorial history of translations, as well as their circulation, offer further insights regarding the role of translation in the construction of collectivities.

4. *The Ibero-American Collection: Beyond literary analysis*

While it must be acknowledged that the IIIC has often been considered a Eurocentric organization, several non-European regions and countries took part in the initiatives and events it promoted, with ongoing debates about their national and regional identities unfolding therein. Latin America stood among the regions that most saliently participated in the League of Nations' intellectual cooperation. Several events organized by the IIIC can be read from the perspective of the debates around Latin American identity, or from the perspective of specific national strategies to reposition individual countries in the world order. For example, we may look to the celebration of the seventh *Entretien* organized by the IIIC,

which took place in Buenos Aires in September 1936, and which coincided with the celebration of PEN's congress just days before. This, in turn, prompted the Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes's *Notas sobre la Inteligencia Americana* (Notes on Latin American Intelligence) (Colombi 2011) and his conversations with the Argentine philosopher Francisco Romero and the Dominican intellectual Pedro Henríquez Ureña, registered as *La Constelación Americana. Conversaciones de tres amigos* (The American Constellation. Conversations Between Three Friends) (Altamirano 2021). The same can be said of the Second Conference on National Committees of Intellectual Cooperation, held in Paris in 1937, where the Brazilian Miguel Ozorio de Almeida and the Argentine Antonio Aíta respectively addressed inter-American cooperation as well as the cooperation between the American continent and Europe (Fólica and Ikoff 2020). Finally, when the German occupation of France interrupted the IIC's activities, a meeting was held in Havana to discuss the creation of an International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, espousing the idea of America as taking the torch of (European) civilization.

In the field of translation, Latin America stood out for the publication of the *Ibero-American Collection*, which, as I shall show, led to several efforts at region-building and reflections upon Latin American cultural identity. The *Ibero-American Collection* was a literary collection comprising 12 volumes published in French translation by the IIC. Published between 1930 to 1940, it assembled Latin American classics or representative works, including both fiction (mostly novels) and non-fiction (historical volumes, folklore, and essays), all by writers who were no longer alive at the time of publication, which is implicit in the "classic" category. Among them, we may note *Choix de lettres, discours et proclamations* (Selected Letters, Speeches and Proclamations) by Simón Bolívar, *Facundo* by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and *América* by José Martí.⁴

While the publication of several volumes that were already in progress was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, there are other reasons why more volumes were not published in the decade from 1930 to 1940. First, the search for funds was an onerous process that involved negotiations between the IIC, government representatives, intellectual figures, and, in some cases, local fundraising committees. Second, the Publishing Committee did not organize consistently, especially in its early years, as described in a 1931 report by Gonzague de Reynold.⁵ Third, factors related to the economic context, such as the devaluation of the French franc and increases in the price of paper, made previous cost

4. For a complete list of published and unpublished works, see Pita González 2019a, 270–272.

5. "International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. Executive Committee. Fourth Session. Held in Geneva, 13 July 1931. Point VII of the Agenda: Ibero-American Collection. Note by the Secretary of the Committee," File of Latin American Classics – Publication of a series by the International Institute Intellectual Co-operation, R2237/5B/5053/5053, UNOG.

estimates insufficient, thus triggering new, burdensome negotiations with actors whose economic situations could have changed in the meantime. A fourth factor pertains to the difficulties of the translation process. The best example is the translation of *Pages choisies* (Selected Pages) by Joaquim Nabuco, undertaken in 1929 by Jean Duriau. His translation, however, was rejected by the Publishing Committee for quality reasons, and the project was entrusted to the Belgian writer Viktor Orban in 1932. Although he had been appointed after a translation test, Orban's work was not considered completely satisfactory either. The last straw in the cursed history of *Pages choisies* was that the original Orban had used for the translation (which was the only one the Institute had), was lost in the post in May 1932. Within this framework, and so as not to alter the collection plan, in 1933 the Publishing Committee started turning the cogs for the translation of another Brazilian volume, *Dom Casmurro* by Joaquim Machado de Assis. Since the Publishing Committee wanted to alternate the countries published to avoid feuds among states, the publication of Nabuco's work was delayed until 1940, when it was published with the specification that it was "Translated by Viktor Orban and Mathilde Pomès." While not all volumes faced the same ill-fated history, the work of the Publishing Committee suffered from the same problem it sought to tackle, that is, from the subpar organization of translation as a professional activity.

