Translation between Pacification and Polarization[1]

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Introduction

The expanding scope of translation thought and reflection has come to include definitions as marginal, and yet well-founded, as conflict resolution, the dialogue of cultural paradigms within the hyper-heterogeneous context of today's world, and even the transference of laws between disparate legal systems. Despite this increasing variety, however, it remains the case that most representations of translation attempt to portray it as something positive, benevolent, salvation-esque, even Christ-like. Translation appears as the means of saving and pacifying the world, a sort of panacea for all that ails the new millennium. Yet it seems to us that, as in the case of any instrument shaped by the ideologies that steer it, translation is much less idealistic than we may think.

However, discussions of the representation of translation and translators, be they positive or negative, seem to us somewhat misplaced in the context of a time when it is the *function* and the *action* of translation and translators in a world of conflicts that most concern us. It is a "critique of practical reason" for translation, rather than one of aesthetic judgment, that needs to be clearly defined. Is translation in the process of establishing for itself a new task? If so, then the Kantian question is perhaps best reformulated and considered as follows: what is the role of this new kind of translator and how can he contribute not only as an instrument of linguistic understanding for speakers of variant languages, but moreover as a *witness* and *subject* of social conflicts that feature different cultural and political groups – in societies known to be democratic – who have diverging frames of reference, who do not understand one another and who even wage discursive wars against each other through interposed media?

Although the great linguistic turn and, by the same token, that of translation as *process* seems to have faded over the past two decades as the cultural turn of the 1990s promoted an approach favouring the study of translation as *product*, translational research continues to reference the former, now under the auspices of the "sociological turn". In truth, translation and the translator are increasingly the subject of sociological interest, examined in light of a largely Bourdieusian approach that involves re-situating various translation "agents" within the different "fields" of textual production (more often than not literary) and reconstructing their "habitus", as well as that of the translated product, within the network of now-global cultural and socio-economic systems.

So what is the situation of translation as a process today? Are such studies doomed to disappear completely, or is there a possibility that they will reassert their relevance, particularly in light of the communication crisis currently faced in post-industrial societies living in an era of information and technology? Considered in the context of the challenges of intercomprehension within the hyper-heterogeneous societies of the West, this article can be read as an attempt at exploring possibilities in hope of regenerating a concept of translation conceived as an epistemic paradigm of intercultural communication.

Context and issue

Well below the teleological orientation so often criticized in the pacifying function of translation and in the political consequences that colour it – in other words, its overexposure – there lies another function of translation, one even more fundamental, that we must mention at the risk of sounding trite: that is, *comprehension*. Indeed, the establishment of peace in ignorance or in indifference is in no way compatible with any worthy social project, neither in the short term nor in the longer term. This is perhaps one of the most common criticisms formulated against the anglo-saxon socio-cultural organizational model: multiculturalism. But we will have to come back to this.

The point is that as heir to both the communicative linguistic and hermeneutic traditions, translational thought cannot overlook this primary, even trivial, mandate of ensuring good understanding of a message. But what happens when we move from a linguistic to an anthropological paradigm, or even to one concerned with the politics of translation as intercultural communication? Is there any difference in terms of their specific relations to comprehension? In my humble opinion, I do not think so.

Much time has been spent carefully exploring the rich investigative field of Jakobson's three categories of translation (established as early as 1959), but now, given that current trends seem to focus more and more on the anthropological dimensions of translation, it seems to me that the time has come to propose a framework that widens the broad scope of translation even further, not only beyond the consideration of inter-linguistic transfer, but also beyond the inter-semiotic.

The value of Jakobsonian theory is that it has always allowed us to position ourselves within a communicative framework in which a certain ethic of translation continually sends us outward into a limbo of messianic activity that is, by definition, outside of this world, at the very frontiers of language, perhaps toward an "outre-langue", to borrow an expression from Nouss.

However, when we consider the translational challenge at the social level, it is not only the imperative of communication, that is of establishing a relationship[2] or moving closer to the other, that imposes itself as a point of reflection. Much more urgent is that of *comprehending* the other, understanding his point of the view well enough to engender a feeling of community, of belonging and of mutual confidence that makes *cohabitation* with him a possibility.

Translation thought has traditionally conceived of the communication process as a linear influx that is necessarily successful, whereas the theoreticians of communication have, for a long time, taken into consideration in their models the notion of "noise" (Shanon and Weaver, 1964). This notion underlines the possibility, or rather the necessity, of accounting for the factor of communicative distortion[3].

This is the line of thought pursued by Dominique Wolton when, speaking of both western societies in general and that of France in particular, he talks about the problem of "*incommunication*" in the era of information technology and the necessity of thinking seriously about it. According to Wolton, "thinking about incommunication means respecting the other and understanding the foundations of otherness. Thinking about incommunication is the highest stage of communication."[4] But he does not stop there; for communication finds a finality that goes beyond the simple transmission and understanding of a message…

> Because recognizing incommunication means admitting the freedom of the other, including his differences and identities. It means being faithful to the idea of the equality of partners. Building cohabitation is precisely finding the conditions of a minimum of intercomprehension, which take into account the irreducible otherness between beings, groups and societies.[5]

Later on, he adds further:

> Incommunication imposes itself as a fact, but cohabitation as a choice and a value. At its very core is the essential process of negotiation. […] There is nothing obvious about learning to negotiate, at either the individual or the collective level. It is simply learning to recognize the other, admitting

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[2] The etymology of communication comes from the Latin *communicare* which means « being in relationship with ».

