

Humor and the framing of the public sphere and public opinion in Portugal (1797-1834)

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Summary

This paper discusses the evolution of the concept of public opinion and sustains that humor, as it appears in Portuguese periodicals from 1797 to the end of the civil war (1834), contributed to the framing of the public sphere and of public opinion in Portugal.

Keywords: Humor studies, public opinion, public sphere, periodical press, history of ideas

Abstract

In his *Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment* (1784), Kant puts forward his belief that the vocation to think freely, which humankind is endowed with, is bound to make sure that “the public use of reason” will at last act “even on the fundamental principles of government and the state [will] find it agreeable to treat man – who is now more than a machine – in accord with his dignity”. The critical reference to La Mettrie (1747), by opposing the machine to human dignity, will echo, in the dawn of the 20th century, in Bergson’s attempt to explain humor. Besides being exclusive to humans, humor is also a social phenomenon. Freud (1905) assures that pleasure originated by humor is collective, it results from a “social process”: jokes need an audience, a “third party”, in order to work and have fun. Assuming humor as a social and cultural phenomenon, this paper intends to sustain that it played a role in the framing of the public sphere and of public opinion in Portugal during the transition from Absolute Monarchy to Liberalism.

The search for the conditions which made possible the critical exercise of sociability is at the root of the creation of the public sphere in the sense developed by Habermas (1962), whose perspective, however, has been questioned by those who point

out the alleged idealism of the concept – as opposed, for example, to Bakhtin (1970), whose work stresses diversity and pluralism. This notwithstanding, the concept of public sphere is crucial to the building of public opinion, which is, in turn, indissoluble from the principle of publicity, as demonstrated by Bobbio (1985).

This paper discusses the historical evolution of the concept of public opinion from Ancient Greece *doxa*, through Machiavelli's "humors" (1532), the origin of the expression in Montaigne (1580) and the contributions of Hobbes (1651), Locke (1690), Swift (1729), Rousseau (1762) or Hume (1777), up to the reflection of Lippman (1922) and Bourdieu's critique (1984). It maintains that humor, as it appears in Portuguese printed periodicals from 1797 (when *Almocreve de Petas* was published for the first time) to the end of the civil war (1834) – especially in those edited by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa but also in *O Piolho Viajante*, by António Manuel Policarpo da Silva, or in the ones written by José Agostinho de Macedo, as well as in a political "elite minded" periodical such as *Correio Braziliense* –, contributed to the framing of the public sphere and of public opinion in Portugal.

Introduction

In the last paragraph of his *Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment* (1784), and as a corollary to Horace's challenge he proposed as a motto to Enlightenment – *Sapere Aude!* ("Dare to know!") –, Kant puts forward his belief that the "germ" freed by nature to endow humankind with the vocation to think freely is bound to make sure that "the public use of reason" will at last act "even on the fundamental principles of government and the state [will] find it agreeable to treat man – who is now more than a machine – in accord with his dignity"¹. The critical reference to La Mettrie², by opposing the machine vs. human dignity, will echo, in the dawn of the 20th century, in Bergson's attempt to explain humor³. Besides being exclusive to humans⁴, far from any machine or mechanical device, humor is also a social phenomenon⁵. Freud assures that pleasure

¹ Kant, I. (1984). Resposta à pergunta: O que são as Luzes?, *Cultura*, 3, 168.

² La Mettrie, J. O. (1865). *L'homme-machine*, Paris: Frédéric Henry, <http://archive.org/stream/lhommemachine00lame#page/n7/mode/2up>.

³ Bergson, H. (1991). *O Riso*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, pp. 29 and 84-85.

⁴ Bergson, H. (1991), p. 14.

⁵ Bergson, H. (1991), p. 17.

originated by humor is collective, it results from a “social process”⁶: jokes need an audience, a “third party”, in order to work and have fun⁷.

What does one talk about when one talks about humor? For practical purposes, humor is considered here in the widest sense of comic amusement, including joke, funny story, jest, wit, ridicule, spoonerism, pun, farce, foolery, facetious remark, playful exchange, irony or satire – “any message intended to produce a smile or a laugh”⁸. Positing humor as a social and cultural phenomenon⁹, this paper intends to sustain that it played a role in the framing of the public sphere and of public opinion in Portugal during the transition from Absolute Monarchy to Liberalism. A time when it became especially conspicuous – and deafening loud – “man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage”¹⁰, by way of Kant's threefold concern¹¹, above all the “key concept of sociability”¹².