Now, if we frame the publication of the collection within the contemporary French literary field, its publication can be related to the latter's growing openness to foreign literature. Indeed, literary collections specialized in translation started being published in France in the 1920s (Sapiro 2019, 62–64). Molloy (1972) described the 1920–1940 period as the dawn of a literary dialogue between France and Latin American countries thanks to an increase in the number of Latin American translations, the publication of the first anthologies of Latin American literature, and the first manifestations of literary criticism focused on Latin American literature no longer penned by Latin American emigrants alone, but by French intellectuals. In this sense, the collection can be considered a sign of the times. However, the fact that the publication of the *Ibero-American Collection* was carried out by an intergovernmental organization points to the weight of the political in its editorial history. The idea to publish the collection was brought up in a meeting of Latin American national representatives, held at the IIIC in March 1927, by Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral. In parallel, the Section for Literary Relations had been participating in conversations to design a program of activity in the field of translation and proposals to publish literary collections had been discussed. The publication of literary collections among the IIIC's translation activities was not approved immediately, but Mistral cunningly used her double position as Chilean national delegate and Section Chief to consolidate this project in the interest of Latin American cultures and countries.

As first chief of the Section for Literary Relations and founder of the collection, Mistral was a key member of its Publishing Committee,⁶ the organ that managed the various stages of the life cycle of the publications, which included fundraising, text selection, translation, selection of forewords and other paratexts, and distribution. The correspondence preserved in the IIIC's archives reveals that Mistral's influence within the Committee lasted long after 1928, when she ceased her activities as head of the Section. Her successor, the Franco-Brazilian Dominique Braga, was in regular contact with her to ask her for guidance, make use of her personal and professional contacts, and confirm his decisions with her. She was also a key actor wielding the Ibero-American Collection and its Publishing Committee to consolidate inter-American relations.

Just as the national structured the IIIC, the *Ibero-American Collection* was also organized on a national basis: each volume was financed by a single country, and forewords and other paratexts accompanying the text were preferably authored by intellectuals from that country. The Ibero-American character of the collection was thus the result of a juxtaposition of national volumes resulting from the cooperation between each country and the IIIC itself, lacking any direct cooperation between Latin American countries per se. Competition was used to promote the participation of more countries, as illustrated by the fact that economic contributions from other countries were systematically mentioned to obtain funds from newcomers joining the collection later on. However, given Mistral's efforts to build a Latin American identity and cultural memory (Núñez Pacheco 2009; Cormick 2012), she used her influence in the Publishing Committee to oppose national (and nationalistic) dynamics and promote Latin American direct cooperation: she was the tireless promoter of co-financed volumes, which transgressed the structuring principle of one volume per country. For instance, she worked to publish a volume devoted to Rubén Darío, co-funded mainly by Nicaragua, Colombia, and Argentina, with minor contributions from other Latin American countries, and she also tried to promote folklore volumes of two or three countries. In the same spirit, she managed to make the most out of her absences from the Publishing Committee's meetings, sometimes using them as

6. The committee was chaired by Swiss writer and historian Gonzague De Reynold. Dominique Braga, a French-Brazilian writer who led the Literary Section after Mistral, acted as secretary general of the collection. With different degrees of implication, the following actors took part in this committee or collaborated in some way: Gabriela Mistral (Chile), Víctor Andrés Belaúnde (Peru), Gonzalo Zaldumbide (Ecuador), the brothers Ventura and Francisco García Calderón (Peru), and Mariano Brull (Cuba). Among French the actors were Georges Le Gentil and Ernest Martinenche (both professors at Sorbonne University), Paul Rivet (Musée de l'Homme) and Raymond Ronze (historian specialized in French and Latin American university relations).

occasions to collaborate with other intellectuals regardless of their origins, thus prioritizing intellectual criteria over political prerogatives, which would have any absent member substituted by an intellectual from the same country. On other occasions, she used her absences to address political jealousies and give representation to those countries that begrudged their lack of influence in the Publishing Committee. This was the case of Argentina, with Mistral's absence giving way to the Argentine Manuel Ugarte's participation, rather than that of a fellow Chilean.

Mistral's efforts appear all the more salient if considered through what was then the dominant conception on Latin America in the League's circles. The collection's name is quite telling: it refers to Ibero-America, despite there being no Spanish or Portuguese authors in the collection, with its foundational event comprising a meeting of *Latin* American representatives. In the IIIC's documentation and correspondence, one can quickly glean the terminological heterogeneity in reference to the collectivity being represented, with terms such as "Latin American," "Hispano-American," and "Ibero-American" being used complementarily, while Latin American intellectuals commonly used the possessive pronoun ("our America," "our literatures," and so on) as well. Such terminological heterogeneity has to be read as conveying different representations of an emerging regional identity and, especially, different views regarding the relations among Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas, and between Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil. They also conveyed contrasting views regarding their relationships with Spain and Portugal as former colonial empires, on the acceptance or rejection of European culture as constitutive of Latin American culture (without denying Latin America's originality), and, last but not least, on the region's relations with the United States. In the case of this literary collection, no document has been found explicitly addressing the reasons behind the choice of the term 'Ibero-American' for the collection's title, although this conversation must have taken place, especially considering the fact that, in one of the first reports regarding this collection, authored by Spanish critic Enrique Díez Canedo, he suggested calling it "Collection of *Hispano-American* Classics."⁷ The ultimate choice seems to be explained by what has been called the "thinking in civilizations" that characterized the IIIC and the League of Nations (Laqua 2011a, 231). According to Laqua, one of the limitations in intellectual cooperation as practiced by the League of Nations was its attachment to categories such as race and empire, as well as its stressing of shared heritage, which greatly informed its understanding of "civilizations." Such shared heritage is also explicit, for example, in some of the texts published by the