[3] One could recall here that the main concern of Shanon and Weaver's theory was to fix problems in telegraphic transmission and clarity of signals.

[4] WOLTON, Dominique (2005). *Sauver la communication*. Paris, Champs-Flammarion, p. 139. Our translation.

[5] Id. Our translation.

> incommunication, while registering nonetheless the exchange
> in a normative perspective of intercomprehension.[6]

In these two quotations, we can already discern the emergence of three concepts which are fundamental for our discussion and purpose: a) "intercomprehension", b) "negotiation" and c) "cohabitation":

a) The notion of *intercomprehension* marks a departure from the traditional model presented by Shanon, Weaver and Laswell that represented communication as a linear process in which the message travels from the transmitter to the receiver without any possibility of retroaction or interactivity. That is why the sociologists Matilda and John Riley introduced the concept of "feedback". Comprehension, which is fundamental as we know, is not unilateral but necessarily *reciprocal*.

b) As for the notion of *negotiation*, it is nothing more than the process of intercomprehension repeated many times. Comprehension, after all, is not necessarily guaranteed simply by contact between parties, but rather requires an integrated cyclical process that can lead to such an end, continuously progressing toward better agreement and intercomprehension.

c) Finally, the notion of *cohabitation* is that element which clearly situates the communicative process within the social dimension, following in particular sociological theories of mass communication. Riley and Riley, for example, working around the same time as Jakobson in 1959, broadened the communication models of their time to include the dimension of *context*, talking in these terms about the different levels of belonging of the transmitter and the receiver: "primary groups" and "larger social structures". Thus when a message is sent, it is done so in accordance with the expectations and horizons of reference of both the members of the primary group and those of the larger social group. Communicating is no longer a matter of isolated individuals exchanging personal messages; it is a negotiation that engages the entire frame of reference of both coexisting protagonists.

Inter-referential translation

All this is to say that communication, understood in this manner, brings us back to Jakobson, only this time to his model of the functions of communication, including, most notably, the "referential function". For if translating subjectivities situated in a social and political context, while taking into consideration their respective cultural and cognitive

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[6] Ibid., p. 141. Our translation.

backgrounds, cannot be fully accounted for by either inter-lingual or inter-semiotic translation, it follows that the narrow possibilities of the three traditional categories described in *Linguistic Aspects of Translation* are no longer sufficient. Instead, this type of translation is more appropriately placed within an additional dimension, one which I propose to name "inter-referential".

In this new space, where the Jakobsonian theory of translation itself belongs according to its own concept of communication, *inter-referential translation* can be defined as the process by which translational transfer is not limited to the heterogeneity of the sign systems involved, but rather extends to include the frames of references of the subjectivities and the socio-cultural groups concerned. Once again, the dialogism that we are discussing here pertains not only to isolated translational occurrences, but to a discursive network that involves different, and even sometimes conflicting, universes of reference.

At this stage in our reflection, two questions arise: a) If it is no longer sign systems that relate subjectivities which are no longer separable from their respective referential determinants, what then can be used as a basis for concrete communication and, consequently, mutual understanding? b) Since translation generally presupposes the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the subjectivities concerned and since inter-referential translation presupposes that of the horizons of reference, does it follow that the translational project must necessarily belong to one particular linguistic, cultural or referential group and not to another?

First of all, though semiotics is the domain which generally includes and therefore can translate the largest spectrum of conceivable "languages" or sign systems, we must recognize that in the context of inter-referential translation that which is essential to the communicative exchange is primarily discursive in nature, in that it requires consideration of much more than just the individual parties involved in the process of translation/communication. It is equally important to account for the *doxa*, which is made up of the collective imagination of the primary groups and those of the larger social structures to which those parties belong. Thus, while making use of all the traditional linguistic and textual tools, inter-referential translation also depends on this discursive dimension that includes not only the translator's/communicator's individual discourse, but also that of a certain proportion of the group to which he belongs, along with the "State apparatuses" that inform it (Althusser 1970).

Secondly, it is important to avoid falling into the trap of essentializing belonging to the point of systemizing borders and reducing inter-referential exchanges to a dialogism of fixed and inflexible identities, with differences that are, consequently, beyond deliberation. The mode of belonging of the parties involved in a communicative/translational process is, in fact, a function of their ability to, on the one

hand, understand the issues that confront parties with poor intercomprehension and, on the other, *decentre* themselves in the name of a more global social ethics, moving away from more traditional modes of belonging (e.g. ethnic-cultural) and toward what Wolton calls "cohabitation", that is, toward that mode of belonging that encompasses the largest possible social spectrum.

In this sense, inter-referential translation presents us with the ideal tool to theoretically reinforce our previously proposed concept of "civic translation".[7] In essence, we are talking about translating differences that invoke their own translation within an essential frame of reference, a zone of comprehension commonly shared by the heterogeneous membership of a society no longer capable of understanding itself by the use of one and the same language. This is the type of commitment resulting from an *ethics* of translation which I conceive of not as a general principle applicable to the entire translational identity or craft, but rather as one specifically dedicated to a more political agenda.

The activism of civic translation, then, is simply a response, at once *conceptual* and *political*, to the need for inter-referential translation increasingly felt by western societies in the midst of the identity crises continuously caused by the heterogeneity which characterizes them.

In fact, the situations in Europe and North America are perfect examples to demonstrate that the major political issues of these societies are first and foremost those tied to the difficulty of drawing divergent perceptions together, converging toward what minimal common ground of understanding can be found regarding the interpretation and expression of democratic principles. Be they social or political resistance movements or associations representing cultural , ethnic or religious groups, no one questions the universal principles that governed past revolutions and established the general configuration of the rule of law. The main obstacle to this convergence is determining the margin within which it is possible to include as many referents as possible who interpret these founding principles in ways that are equally legitimate.