Searching the conditions needed in order to critically exercising such sociability is in the roots of the creation of the public sphere, as Habermas put it - “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public”¹³ -, as a free space indispensable for the “public use of reason” referred by Kant¹⁴: “A public sphere as a functional element in the public realm posed the issue of *pouvoir* as such. *Public debate was supposed to transform voluntas into a ratio that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all.*”¹⁵ However, Habermas's view has been challenged by recent studies criticizing the idealism of the concept, which supposes the existence of a space that allegedly transcends the socio-economic

⁶ Freud, S. (2005). *Le mot d'esprit et sa relation à l'inconscient*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 257.

⁷ Freud, S. (2005), p. 266.

⁸ Bremmer, J., & Roodenburg, H. (Eds.). (1997). *A Cultural History of Humour*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1.

⁹ Le Goff, J. (1997). Laughter in the Middle Ages. In J. Bremmer & H. Roodenburg (Eds.). *A Cultural History of Humour* (pp. 40-53). Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁰ Kant, I. (1984), p. 161.

¹¹ Pereira, J. E. (1984). Kant e a «Resposta à pergunta: O que são as Luzes?». *Cultura*, 3, 155.

¹² Pereira, J. E. (1984), 155.

¹³ Habermas, J. (1993). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, p. 27, http://pages.uoregon.edu/koopman/courses_readings/phil123-net/publicness/habermas_structural_trans_pub_sphere.pdf. See also Habermas, J. (1974). The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article, *New German Critique*, 3, 49-55.

¹⁴ Kant, I. (1984), pp. 162-163.

¹⁵ Habermas, J. (1993), pp. 82-83.

contradictions among those taking part in it¹⁶ – as opposed to Bakhtin, for example, whose standpoint stresses diversity and pluralism¹⁷.

Albeit, the concept of public sphere is crucial for the framing of public opinion¹⁸, which in turn is inseparable from the principle of publicity – the scrutiny and control of the actions of those in charge of political power –, according to Bobbio, as opposed to the *arcana imperii* theory¹⁹.

1. From doxa to public opinion, by way of Machiavelli's humors

Humor makes its entrance in politics with Machiavelli, who uses the word in the sense²⁰ given to it by the Greeks and Romans in Ancient Times and kept until the Modern Age: "... en toute cité on trouve ces deux humeurs opposées; c'est que le peuple n'aime point à être commandé ni opprimé des plus gros. Et les gros ont envie de commander et opprimer le peuple. Et de ces deux appétits opposés naît dans les villes un de ces trois effets: ou principauté ou liberté ou license"²¹.

The earliest references to opinion date from the fifth century B.C., when Parmenides, in his *On Nature*, distinguished the "way of opinion" from the "way of truth"²².

According to Plato, opinion (*doxa*) stands in the middle ground between science and ignorance²³. Aristotle gives the example of comedy to explain what he means by ridicule: "Comedy is, as we have said, a representation of inferior people, not indeed in

¹⁶ Gardiner, M. E. (2004). Wild Publics and Grotesque Symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere. *The Sociological Review*, 52, 42-43, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00472.x>.

¹⁷ Bakhtin, M. (1970). *L'oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ Alves, J. A. S. (2000). *A Opinião Pública em Portugal (1780-1820)*. Lisboa: Editora UAL, pp. 22-24. See also Alves, J. A. S. (2005). *O poder da comunicação*. Lisboa: Casa das Letras, pp. 99-147, and Alves, J. A. S. (2009). *Nas origens do periodismo moderno: Cartas a Orestes*. Coimbra: MinervaCoimbra, pp. 13-96.

¹⁹ Bobbio, N. (2007). *Estado, Governo e Sociedade. Para uma teoria geral da política*. São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra, p. 30.

