

ACME : Association of Censors Mandarins Engaged

“...there is no single royal road to the truth...” (BARNES, 2002)

At the 6th International Conference of Critical Geography held in Frankfurt in August, 2011 (“Crisis - Causes, Dimensions, and Reactions”), in a workshop having as topic: “Babel-crisis: Critic through translation?”, Karl R. KEGLER, Georges NICOLAS and Anne RADEFF and presented two communications in two languages (German and French) respectively called: « Les lieux centraux. La traduction comme « normalisation » d'une théorie erronée » and « Zentrale Orte : Übersetzung als « Normalisierung » einer unrichtigen Theorie » (“Central places. Translation as “normalization” of an erroneous theory”). The chairpersons of this workshop proposed after to all participants to publish their communications in a special issue of *ACME (An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies)*.

Their purpose was “to take over [...] the reflexion on languages and translation in geography” to examine in a critical way “the domination of the English language” and “its consequences, such as a normalization concerning the contents of scientific researches, the contexts of interpretation and the ways to make research, lined up on the Anglo-American university system.” It implicates, as they specified: “on one hand, to consider translation as a potentially critical practice, allowing to question the hegemonic system and to open new expression possibilities for other languages, other contents, other interpretations and other scientific practices. On the other hand it is necessary to question also these practices of translation, because they are always political and linked to questions of power.”

Georges Nicolas and Anne RADEFF proposed then to examine a famous example of translation from German to French (Carl Ritter : *Über räumliche Anordnungen auf der Außenseite des Erdballs und ihre Functionen in Entwicklungsgänge der Geschichten* (1852) translated by Élisée Reclus : *De la configuration des continents sur la surface du globe et de leurs fonctions dans l'histoire* (1859)), giving so a “historical depth” to the critical examination of the role of translations from other languages than English. What is more: Georges NICOLAS (-OBADIA) was one of the authors of the publication in 1984, with Danielle NICOLAS-OBADIA, of a critical translation of the *Einleitung zur allgemeinen vergleichenden Geographie* (1851) of Carl Ritter followed by a new version of the French translation of *Über räumliche Anordnungen auf der Außenseite des Erdballs und ihre Functionen in Entwicklungsgänge der Geschichten*.

This proposal was accepted by the chairpersons of the workshop who guaranteed that the article would be “assessed in a non-anonymous way”, that reviewers would be competent and that these chairpersons would discuss with the authors about “the pertinence” of the reports of valuation. With these guarantees in mind, Georges NICOLAS, with the help of Anne RADEFF, proposed a text called: « Élisée Reclus traducteur de Carl Ritter, passeur de la logique Tout/partie » (“Élisée Reclus translator of Carl Ritter, passing on the Whole/Part logic”)

Without pronouncing on the competence of all reviewers (some of them did not go out of anonymity), the result of these “valuations” was a complete refusal to envisage that the authors of « Élisée Reclus traducteur de Carl Ritter, passeur de la logique Tout/Partie » could have another critical opinion than that of the “reviewers “on the way Élisée Reclus had performed his translation. Both “reviewers” offered no more and no less than to abandon and to reverse the problematics and the ideas of the authors. For the first reviewer: “my hypothesis is that the disloyalty of [the translation of Élisée Reclus], as usual [*sic*] in edition of the time, is rather explained by a wish of readability for the French public of the *Revue Germanique* than by predetermined ideological choices”. For the second reviewer, given that “the thought process of Élisée Reclus is well intentioned [*sic*], “it seems [...] preferable, for a better logical understanding, to include the biographical elements concerning the relations between Carl Ritter and Élisée Reclus at the end of the compared analysis of the text and of its translation, in order to supply the explanations, and not the opposite.” The whole wrapped in recommendations coming from “a good feeling”: “The author should undertake a serious job of revision...”; “I suggest to the author to think”; “I invite the author to consider”; “as the author did a rather precise philological job, it would be worth being strict until the end” etc. These recommendations were accompanied, it is true, of a surprising homage to the “substantial job [*sic*] of Nicolas-Obadia”. That shows the critical lucidity of these “reviewers”!