In order to further support this attempted contribution of inter-referential and civic translation as processes of integration and pacification in the plural democratic space, we can look to the notion of "common" as understood by Hardt and Negri (2004). For them, the common marks a rupture with the notions of "the masses", "the working class", and "the people", all notions borrowed from identity, exclusion and fixation; the common instead matches the concept of "multitude" which, in contrast, is marked by dynamism, inclusion and differentiation ("set of singularities").[8] The relevance of such a

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[7] See *TTR*, vol. XVIII, n°2, 2nd Semester 2005, pp. 49-69

[8] M. HARDT et A. NEGRI (2004), *Multitude. Guerre et démocratie à l'âge de l'Empire*, Montréal, Boréal, pp. 8-9.

notion for us resides in the fact that, in addition to being the result of a bringing together of the subjects of social mobilization, the common represents the condition of communication, and therefore, of collaborative action.

> The common which we have in common is, in fact, not so much discovered as it is produced […] Our ways of communicating, of collaborating and of cooperating are not only founded on the common, but they also produce it in a dynamic and expansive spiral.[9]

If the common produced by action and communication is at once the source and the horizon, then inter-referential and civic translation are active both at the level of the actualization of the principles of equality and plurality in common action, and at that of the relations of communication articulated by the various referents. Only by identifying the common that underlies the networks of transmission and mobilization can we recognize the differences that drive the movements of political contestation or social resistance.

All that said, the fact remains that this notion belongs to a theoretical perspective with serious limitations, one of which has been underlined by Chantal M0uffe. For although the multitude, which is the condition of producing the common, is an integrally immanent organization in society, it is incapable of representing a sovereign power ("the multitude can not be sovereign"[10]). In other words, if all the elements characterizing the *social being*, the multitude, act "at the same level", how does this type of action relate to a common act where the multitude becomes a *political subject*? How is the move from a common production to a common decision accomplished? This is where Mouffe's reflection can take over, thinking of a political subject capable of creating a (minimal) *political unity* as well as a counter-hegemony to Empire in a world that is no longer unipolar et deterritorialized (as in the post-political theories[11]), but multipolar and reterritorialized.[12] So we now face the following question: moving beyond the simple recognition of differences, how are they to be articulated in order to resist the common challenge? But we will get back to this later.

With each passing day, however, we see that socio-cultural reality is even more complex than this. Regardless of how noble the intention behind trying to rectify situations of non-communication may be, there will always remain gray areas, zones where it is not in the best interest of serious and lasting exchange to underline them, in the name of "pacification". On to the contrary, if translation cannot lose sight of the indisputable and salutary objective of togetherness or "cohabitation", neither can it afford, in the long

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[9] *Id.*

[10] *Ibid.,* p. 375.

[11] "Cosmopolitanism", "Global Civil Society", "Smooth World", "The Third Way", etc.

[12] See MOUFFE, Ch. (2005) *On the Political*, London-New York, Routledge.

term, to turn a blind eye to issues as fundamental and *divisive* as freedom of conscience in public commitment in France and Quebec, for instance.

Translating such a "minority" and alienating claim into the common reference-language for those who are conveniently labeled the "majority" is not enough to guarantee the expected reception. In fact, it requires perseverance and endurance from both parties to accept temporarily not being understood or even being totally opposed to the understanding of the general tendency, and whatever time it takes to strip away from the object of translation the ideological and political influences that surround it.

Inter-referential and civic translation, then, is not simply a means of searching for a peaceful middle-ground between opposed parties; it can also be a way of shedding light that reveals a real stumbling block, an irreducible divergence that can ultimately and ironically be even more salutary. Taking seriously into consideration problematic and divisive issues rather than only seeking improbable compromises and utopian appeasement through inter-referential and civic translation thus increasingly seems to be a matter of urgency. Translating in this particular sense is, first and foremost, translating what we fail to understand and acknowledge as that which we disagree on.[13]

Social and political perspectives

Before moving on the illustration of our thesis, I would like to consider two theoretical questions that could lend further support to our previous discussion.

Firstly, it was Berman who reminded us that translation is a "trial of the foreign", but Annie Brisset who stressed that this expression has a real heuristic value, especially when we consider the double meaning of the word "trial" (*épreuve* in French): on the one hand, passing through the detour of otherness is an experience one cannot come through unscathed (you will recall that Herder conceived of the translational process as one which "stained" the mother tongue); on the other hand, translation is translating the "*meaning of others*", that is, speaking in their stead without even being forced to go outside of oneself or having that "meaning of others" entailing the latter's trial. It was to this last sense that Peter Haidu referred when he noted that "the most common historical experience, I believe, suggests locating Sameness at the Euphoric position, Otherness at the Dysphoric".[14] Again it is the "dysphoric" nature of translation as a trial that is emphasized and, by the same token, the naturally unpleasant character of the relationship to the other… So how are we to conceive of a possible overcoming of social

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[13] We shall get back to this in the last section of this paper.
[14] HAIDU, P. (1990) cited by BRISSET, Annie (1998). « Malaise dans la traduction. Pour une éthique de la réciprocité », in *Texte*, Toronto, numéro spécial « L'altérité », 1998, pp. 322.

polarities if translation – as a locus of articulation between divergences – is deemed either a stain or a state of unease?