²⁰ Goldberg, B. (1999). A Genealogy of the Ridiculous: From 'Humours' to Humour. *Outlines. Critical Social Studies*, 1, 61-63. See also Gendrel, B. & Moran, P. (2007). Humour: Panorama de la notion. In *Fabula*. Paris: École Normale Supérieure. http://www.fabula.org/atelier.php?Humour%3A_panorama_de_la_notion.

²¹ Machiavelli, N. (1980). *Le Prince*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 74.

²² Guthrie, W. K. C. (1965). *A History of Greek Philosophy Volume II: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²³ Plato (2008). *A República*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, pp. 263-264.

the full sense of the word bad, but the laughable is a species of the base or ugly. It consists on some blunder or ugliness that does not cause pain or disaster, an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful."²⁴

The sentence *Vox populi, vox Dei*, quoted through the centuries in order to justify common opinion, was written in 798 by Alcuin of York in a letter to Charlemagne – meaning exactly the opposite: urging the Frankish emperor to ignore those who claim that the voice of the people is the voice of God, since “the turbulence of the multitude is always close to folly”²⁵. As for Thomas Aquinas, he warns that what is considered good in the opinion of wise and spiritual men may not be so considered in the opinion of many, at least of those who are dominated by carnal inclinations²⁶.

The expression “public opinion” appears in an essay by Montaigne dealing with habits and usages, pointing out that it is not advisable to change light-heartedly a law which is in force²⁷.

Hobbes identifies conscience with opinion. Defining opinion as private opinion²⁸, he expands the concept in order to encompass faith or judgment, as well as beliefs²⁹.

As for Locke, in the euphoria set forth by the Glorious Revolution of 1688, he goes a step further towards framing the concept of public opinion by defining the “law of opinion or reputation” as a “philosophical law” designed to measure virtue and vice.³⁰

In 1729, Jonathan Swift stirred the British public opinion with his *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People from being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Public*.³¹ The solution presented by this pamphlet for the poverty in Ireland was using the children of the poor

²⁴ Aristotle (1932). *Poetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0056&3Asection%3D1499>.

²⁵ “*Nec audiendi qui solent dicere, Vox populi, vox Dei, quum tumultuositas vulgi semper insaniae proxima sit.*”, see Knowles, E. M. (1999). *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 10.

²⁶ Aquinas, T. (2000). *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 14, art. 1, ad. 3, Raleigh, North Carolina: Hayes Barton Press, pp. 1190-1191, <http://books.google.pt/books?id=Rco1YIFj8EC&q=Question+14#v=snippet&q=Question%2014&f=false>.

²⁷ Montaigne, M. (1965) *Essais*, Livre I. Paris: Gallimard, p. 185.

²⁸ Hobbes, T. (1981). *Leviathan*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p. 165.

²⁹ Habermas, J. (1993), p. 91.

³⁰ Locke, J. (1690). *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, vol. I. London: Printed by Eliz. Holt for Thomas Basset, p. 213, http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1477354&pageno=213.

³¹ Swift, J. (1729). *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People from being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Publick*. Dublin: S. Harding.

as “delicious and nutritious food”: stewed, roasted, baked or boiled. The satire was taken literally by many readers who, unable to decode the abundant paralipsis, allegory or irony in the text, came forward to denounce the author as a supporter of infanticide and cannibalism.

As a matter of fact, Swift was “literalizing the metaphor”³², anticipating what came to be known as “ethnic cleansing”³³.

“Public opinion” reappears in French in 1744, in a letter addressed by Rousseau to his namesake Jean-Jacques Amelot de Chaillou, Foreign minister of Louis XV, whereupon he apologizes for telling the Venetian noble Chevalier d’Erizzo that “public opinion” considered him partial to Austria³⁴. Eighteen years later, in his *Social Contract*, Rousseau stresses that one should not count on public opinion in order to reform the ways of a society, a task that must be performed by the laws³⁵.

As for Hume, opinion is nothing less than a “wonder”, the very foundation of government: “Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we inquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find, that, as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular.”³⁶

The Enlightenment and the American Revolution provided a new stamina to the concept: in 1777, Burke considered “general opinion” as “the vehicle and organ of legislative omnipotence”³⁷. From “general opinion” to “public opinion” is a short step: “The opinion of the public that put its reason to use is no longer just opinion; it did not arise from mere inclination but from private reflection upon public affairs and from their public discussion.... Soon thereafter Burke’s ‘general opinion’, parallel with

³² Boyle, F. (2007). Jonathan Swift. In R. Quintero (Ed.). *A Companion to Satire Ancient and Modern*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 196-211.