7. Enrique Díez Canedo, "Annex 2. Report by Enrique Díez Canedo on the Collection of Latin American Classics", 18 May 1927, 13C/60353/24804, UNOG.

IIIC and in the writing penned by key figures,⁸ where America is considered in terms of its relationship to Europe and the ways it could help Europe in the context of the moral crisis that followed the First World War, but not as an autonomous space in its own right. This same derivative conception can be gleaned in the collection's imprint, a ship sailing from East to West, with clearly imperial, if not colonial, resonance.

The translations published within the *Ibero-American Collection* also reflect the (re)negotiation of power relations between Latin American countries and former colonial empires, especially through several struggles between Latin American actors who wished to take ownership of the region's historical narratives and representatives of former colonial empires who wanted to maintain a certain level of control over said narratives. For example, when the Publishing Committee decided to publish a volume titled *Le Diamant au Brésil*, professor Georges Le Gentil voiced the difficult situation he found himself in as he was held responsible for the book's content:

Je viens d'apprendre indirectement que les Portugais ont très mal accueilli le livre de Joaquim Felicio dos Santos sur les Diamants au Brésil et qu'ils me rendent responsable, dans une certaine mesure, de la publication d'un ouvrage qui renferme des appréciations sévères sur le régime colonial.⁹

(Letter from Georges Le Gentil to Dominique Braga, April 18th, 1932, IICI-F-VI-3 (1), UNESCO)

As a result of such complaints, Le Gentil requested that a Brazilian member be present in the Publishing Committee to avoid future misunderstandings, thus making explicit the strategic relevance of the experts' origins. It ought to be mentioned as well that Le Gentil's statement was written despite the fact that Dominique Braga and Eliseu Montarroyos, Brazil's national delegate to the IIIC, had "tâché d'éviter que ne soient traduits les passages pouvant éveiller des susceptibilités portugaises."¹⁰ French professor Ernest Martinenche had also voiced similar reservations, preferring to leave certain decisions regarding book selection to national representatives. As reflected in the previous quotations, publications were carefully monitored by member states so as not to counter national interests

8. See, for example, the volume *Europe-Amérique* edited by the IIIC in 1936, as well as some articles by Paul Valéry (1962, 329).

9. English translation: "I recently came to know that the Portuguese did not receive Joaquim Felicio dos Santos's book on Diamonds in Brazil at all well, and that they have found me responsible, to an extent, for publishing a work that contains severe opinions on colonial rule."

10. English translation: "(...) tried to avoid the translation of the fragments that could stir Portuguese sensitivities." Letter from Dominique Braga to Georges Le Gentil, 22 April 1932, IICI-F-VI-3 (1), UNESCO.

or tarnish the state's image. The control to which professors of foreign literature and foreign languages were submitted reflects the difficulties of reconciling specialized or scientific criteria with the fact that such actors were considered, to some extent, unofficial diplomats or relays points of foreign representation. Another example illustrating the issues regarding Latin American countries and former colonial empires lies in the discussions surrounding the publication of a collection on Latin American history and ethnography known as the "Levillier proposal" (Pita González 2019b). Mistral feared that the contents could be influenced by political factors: according to her, in the context of the *Ibero-American Collection*, Spain had tried to control historical Hispano-American volumes to the extent that it mutilated Bolívar's letters. She thus recommended that the IIC rely on "French, German, and North-American historians" for this collection "to make sure veracity is the main criterion used, and not the criterion of negation and prejudice."¹¹

Finally, the circulation of these translations also illustrates the ways in which translations can shape territorial imagination. In her pioneering analysis of the circulation of Hispano-American literature in France, Sylvia Molloy qualified the *Ibero-American Collection* as a "partial failure" (1972, 105) when commenting on the following quotation from Jean-Jacques Mayoux, the last director of the IIC:

Le résultat pratique a été de faire plaisir à l'Amérique latine, ou plus exactement aux milieux intellectuels de ces pays, ce qui est bel et bien. Mais le public auquel ces livres étaient destinés n'a pas mordu, ce qui est tout de même fâcheux.¹²

(quoted in Molloy 1972, 105)

Indeed, Mayoux commented negatively on the outcomes of the *Ibero-American Collection*, given that it sold more copies in Latin America than in France even though it was a collection of translations from Spanish into French. Instead of adopting a normative perspective, I would like to discuss some of the factors that played a critical part in the reception of the *Ibero-American Collection* from an analytical standpoint.