Secondly, along these same lines, one could also raise the objection that as a result of striving for communication through interposed inter-referential translation, are we not also sparing ourselves the trouble of coming up with a political theory that gives rightful place to difference of opinion? Does inter-referential translation in fact risk slipping into some sort of conservatism? In other words, how does this relate to a political theory in which consensus is conceived of on the basis of conflict? Does inter-referential translation not present itself as a means of constructing conflicting consensuses, somewhere between open conflict that sets friends against foes[15] – an antagonism not considered legitimate in a democratic society – and the sort of soft consensus proposed by Rawls and Habermas, an agreement between agents built on ethical grounds? [16] How does one construct a consensus that is not simply submission to the established order? How does one construct a radical reform?

In order to move in this direction, we will draw on the writings of two eminent figures of contemporary political philosophy in order to better understand the implications of a translational process that, while taking the political and social fact of dissension as its starting point, still considers consensus its ultimate aim. We will look first at the work of Chantal Mouffe, and then at that of Jacques Rancière.

Chantal Mouffe has developed two concepts that seem very relevant to us: *agonism* and *chain of equivalences*. Muffe, along with Schmitt, recognizes that the political dimension is structurally one of conflict. Consequently, contrary to the thinking of the liberal tradition, the antagonistic dimension, or the permanence of conflict, is intrinsic to politics and democracy. But Schmitt thought about this antagonism in terms of friends/foes, a model inconceivable in democratic society. Mouffe therefore outlines a new mode of expression for this conflict, one she calls *agonism* in which it is no longer enemies that oppose each other, but rather *adversaries* who *reciprocally* recognize the legitimacy of their demands. [17] It then follows that there can be no democracy without plurality, just as there can be no plurality without antagonism and, consequently, no democracy without antagonism.

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[15] See the categorisation formulated by Carl Schmitt (1976) *The Concept of the Political*, translation, introduction, and notes by George Schwab, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press. Cited by Chantal Mouffe (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*, London-New York, Verso, p. 49.

[16] See RAWLS, J. (1993) *Political Liberalism*, New York, Columbia University Press and HABERMAS, J. (1993) *Justification and application : remarks on discourse ethics*, translated by Ciaran Cronin, Cambridge, Polity Press.

[17] MOUFFE, Ch. (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*, op. cit., p. 74.

It seems to us that inter-referential translation plays an essential role here; for due to the lack of *ad hoc* translation, the problems of society may be expressed in moral terms,[18] requiring as they sometimes do *political translation*. The obvious question, then, is how can inter-referential translation contribute to the political translation of society's problems? In contrario: to what degree can it fight the "liberal" translation that keeps forcing societal problems into the moral and sometimes even religious registers, as happened in the many commentaries that resulted from the infamous riots of November 2005 in France?

Thus Mouffe recognizes the plurality of societal movements that oppose liberal globalization. Negri and Hardt were opposed to any idea of political unity between these different movement (attached as they were to the Deleuzian distinction between "molar" and "molecular") [19]. Mouffe, however, believes that this unity is now more urgent than ever before. And the only way to reach it is by being able to construct chains of equivalence between the different struggles and different movements.

This is where we see the political and oppositional relevance of inter-referential translation: how does one translate, from one movement to the other, the expression of these demands? Inter-referential translation seems to us to be the perfect operation by which to build bridges and chains of equivalences from one struggle to the other, from one movement to the other.

Jacques Rancière, for is part, distances himself from sociological thinking, particularly from the Bourdieusian model which in essence consists of, firstly, identifying and revealing the inequality in order to, secondly, solving it. In such a thought process, the diagnostic of the social structure comes first, and the treatment second. Rancière, however, insists that the entire process must be reversed: we must first *postulate equality* and then *demand that it be reached.* It is only by affirming equality first that we can see it realized in the social order.

If there is a contradiction between a (formal or legal) declaration of equality and actual inequalities, it is not a matter of condemning the principle of equality as a deceptive veil that masks the reality of inequality and domination, as is done by the Marxist tradition and an entire current of sociological thought. Instead, starting from a postulate of equality (recognized as neither a lie nor a mystification) allows Rancière to affirm its belonging to a common universe of principles. This is the "consensual" aspect of his thought. The challenge of the self-proclaimed democratic society consists in translating

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[18] Ibid., p. 98.

[19] Voir dans HARDT, M. et NEGRI, A. (2000) *Empire*. Traduit de l'américain par Denis-Armand Canal, Paris, Exil Éditeurs ainsi que dans GUATTARI, F. et DELEUZE, G. (1980) *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, ("Micropolitique et segmentarité") pp. 253-283 et ("7000 av. J.-C. – Appareil de capture") pp. 528-591.

the principle of equality to all levels of political and social relations. But the fact remains the inequalities exist and persist. Some individuals or groups will therefore denounce the *wrong* done against equality by the social order. This is why, says Rancière, there is "politics" when two opposing processes meet:

a) The first is a process of rallying citizens through a "hierarchical distribution of roles and functions". [20] Rancière calls this process of distribution "policing", a process of domination destined to sideline the "titleless" and the "unaccounted for".

b) The "political" opposes this first process and has more to do with equality. It posits that human beings are equal, which therefore calls into question the "police" distribution of roles and functions.