Very affected by the “encouragement to resubmit a text after substantial revisions” (the text was “*rejected with encouragement to resubmit after substantial revisions as outlined in the report*”), in order to see what means “critical analysis” in *ACME* (BARNES, 2002, 12) and given the “radical” opposition between their point of view and that of the “reviewers”, Georges NICOLAS and Anne RADEFF proposed to the French editorial board of the E-Journal that: « Élisée Reclus traducteur de Carl Ritter, passeur de la logique Tout/partie » should be published without modifications (except some improvements) with the opinions of the “reviewers” in their raw state or rewritten. The answer was so disdainful as the “reviewers” opinions.

“I fear [...] that you are wrong: *ACME* is a peer-reviewed Journal. It implies that all articles submitted to *ACME* are reviewed by several re-readers specialist in similar fields, and that it is their opinion which decides on publication or not of the texts. It is what guarantees the scientific quality of the Journal [*sic*]. The taking into account of the reviewers’ comments is therefore a prerequisite to the publication. Of course, we do not ask you to submit at whatever cost to all the required corrections, especially not at the cost of your demonstration, but the fact of not performing some of these corrections must be justified, and this justification must be accepted as scientifically valid by the reviewers.”

In other words, in *ACME* there is not possible appeal against decisions of the anonymous reviewers; more: if we had agreed to review our texts, these would have been again submitted to the same reviewers. What’s more, it was no discussion of examining their competence or even simply to call attention that were not aware of the latest researches on the subject! Finally, the proposal to publish

our texts with those of the reviewers so that the readers could confront them was not even examined. The proposed process could be endless or interrupted in an arbitrary way by the editorial board of *ACME*.

ACME is a “peer reviewed” E-Journal in “open access” but not “open science”. In “open access”, the “experts” (reviewers) have absolute censure powers while in “open science” articles are first published and then valued; as a result, there is no preliminary censure. “This publication [in “open science”], a priori without effort, is in reality efficient, because it raises the level of requirement to which the research must give satisfaction. Indeed, articles remain on the website, even if they are refused after valuation. And valuation too remains. Experts make therefore more efforts, because their job and their names are published. As for the authors, they prefer controlling their studies once more, before having to lead publicly debates with the experts and so to make scientific discourse public.” (AMRHEIM, 2014)

The “critic” of *ACME* is exerted on all geographies and all geographers that the “peer review” does not judge as “*anarchist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, environmentalist, feminist, Marxist, non-representational, postcolonial, poststructuralist, queer, situationist and socialist perspectives.*”

Anti-colonialist Georges NICOLAS who passed twelve years exiled in Switzerland after a condemnation identical to that of Élisée Reclus understood that the “peer review” *ACME* does not differ from the journals of his ideological enemies. Everything can be criticised in *ACME*, except the contents of *ACME*. *ACME*’s “critical geography” is an institutionalised geography where “critical professors [...] fully integrated” into the institution follows the fashion and a career’s strategy” (GINTRAC, 2012, 9). *ACME* is a militant E-Journal; it is not a scientific Journal.

Our relations with the French editorial board of *ACME* show that “peer-reviews” system is: “*a crap shoot. Personal vendettas, ideological conflicts, professional jealousies, methodological disagreements, sheer self-promotion, and a great deal of plain incompetence and irresponsibility are no strangers to the scientific world; indeed, that world is rife with these all-too-human attributes. In no event can peer review ensure that research is correct in its procedures or its conclusions.*” (HIGGS, 2007).

Georges NICOLAS et Anne RADEFF, Monday, November 10, 2014

Further Readings of the annexe

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GINTRAC, Cécile. 2012. Géographie critique, géographie radicale : comment nommer la géographie engagée ? *Carnets de géographie, rubrique : carnets de recherches*.

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<http://cyberato.pu-pm.univ-fcomte.fr/?q=publications/e-eratosthene/elisee-reclus-traducteur-carl-ritter-passeur-logique-toutpartie>