³³ Boyle, F. (2007), pp. 202-203.

³⁴ Noelle-Neumann, E. (1993). *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 80.

³⁵ Rousseau, J.-J. (1966). *Du contrat social*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, p. 168.

³⁶ Hume, D. (1777). Essay IV. Of the First Principles of Government. In *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, vol.1. London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, p. 33, <http://www.davidhume.org/texts/etv1.html>.

³⁷ Burke, E. Letter On the Affairs of America. In Habermas (1993), p. 94, note 19.

‘public spirit’, received the name ‘public opinion’: the Oxford Dictionary dates the first documentation to 1781.”³⁸

Whereas Kant uses the concept of “publicity” to signify an institutional space mediating between politics and morals but able to “force politics ‘to bend a knee before morals’”³⁹, Hegel downgrades public opinion as a demonstration of one’s judgment on one’s self-interest, something that ought to be despised by the “great man” aspiring to grandeur⁴⁰.

The crisis of public opinion, exposed by both Marxist and liberal criticism, became more and more apparent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, crossing totalitarian experiences and the coming of new mass communication technologies. Between the two world wars, Walter Lippman warned about the dangers of propaganda and the “manufacture of consent”⁴¹.

The turning of the twentieth to the twenty-first century witnessed the growth of oligarchic domination of the spaces where public opinion is formed while the efficiency of the manipulation of the said public opinion by those in charge of the political power, closely connected with the economic and financial power, increased. Bourdieu’s conclusion on the subject, exposing the “consensus effect”, sounds as much as provocation today as it did forty years ago: “Public opinion does not exist”⁴².

Nonetheless, it does. Hence the call to the setup of “institutional spaces intended to make freedom of expression effective, by means of an actual participation of citizens in the framing of public opinion”⁴³.

2. *Humor and the public sphere*

Castigat ridendo mores or, as it also occurs, *Ridendo castigat mores*, is a saying more modern than its Latin sounds. It is attributed to the French playwright Jean de

³⁸ Burke, E. Letter On the Affairs of America. In Habermas (1993), p. 95.

³⁹ Matteucci, N. (1998). Opinião Pública. In N. Bobbio, G. Pasquino & N. Matteucci (Dirs.). *Dicionário de Política*. Brasília: Editora da Universidade de Brasília, p. 843.

⁴⁰ Hegel, G. W. F. (1969). Philosophie du Droit, Zusatz au par. 318. In *Morceaux Choisis*, vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, p. 215.

⁴¹ Lippman, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, p. 248, <http://www.archive.org/stream/publicopinion00lippgoog#page/n6/mode/2up>.

⁴² Bourdieu, P. (1984). L’opinion publique n’existe pas. In *Questions de sociologie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, pp. 222-235. <http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/socio/bourdieu/questions/opinionpub.html>.

⁴³ Matteucci, N. (1998), p. 845.

Santeul or Santeuil (1630-1697), who wrote it to the Italian comedian Dominique (Domenico Biancolelli) in the role of Arlecchino⁴⁴. Since the seventeenth century it became the motto of comedy and played an active part in the building of the public sphere.

In nineteenth-century Germany, humor helped to “carve” the space where ideas could be debated⁴⁵. Shared laughter kept people together and gave them a sense of community: “... we must also look at humour in the aggregate and at its larger, overall function in society. Often, the simple act of sharing in laughter was more important than the specific content or immediate impact of any given joke or caricature. Laughing together meant participating in a common culture, communicating about an issue of mutual concern. In this way humor helped carve out a public space, a field or arena within which all sorts of ideas could be discussed and debated, be they political, social or moral. The views expressed within this public space were never monolithic or uniform. Popular humor expressed a sense of community among participants, but at the same time it helped define and clarify the differences within that community. Laughter, whether trivial, subversive or something in between, formed part of an ongoing public debate”⁴⁶.