The encounter of these two processes reveals the *wrong* done by the order (the police) to equality (emancipation). Thus, according to Rancière, there is no community that does not depend on a "wrong", because every community distributes functions and roles which result in a "misaccount" of some elements of the social world. Those elements are therefore excluded from the exercise of collective power. So we see that there is a "sensible distribution"[21] which rests on an unequal distribution that causes a wrong. And where there is the "treatment of a wrong", [22] the is politics. "The singularity of the action of the demos […] is proof that there is original disorder or misaccounting".[23] Every police distribution of the social order is part of an original neglect made visible by the contestation of the demos (the "titleless" and the "unaccounted for"). Rancière therefore defines citizenship in the following manner: it is a calling into question of the established order and of the "police" distribution of functions and roles (it is the dissenting side of his concept of politics). Citizenship "lives on difference and conflict." [24]

The points of convergence between the ideas of Rancière and those of Mouffe are numerous. Two elements are particularly important with regard to the problem of inter-referential translation: consensus can only be built around common values. And this is exactly what's missing in the relationship between society and its Muslim citizens. Society tends to deal with Muslims as though they were internal enemies (see Schmitt's categorization), and Muslims themselves feel like strangers to society. Inter-referential translation therefore holds as its objective the translation of differing universes of reference in order to find that middle ground of common values acceptable to all elements of society.

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[20] RANCIÈRE, J. (1998) *Aux bords du politique*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Folio Essais", p. 112.

[21] RANCIÈRE, J. (2000) *Le partage du sensible,* Paris, La Fabrique éditions, p.12.

[22] RANCIÈRE, J. (1998) *Aux bords du politique*, op. cit., p. 113.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[24] RANCIÈRE, J. (1997) « Le dissensus citoyen », *Carrefour*, Ottawa, 19/2, 1997, p.21.

But that is not enough: we must also object to the "policing" or hegemonic arrangement of the society in which we live and which withholds from the reach of collective power entire sectors of that society. For this reason, we must 1) reach an agreement as to our common values, such as equality and pluralism, 2) realize and contest the wrong done to equality by the social order, and 3) speak out and demand the maximization of the values mentioned in 1). But this too is insufficient and for aid we turn again to Mouffe and Foucault.

> We live in a legal, social and institutional world where the only possible relationships are extremely few, extremely general, extremely poor […] We live in a relational world that has been considerably impoverished by institutions. Society and the institutions which comprise its skeleton have limited the possibility of relationships, because it would be extremely complicated to manage a world rich in relationships. We must fight this impoverishment of the relational fabric.[25]

> Each individual, Foucault realizes, now fights his own battle, defending his own specific interests within the framework of their sector. What is instead required is that we together fight to create new relationships, social links that will shake and topple the ones that have been imposed on us by the "police" composition of society and its institutions (a composition that holds as one of its objectives that identity assignment which prohibits the creation of bridges between the different battles). And this, in our view, is where inter-referential translation becomes indispensable.

> This naturally leads us back to the notion of chain of equivalences presented by Mouffe. Dissension must be translated, presented as it is every time in a different manner and by a multitude of different battles. We must work transversally: the inter-referential translator is therefore an "exchanger" or a "meeting point" where the battles of different issues cross paths, producing "transversal links of knowledge to knowledge, from one politicizing point to another." [26]

Finally, since the ethics of an activist translation has raised the risk of a translator's hypervisibility (because of his social and political involvement), it becomes necessary to

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[25] FOUCAULT, M. (1994) *Dits et écrits (1954-1988)*, tome IV (1980-1988), Paris, Gallimard, p.309-310.
[26] FOUCAULT, M. *op. cit*., tome III (1976-1979), Paris, Gallimard, p. 157.

take up again a line of thought begun by my colleague Sathya Rao. Thinking ahead to a future project, I would suggest that instead of attempting a rearrangement of invisibility – as he suggests – we should rethink entirely the extent and limits of visibility. In fact, if the latter is by definition the locus of social activism, then that is where readjustments should take place. Because whatever the argument for even temporary invisibility may be, the trial of the foreign and its challenges happen in the unpleasant or conflictive contact with otherness, that is, in the *public sphere*. If visibility has been identified as an ethical problem, it is because of its collective dimension as opposed to the Kantian moral problem, which is essentially individualistic, according to Habermas.

Case-study

In order to put these theoretical elements to the test within a particular socio-cultural and political context, I propose a brief case study, quick and incomplete as it may be.

Within the framework of the debate concerning reasonable accommodations and the work of the Bouchard-Taylor commission in Québec, "The Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences", I have chosen to analyze one of the many possible representations of the actors involved and their discourses, specifically the representation found in the written press.

But what is of particular interest to me is identifying "the question that angers" and isolating the articles that pertain to the most important point of *discord* between the parties, that of the representation of women, commonly formulated as "the question of equality between man and woman/the sexes" and stemming from the "question of the islamic veil" infamous in France before Quebec[27].

The *corpus* consists of a sample of articles (almost infinitely expandable), taken from three Montreal newspapers (*Le Devoir, La Presse* and *Le Journal de Montréal*). Though we cannot go into the detailed results of our textual and discursive analyses (which will be published soon), we can confirm at least three general tendencies, which I have placed into the following categories: translational, non-translational and (in)translational.

Translational articles

Translational articles are texts in which the authors seek to understand and, subsequently, to concede problematic elements raised by the critics, all while proposing possible perspectives for *cohabitation* and defending the interests of the greatest number. In these articles, the authors provide a sort of overview of the paradoxes, contradictions,

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[27] See NORDMANN, Charlotte (ed.) (2004) *Le foulard islamique en questions*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam.

exaggerations, inconsistencies and irrational tendencies tracked in the discourse of certain social agents. This critique appears to recognize the role of dissension as a starting point for and an object of communicational and deliberative action. Moreover, there is sometimes an ironic undertone to encourage critical thought from those who try to underline the distances separating citizens and, consequently, the impossibility of coexistence in light of such differences.