First, we may note the elitism underpinning the IIC's cultural policy. Its view on the role of the intellectual as a guide for society and its production of fine editions must be considered in relation to the IIC's need to legitimize its own existence and mission. The ways in which distribution was promoted and

11. Letter from Gabriela Mistral to Dominique Braga, 26 November 1934, IICI-F-VI-2, UNESCO.

12. English translation: "The practical result has been to please Latin America, or more precisely, the intellectual milieus of these countries, which is fine and good. But the public to which these books were destined did not bite, which is unfortunate."

the collectives involved need to be problematized too. Some time would need to pass by before UNESCO reoriented its policy toward the masses, as its interest in guaranteeing the affordability and widespread circulation of its *Collection of Representative Works* illustrates (Intrator 2019, 105–136). While UNESCO took note of the critiques of elitism and Eurocentrism directed at its prewar precursor, this did not shield it from receiving criticism itself.

Second, we must interrogate the effects of the IIIC's framing of the collection itself and, more precisely, the collection's heteronomous position in the literary space. While it would be interesting to quantify its effective circulation in future research, and eventually reconstruct the reception of the *Ibero-American Collection* in Latin American periodicals, I would like to tackle the circulation of translations in the source culture. The fact that France housed the intended target culture, but that effective circulation took place in Latin America, compels us to problematize the notions of source and target culture, the underlying binary representation of translation (Cussel 2021), and, more broadly, to open the door to multidirectional dynamics in our analyses. It also invites us to interrogate the functions fulfilled by books and literary translations in the domain of cultural diplomacy. The Latin American circulation of the *Ibero-American Collection* reflects an interest in translations in terms of symbolic construction, especially as a means to boost the self-esteem of a cultural group that recognized itself as the object of interest of the Other. Put plainly, the Ibero-American Collection was proof that Paris and an international intellectual community recognized and valued Latin American intellectual production. In this framework, we may conjecture that these translations functioned more as book-objects among Latin American intellectuals than as bolsters for certain ideas. In other words, their social meaning did not emanate from their content as much as from their publication's features. With publication in French by an international organization, translation functioned as a form of consecration of a cultural group. However, given the intergovernmental character of the institution, the cultural and the political were conflated. The IIIC operated by mechanically applying the dominant category structuring the international political system, the state, to the organization of the intellectual space. Such an operation equated political maps with cultural ones and, by doing so, blurred the distinction between cultural and political representation. Each volume thus simultaneously represented and consecrated a culture, but also the country each volume represented by metonymy – and, by extension, the region the collection was designed to represent. From the symbolic recognition of a literary or cultural collectivity, we shift to the consolidation of national and regional collectivities.

5. Conclusions

The case study reconstructed in this article can be read from different perspectives: as offering a new chapter in the history of translation, as proposing a historical and materialist perspective on the emergence of a global literary system, or as bringing the cultural perspective to the history of international relations and global history. My goal has been to illustrate the ways in which translations promoted by international organizations can become spaces where symbolic power relations are renegotiated, and territorial imaginations (re)shaped. The editorial history of the *Ibero-American Collection* sheds light on the contrasting motivations of the actors involved, on the connections between scholars of foreign literature and actors and forms of foreign representation, as well as on the multi-directional effects of translations, which compels us to problematize key notions that structure our understanding of literary circulation, such as source and target cultures. The translation activities promoted by the IIC reinforced different forms of collectivity, both professional and political, and fulfilled complementary symbolic functions, in this case, redefining one's own image in cosmopolitan terms, pursuing the development of an internationalist order (understood as pacifist in the framework of liberal internationalism), and consolidating national and regional identities.

This contribution illustrates the significance of historicizing translation flows, the actors promoting them, and their motivations, in order to obtain a more nuanced and complete comprehension of cultural-transfer phenomena. As Mistral's activities show, top-down approaches to policymaking require nuance. More flexible articulations between agent and structure would help reassert policymaking's relational character, the range of factors and interests that shape it, and the existence of unplanned effects. Finally, this article also problematizes the categories employed in the organization and categorization of intellectual life while seeking to offer food for thought regarding the ever-tense interactions between the intellectual and the political.

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