On the contrary, in England, the development of a public sphere – built with the formidable help of satire during the previous two centuries – witnessed the decline of the humoristic genre, displaced by the political institutionalization of the public sphere itself and by the growing popularity of the novel: “In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, both verse and narrative satire flourished and even for a time assumed a predominant position among genres. However, the increasing production and popularity of novels accompanied a decline in the cultural work accomplished by satire. The development of a pluralist public sphere in Britain, including the emergence of a loyal opposition, provided an arena for the expression of disagreements with official policies which therefore no longer had to be couched in indirect, ironic and satiric terms. Another side of the developing public sphere was the opening of a private, domestic life outside the reach of government; this dimension became the privileged subject of novelistic representation.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Fournier, E. (1861). *L'Esprit des Autres*. Paris: E. Dentu Éditeur, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Townsend, M. L. (1997). Humour and the Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century Germany. In Bremer & Roodenburg (1997), pp. 200-221.

⁴⁶ Townsend, M. L. (1997), p. 202.

⁴⁷ Palmeri, F. (2007). Narrative Satire in the Nineteenth Century. In R. Quintero (Ed.). (2007), p. 362.

3. Humor in the periodical press and the building of public opinion in Portugal

It is not far-fetched to say that there was a boom of humor in Portuguese periodical press in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth century. In an universe of almost four hundred periodicals, about twenty claimed to be humoristic⁴⁸. During that time, humor took an active part in the framing of the public sphere in Portugal: “... irony and humor have a function which cannot be ignored. Humor and irony settle, at least for a moment, in a provisional and aggressive way, what can be regarded as social and political tension. These humor and irony do not come from nothing; if they nest, it is in the bosom of a multiple situation, tragic and lively – political, economic, social, religious or cultural.”⁴⁹

The first periodical using humor systematically as its core genre was *Almocreve de Petas*, launched in 1797 with the unashamedly stated intention of entertaining its readers. It was edited by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa (1755?1756?-1832), the most prolific writer, playwright and poet (also a businessman, a civil servant and a military officer) of his time. The following excerpt is an example of the humor of *Almocreve de Petas*, which is still meaningful nowadays. Note the antropomorphization of the Portuguese language as well as that of attic salt and of gallicism:

“Most of the Wise of this capital city regret almost without hope the great loss that came across Her Ladyship Dona Portuguese Language; this noble Lady, who is no longer a girl, is the widow of a Gentleman called Attic Salt, unknown by many and praised by a few... she was left in the most complete despair... Sometime later, a number of modern Gentlemen took her in their care, dressed her all in dark, as was fit to her wretched status... Mr. Gallicism has spent large sums with her; some Foreigners have consigned to her dozens and dozens of words... yet, in spite of all this assistance, everyone feels uneasy about her melancholic guise, when just a few years ago she was remarked by her wit, grace and discretion.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Tengarrinha, J. (2013). *Nova História da Imprensa Portuguesa das Origens a 1865*. Lisboa: Temas & Debates/Círculo de Leitores, pp. 134-144.

⁴⁹ Alves, J. A. S. (2005), p. 128.

⁵⁰ Costa, J. D. R. (1819). *Almocreve de Petas ou Moral Disfarçada para Correção das Miudezas da Vida*, Tomo I, Parte V, 2ª edição. Lisboa: Na Officina de J.F.M. de Campos, p. 2.

Other humoristic periodicals of the time are *O Espreitor do Mundo Novo*⁵¹, also edited by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa⁵², or *O Piolho Viajante*, by António Manuel Policarpo da Silva⁵³.

Humor is also a weapon for those who use and abuse satire, sarcasm and vulgar language as a tool of their political agenda, such as José Agostinho de Macedo⁵⁴.

But humor appears too in a political periodical such as *Correio Braziliense*, whose target was the commercial bourgeoisie of Lisbon, Oporto, Brazil and the Portuguese-Brazilian expatriates in London, besides the court of Rio de Janeiro. Although exceptional, as far as the editorial line of the newspaper is concerned, these two excerpts are particularly significant⁵⁵.