> Some go even further, contesting, on the grounds of being universally oppressive, beliefs that are not part of their "progressive" conception of things. Therefore, not only are they trying to protect their society from practices which may be imposed on it, but also to "liberate" those from other traditions from such hindrances. Thus, militant women who have just been liberated from old social servitudes will demand for their "sisters" everywhere on the planet an equal and swift empowerment.[28]

In the tone of scientific discourse, which does not hesitate in helping to create a more favourable perception of what has been presented without the nuances of "religious symbols" or indications of the inferiority of women among Muslims, one could also mention that of anthropology. Indeed, in an article published on September 18, Émilie Joly-Couture attempts, through an historic detour, to relativize the otherness of women who wear the headscarf through a comparison with the historic otherness of the women of Quebec: "Veiled women who used to inspire the dreams of the desert poets have now become an incarnation of extreme otherness."[29] She explains in a translational manner, that is from the point of view of otherness, how one should understand the significance and social role of clothing in Muslim societies.

> In countries where the body belongs to the private space, clothes and their accessories (such as the veil) hold identity-related and social functions of extreme importance. They make possible the transposition of the private sphere into the public sphere without weakening the integrity of the former, and without excluding the individuals from the latter. For observing Muslim women, the veil is seen in the perspective of a highly valued private space, a re-appropriation of their bodies and the subversion of an ideology that wants to make of it a public commodity.[30]

In fact, she goes even further, trying to show how the scarf and the veil constitute in themselves a translational space when it comes to the convergence of Islam and western societies.

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[28] LECLERC, J.-C., "Mixité, laïcité, égalité – 'Cachez ce short qu'on ne saurait voir'", *Le Devoir*, 13 novembre 2006.

[29] JOLY-COUTURE, É., "Son voile qui volait au vent", *Le Devoir*, 18 septembre 2007.

[30] *Id.*

> This aspect of wearing the veil, if it is understood, can be used as point of mediation and negotiation in situations of cultural conflict in Quebec […] By ostracizing […] women who continue to wear the veil and by treating them as submissive women without a will of their own, we risk losing the opportunity of reflecting critically on our notion of public space.[31]

But convergent discourse that introduces the deliberative dimension into a debate is not and should not rely solely on parties considered to be objective, external and not immediately concerned by polarizing declarations, but also on those who are in a position to actually carry out inter-referential translation among Muslims themselves. In this regard, we can mention once again the article of the Swiss thinker Tariq Ramadan, published as a follow-up to the latest public forums of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission held in Montreal.

Right from the beginning, the author uses a series of words ("we", "our societies", "our communities", etc.), terms and expressions ("citizens", "living together", "common law", "equality", etc.) that highlight notions promoting convergence, the interest of the many, and resistance to feelings of fear and mutual avoidance. Opposing the extreme views of those who see no solution other than "making disappear all religious or cultural symbols that indicate difference" and those who, "with more optimism, suggest […] in the name of multiculturalism, the display of all symbols in a free and undifferentiated manner" [32], the author describes their limits by emphasizing that the only way out of this insoluble *antagonism* is getting over fears, and favouring knowledge and understanding of the "universe of the other as a wealth and not as a threat". He further adds that there is a need "to explain, to educate, to know oneself and to know the other" [33].

This logic is that of the inter-referential translator, who establishes a dialogue between the opposing universes of reference and involves them in the quest for balance within a larger social structure that represents what is "*common*", the locus of cohabitation. Though necessary, pacification is perhaps nothing more than a utopian ideal, always partial, incomplete and fragmentary. In reality there will always be divergences and discord, but, rather than aggravating further conflicts, inter-referential translation could instead make this the starting point of cooperation on grounds no longer minimal.

Non-translational articles

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[31] *Id.*

[32] RAMADAN, T., "Symboles religieux, à voir et à comprendre", *Le Devoir*, 22 décembre 2006.

[33] *Id.*

Non-translational articles are those texts written in a spirit that betrays the author's unwillingness to engage in the process of negotiation and yet, despite this antagonistic attitude, still promotes togetherness, albeit only through a caricature or oversimplification of otherness. Such is, for example, the case of the people who reacted favourably to the infamous code of conduct of the municipality of Herouxville, as quoted in the newspaper *La Presse*:

> We hope that your initiative will awaken those we have elected at the provincial and federal levels in order to put an end to the horror of this invasion on our traditional values […]
>
> If they wish to establish themselves here, they should be like us. Otherwise, let them go back to where they came from, period […]
>
> If the government of this 'belle province' showed some backbone, every immigrant would melt into the mass and culture of Quebec.[34]

Though it is not the author himself who claims this non translational orientation, the fact remains that the article contains some very eloquent examples of it; the only imaginable solutions to the perceived threat towards one's values are expulsion or assimilation. There is absolutely no place for communication or negotiation, not even in the sense of Rancière's "misagreement".

At times, however, this non-translational discourse is not lacking in sophistication. For instance, consider the article in which Denise Bombardier, in addition to making use of those same essentialisms, reproduced in the way she identifies the objects of her discussion ("fundamentalist religious groups", "religious fanatics", "moderate Muslims", "religious Muslims", "those who speak on their behalf (the moderates)", "moderate Sikhs", "a sect (the Hassidics)", "a majority of honest people", etc.)[35], also develops another kind of opposition. As this author attempts to demonstrate the contrast she perceives between the life of the women in their *country of origin* ("their country", "daily violations of human rights", "their previous life as inferior beings", "the obligatory submission to their fathers, husbands and brothers", "they often had to cover themselves from head to toe, to dress in black, that non-colour for their non-existence") and *life in Quebec* ("…here the possibility of choosing their life, their husband, their friends, to be financially independent of the men's clan"), the entire demonstration takes place against the background of an opposition between *religious fundamentalism* (revealed by continuing certain distinct clothing practices) and *moderation* (in other words, being freed from such practices, even rejecting the wearing of a veil).