The first one is a sarcastic reference to count Da Ega, Aires de Saldanha, and his wife, Juliana de Almeida Oyenhausen (daughter of the famous poet Leonor de Almeida, known as Marchioness of Alorna) who was snubbed in Lisbon for her notorious affair with the French invader general Junot: in 1811 she had just left her husband for the Russian ambassador in Madrid, count Stroganoff: “The countess left Madrid and travelled to Italy under the protection of a noble Russian who was there as ambassador. What would say about these events, if he was alive, her most illustrious and most excellent relative the marquis of Ponte de Lima, who, when he was prime minister, entertained himself fencing and having long talks with the figures depicted in his tapestries; surely those great lords would not wish to add to their coats of arms the

⁵¹ This was a monthly periodical with a different theme in each issue: squares, coffee houses, fairgrounds, houses, jails, churches, parks, popular festivals, bullfights, parties, the Opera House. See Costa, J. D. R. (1819). *O Espreitor do Mundo Novo. Obra Critica, Moral, e Divertida*, 2ª edição. Lisboa: Na Officina de J.F.M. de Campos.

⁵² See Palma-Ferreira, J. (1974). *O Almocreve de petas e outras prosas*. Lisboa: Estúdios Cor; Palma-Ferreira, J. (1980). *Obscuros e Marginados*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, pp. 101-138; Pimenta, A. (Ed.). (1978). In J. D. R. Costa. *O balão aos habitantes da lua*. Lisboa: Edições 70; and Ferreira, M. I. L. (2011). *José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa (1755/56-1832). Um autor ao serviço da “Educação dos Povos”* (MA dissertation). Available from Departamento de Estudos Românicos da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa.

⁵³ Silva, A. M. P. (1802-). *O Piolho Viajante: divididas as viagens em mil e uma carapuças*. Lisboa: Na Regia Officina Typographica. See also Palma-Ferreira, J. (1973). Preface. In A. M. P. Silva. *O Piolho Viajante: divididas as viagens em mil e uma carapuças*. Lisboa: Estúdios Cor, pp. 9-24; Palma-Ferreira, J. (1980). *Do pícaro na literatura portuguesa*. Lisboa: ICALP, pp. 101-117; and Abreu, M. (2002). O leitor e a história literária. In XVII Encontro Nacional da ANPOLL. Gramado: Rio Grande do Sul.

⁵⁴ Macedo, J. A. (1828). *A Besta Esfolada*, Nº 2º. Lisboa: Na Imprensa Régia, p. 16. See also Andrade, M. I. O. (2001-2004). *José Agostinho de Macedo. Um Iluminista Paradoxal, Vol. I e A Contra-revolução em Português, Vol. II*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri.

⁵⁵ Lustosa, I. (2000). *Insultos Impressos. A guerra dos jornalistas na Independência (1821-1823)*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, p. 423.

trophies that adorn the helmet of the Ega; Shame! Behold the great ones of the realm!!!”⁵⁶

The second example takes advantage of the pretext of the notice of a legal order by the Regency Government of Lisbon (since the King and Court were in Rio de Janeiro), in June 17th, 1817, renewing the ban on the circulation of *Correio Braziliense*: the “Portaria dos Governadores do Reino” (“Decree by the governors of the Realm”) was transformed by a timely misprint into “Porcaria” (Portuguese for filth)⁵⁷.

Conclusion

In Portugal, who suffered the traumatic impact of three French invasions, the flight of the Royal Family to Brazil, the British military protectorate and the civil war between liberals and absolutists, humor in the public sphere is ambiguous and diffuse with the polysemy of jokes allowing several interpretations, in intricate palimpsests. The warning of Townsend regarding the study of humor in Germany also applies to Portugal, replacing the 1848 revolution with the long period of implementation of liberalism from 1820 to 1834: “This public debate was certainly diffuse and often ambiguous, but the fact that it existed at all was extremely important.... In this setting, where public discourse was strictly regulated, often the simple act of speaking aloud was itself a political statement. In the end, popular humor may have done little to focus the inchoate political consciousness of Germans in the early nineteenth century, but it did keep this consciousness alive, nurturing and strengthening the general level of critical awareness, and providing much of the rhetorical and emotional tinder that flared into revolution in 1848.”⁵⁸

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⁵⁶ *Correio Braziliense*, vol. VI, 1811, p. 311.

⁵⁷ *Correio Braziliense*, vol. XIX, 1817, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸ Townsend (1997), p. 216.