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[34] Réactions recueillies par GIRARD, Mario. "L'affaire Hérouxville déchaîne les passions", *La Presse* du 29 janvier 2007.

[35] BOMBARDIER, D., "Les minorités silencieuses", *Le Devoir* du 25 novembre 2006.

The conclusions that the author seems to draw from this latter opposition suggest that moderation is achieved only when we have successfully "distanced ourselves from those religious Muslims", that is, from the religious practice underlying all extremism and fundamentalism. Such an implication obviously cannot contribute to the development of any translational position. On the contrary, it can only intensify feelings of alienation among Muslims who, although insisting on the necessity of keeping their own references and scriptural sources, seek to promote a contextualized reading thereof, one articulated in accordance with their new environment. If the only religious reference comes from the circle of moderation, it is therefore more than likely that many Muslims, such as those who are moderately practicing and even those who are non-practicing, will feel excluded.

Consider another example. In a two-part article, Richard Martineau, columnist in the *Journal de Montréal* sarcastically talks about the headscarf as a "harmless piece of fabric." [36] In the first part, and throughout the detour of a testimony from a militant French feminist of Maghrebian origin, the author tries to demonstrate that the headscarf is, in fact, a "marking system used to differentiate between good and bad girls. Those 'who want' and those who are 'worthy of respect'." The proof is irrefutable: "Mimouna Hadjam lives in Courneuve. She knows the Muslim community. For her, there is no doubt: the veil is anything but a 'harmless piece of fabric'". [37] The logic is impeccable:

> "Wednesdays and Saturdays, little girls less than ten years old can be seen going to the religious courses with a scarf on their head. This learning of the scarf takes place under the calm force of their surroundings, leading a girl to insist upon her "scarf at fourteen, claiming that it is her choice."

> "We oppose the fundamentalists, for whom the battle of the scarf is a step testing the secular camp and going even further by prohibiting the mixing of the genders. We are also opposed to the defenders of human rights who want to, as they say, respect the culture of others."

> "A 'harmless piece of fabric'? Really?"

> Might as well say that the Quran is just another book, a block of papers, a stack of sheets…

Clearly, the author's selection of declarations from his information source reveals not only his obvious prejudices about the "piece of fabric" which, through the inversion of

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[36] MARTINEAU, R., "Un bout de tissu inoffensif", 1ère et 2ème parties, *Le Journal de Montréal* des 23 et 24 avril 2007.

[37] MARTINEAU, R., "Un bout de tissu inoffensif" 1ère partie, *Le Journal de Montréal* du 23 avril 2007.

meaning, is presented as fundamentally harmful, but also his belligerent attitude, demonstrated by his choice of a witness who is as much *against* those who are presented as "fundamentalists" (though these are neither identified nor given a chance to defend themselves) as she is *against* the "defenders of human rights who want to, as they say, respect the culture of others" (who again are not given the opportunity to speak).

As for the second part of the article, in it Martineau supports his position with an investigation led by the French magazine *L'Express* and entitled "Scarf, the conspiracy: How Islamists are infiltrating France".[38]

> It tells us that most of the manifestations and demands for
> reasonable accommodation made by Muslims were planned
> and organized by organizations trying to push back the laws
> of secularity.[39]

The description of the battle between the proponents of secularism and those who, as is claimed, are against it, as illustrated in the French context, is not without significance. In fact, bearing in mind the passing of the famous 2004 law concerning "conspicuous religious symbols" as well as the republican model that fascinated so many militants in favour of the disappearance of all religious symbolism from the public space in Quebec, it is difficult to discern here the expression of even the *smallest translational desire* between the different parties.

Thus, the desire for cohabitation, instead of being served by the transformation of an opaque or incomprehensible perception into a knowledge, even if only relative, of difference or otherness, becomes that much more fragile as a result of these "un-veiling" enterprises that, even in their approximations, in no way promote the togetherness and inter-comprehension aimed at.

(In)translational articles

(In)translational articles are those I would qualify as "neutral" or, at least, that are presented as such, sometimes even claiming some scientific status in order to underline their refusal to take a position while participating in the debate. These articles are (in)translational in that they promote a certain "discretion"; that is to say, they maintain some ideological leeway by not revealing their partisan tendency to others. In this, Sathya Rao's definition of (*in*)*visibility* applies to them: "that untranslatable element that the translator intentionally adds to his work. It is perhaps a time of reflection, a sign of prudence or of refusal, a gaining of momentum, or even a space in which to breathe."[40]

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[38] *L'Express*, edition du 24 novembre 1994.

[39] MARTINEAU, R. "Un bout de tissu inoffensif", 2ème partie, *Le Journal de Montréal* du 24 avril 2007.

[40] RAO, S. (2004), "Quelques considerations éthiques…", *op. cit.*, p. 19.

At this point in our analysis, we can note that often, as we try simply to demystify an aspect of the debate, to put it in perspective or to resituate it in its proper context, it so happens that we also end up contributing, in a more or less unintentional manner, to the achievement of inter-comprehension by the elimination of certain obstacles, the ignorance of which severely handicaps the public. In this sense, (in)translation, even if it does not truly belong under the heading of inter-referential translation, still participates in the developing relations between different universes of reference, resituating key elements of comprehension within the common public space.

Indeed, the best grounds for this sort of return to the facts and to a certain degree of objectivity, particularly in the case of reasonable accommodations, is that of *law*: "It is a matter of legal obligation to accommodate persons by offering them a different treatment so that their fundamental rights as guaranteed by the Charter are not compromised." [41] By returning the debated question to its original domain, participants try, on the one hand, to report facts, legal precedents and clarifications about the concepts of law and rights in democratic society and, on the other, to give synthetic historical accounts which provide the elements for an overall explanation, all while reminding the parties involved to remain calm: "In considering this poignant concern, jurists are invited to exercise prudence and reflection."[42] In an information article published in *Le Devoir*, the journalist gives the floor to a lawyer (Julius Grey), a researcher (Marie McAndrew) and the president of the Human Rights Commission (Marc-André Dowd) in order to lend legitimacy and authority to a discourse that tries to be informative, neutral and impartial.

But law is not only a space where we can "take the heat out of the debates by bringing reason and nuance back into them"; it can also remind us of the fact that it constitutes in and of itself a *space for translation* and *for mediation* between citizens:

> The approach leading to an accommodation comes from negotiation. The solution usually emerges from compromise. The success of the accommodation measure depends on the mutual satisfaction of the parties and on respecting their co-responsibility. If done well, with a good dosage of judgment, searching for accommodation measures can even give rise to reciprocal comprehension and advance the feeling of belonging to the institution.[43]

Thus, in a certain way, the translation of law must show through in spite of itself because one of its fundamental *raisons d'être* is settling disputes and, consequently, converging towards inter-referential translation or, at least, feeding it with the

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[41] CAUCHY, Clairandrée "La chasse à l'accommodement", *Le Devoir* du 18 novembre 2006.

[42] *Id*.

[43] JÉZÉQUEL, Myriam "Accommodements: le fond du problème?", *Le Devoir* du 16 janvier 2007.

argumentative material that makes up the core of the communicational action in Habermas:

> The argument developed in *Between Facts and Norms* essentially aims to demonstrate that there is a conceptual or internal relation, and not simply a historical contingent association, between the rule of law and democracy. […] The democratic process bears the entire burden of legitimation. […] The proceduralist understanding of law thus privileges the communicative presuppositions and procedural conditions of democratic opinion- and will-formation as the sole source of legitimation.[44]

Conclusion

Bearing in mind these illustrations of both the translational and the non-translational nature of the discursive interaction between respective universes of reference, as well as the theoretical hypothesis according to which inter-referential translation is applicable to the social and political domains, we would like to propose, as a conclusion, yet another historical reflection that will allow us to put in proper perspective everything we have said thus far. At a time when the multiplicity of resistance movements against the neo-liberal pole manifests itself vigorously, as did unionized workers at the beginning of the 20th century, we cannot but feel the need to find points of convergence between these diverse groups, just as Gramsci tried to do when he proposed, in his *Prison Notebooks*, the notion of the "translatability of scientific and philosophical languages" at an international level.[45]

> Like two scientists trained in the same field believe they uphold "truths" that are different only because they use a different scientific language, so two national cultures, expressions of civilizations (*civiltà*) that are fundamentally alike, think that they are different, opposing, antagonistic, with one being superior to the other, because they use the languages of different traditions: the political-judicial language in France, the philosophical and doctrinal in Germany. For the historian, in reality, these civilizations are reciprocally translatable, reducible one to the other.[46]

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[44] HABERMAS, J. (1996) *Between Fact and Norms* ("Postscript"), translated by William Rehg, Cambridge Mass., The MIT Press, pp. 449-450.

[45] LABICA G. et BENSUSSAN G. (sous la dir.) (1985) *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, Paris, PUF, p. 1160.

[46] GRAMSCI, A. (1964) *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, Torino, Einaudi, p. 64, translated from Ricci BRAMANT (1975) *Gramsci dans le texte – de l'avanti aux derniers textes de prison*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, pp. 231-232, cited in LABICA et BENSUSSAN, *op .cit.*, p. 1160.

Beyond this naiveté with regard to the degree of perfection attainable in the translation of these ("reducible") *civilità*, we can see that from an historical perspective, this translatability makes it possible to "look for the 'fundamental' and structural identity in diverging expressions", just like the "constitutive unity of Marxism between politics, economy, and philosophy"[47] :

> If these three activities are essential elements of a single worldview, there must necessarily be, in their theoretical principles, a convertibility from one into the other, a reciprocal translation into the language specific to each element: each one is implicit in the other, and all of them together form a homogenous circle.[48]

In other words, in addition to confirming the possibility of translating political, scientific and epistemological cultures, Gramsci (and Mouffe in his footsteps) exposed us to a concept of translation that makes it possible to

a) read history in a way that forces us to consider it synthetically, that is, by identifying its recurrences, its changes, and its repetitions as universal moments to be translated according to the particular circumstances of each era, and

b) see the hope of inter-comprehension and cohabitation as part of a social and political enterprise that deals with the *modes of expression* of differences, far from the great liberal utopias and the tendency to neutralize the political, at a time when citizens are feeling alienated from politics in the democratic context.

Such is the commitment of civic and inter-referential translation at a time when, despite the temptation of extremes, our need for it is of urgently experienced.

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[47] *Ibid.,* p. 1161.

[48] GRAMSCI, A., *op. cit.,* p. 90, transl. BRAMANT, R., *op. cit.,* p. 266, cited in *id.*

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