Traduttore traditore, The Translator as Traitor

Claire Hancock[1]

université Paris-Est Créteil,
Lab'Urba, IUF
hancock@u-pec.fr

Abstract

This paper discusses the specific situation of French geography with respect to what has been termed "Anglo hegemony" and uses this example to shed some light on issues of translation in geography. Different geographic concerns and ways of writing and doing research emerge not just from different vocabularies, but from a number of social and political specificities of which this paper gives a few examples. That the translator may sometimes be cast as traitor says a lot about a whole "geopolitics of geography", which for some time in France revolved around the question of postmodernism, and which now probably has more to do with specific understandings of the ethics and relevance of geographical research. In many ways French universalism is second to Anglophone universalism only, but displays strikingly different characteristics in terms of the recognition of difference.

> I have never known what language I spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was really mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other. (Said, 2000)

What this quote by Edward Said usefully underlines is the intrinsically critical dimension of living, thinking and writing in two, or more, languages, with each language acting as a powerful antidote to the comfortable taken-for-granted assumptions operating in the other(s), in ways that monolingual people cannot suspect.

In *Le Monolinguisme de l'Autre* (*Monolingualism of the Other*), Derrida ponders this seemingly paradoxical statement "I have but one language—yet that language is not mine". The statement is inspired by a biographical episode: as a Jew in French Algeria, in 1941, Derrida was stripped of his French citizenship and expelled from the French school he has always attended. As a result, he explains, he has never been able to call French his "mother tongue", and he comments "That is my culture (…) My culture was right away political (*d'emblée politique*)" (Derrida, 1996, 61).

And here it starts. I am unhappy with the way "d'emblée" does not translate into English[2], so feel compelled to give the original phrase in French, hoping both to make amends to French-speakers, and to convey to English-speakers the inadequacy of their own language to capture the *nuance* of Derrida's thought (not that Derrida himself ever formulated such a complaint, when he would spend hours lecturing to multinational audiences about the way meaning was constructed in Greek, German, English, French, relentlessly tracking down anything hidden in any language).

The dissatisfaction is not mine only, in fact I believe it is widely shared by many of us who keep bumping against untranslatable words, concepts, ideas, turns of phrase, and are frustrated with the fact that things that can be expressed, and thought, with ease in one language, demand so much work on our part to become understandable in another. The question, of course, is how such unease becomes political, and why it should be an issue at all for geographers. Why is it that, as was stated by guest editors of *EPD*, "translation cannot but be at the forefront of a critical geography, and of a critical geography movement trying not to homogenize but to build on the differences that are expressed in diverse geographical traditions" (Desbiens et al. 2002) ?

---

[2] "Right away political" is the translation given by Patrick Mensah in his translation of Derrida's text for Stanford University Press, 1998. As one reviewer pointed out, "political from the outset" is much closer to the mark.

This has been debated repeatedly in geography, with Minca, along with several others, making a forceful case for the idea that "there is no such thing as a neutral lingua franca" (Minca, 2003, 165) and underlining the power geometries embedded in the use of English and the central role of Anglophone journals as gatekeepers defining what counts, or not, as "good" research (see Vaiou, 2003), while totally disregarding the specific intellectual and political environments within which non-Anglophone geographers have no choice but to operate. "Anglo hegemony" was a phrase frequently used in those years (see for instance Garcia Ramon, 2003, Desbiens and Ruddick, 2006, Garcia Ramon, Simonsen and Vaiou, 2006). While the use of English was praised by Rodriguez Pose as a "vehicle to preserve geographical diversity" (2004), its dominance is still resented by many as an oppression, and as a driving force behind the very unequal geography of geographies; there is a sense that parts of the world are granted the privilege of exemplarity, while others are rendered invisible (Milhaud, 2005). Clout expressed concern at a growing, not lessening, pattern of British geographers being uninterested in, and unwilling to engage with, non-Anglophone countries and academic production (Clout, 2005). More than a decade after the genuinely "international" character of so-called international journals was called into question (Gutierrez and Lopez Nieva, 2001), and the parochialism of some features of the reviewing process exposed (Aalbers, 2004), not so much seems to have changed; and if Morin and Rothenberg were right to point out the effects of the "hierarchies of place and status in the US academy" (Morin, Rothenberg, 2011), what then is to be said of all the institutions that are way off the map, and have to labour under the suspicion that no "world-class" research is likely to take place there ? Houssay-Holzschuch and Milhaud (2013) have recently suggested France could be thought of as a "province" of the geographical discipline until the end of the twentieth century[3].

The view from France, which I am best able to give an account of, underlines the paradoxical situation of a country which provides the academic world with many of its most bandied about theoretical references, but whose geography seemed, in the early 2000s, content in remaining aloof, and intent on side-stepping Anglo hegemony[4]. There were a couple of attempts, in those years, to make French geography[5] more familiar to English-speaking audiences (for instance Desbiens et

[3] They rightly point to several material constraints suffered by French academics which severely limit their ability to interact with the "international" geographic community: shortage of funds to travel, lack of access to expensive journal subscriptions, heavy teaching loads, lack of adequate administrative support, and a dearth of sabbaticals (Houssay-Holzschuch, Milhaud, 2013, 3).

[4] For instance, most feminist geographers are familiar with Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, but most would also probably be at pains to name a French feminist geographer.

[5] I should make clear that I use "French" in the sense "operating within the scholarly community of geographers in France", and that I can by no means claim to talk about French-speaking geography generally: quite obviously, there are many interesting issues regarding translation in several countries where French is one of the official languages, but I am in no position to address these.

al., 2002, Claval and Staszak, 2004), but they were far from sufficient to warm up distinctly cool diplomatic relations, for reasons that I shall try and sketch here.

No postmodernism please, we're French

Claudio Minca, in an account of the conference he organised on postmodernism in Venice in 1999, underlined the absence of French geographers, which, in his view, confirmed "the persistence of a sort of 'parallel' geographical tradition that in France is still very much alive but which (…) does not nurture a broad dialogue with the Anglo-American ('international' ?) geographical universe" (Minca, 2000). This of course seemed all the more paradoxical because so many of the authors who inspired the New Cultural Geography at that time were French theorists of postmodernism (Cusset, 2003). France had long been in a position of having its own thinkers adopted internationally, often as a result of a (delayed) translation into English, which is on one level an advantage: it is a comfortable position, being able to flaunt one's Foucault or one's Bourdieu without having their relevance as major thinkers challenged (which no doubt happens quite often to geographers from other countries who would like their own domestic thinkers to enjoy the same international currency). It is a further advantage, no doubt, to be able to claim a better, or more accurate understanding of what Lefebvre, say, meant in the French context, and the misunderstandings of his thought that arise from taking it out of its historical and geographical context, or just inaccurate translation (Chivallon, 2004).

However this international recognition of French theory has not had any knock-off effects on French geographers, as was pointed out by John Agnew and Josée Pénot in their editorial published after the death of Joël Bonnemaison, who was one of the leading French cultural geographers of the 1990s, yet virtually unknown in the Anglophone world, despite the fact much of his work had been translated into English (Agnew, Pénot, 1998). The response to this piece by Katharyne Mitchell in the subsequent issue of *EPD*, which claimed that it would be unduly elitist to expect of geographers to master foreign languages, seemed very much beside the point (Mitchell, 1998). Analysing the geography of cultural geographies on the basis of who referenced whom in those years, Enric Mendizabal i Riera described France as a "first periphery" to the Anglophone "center", while Spain, Italy and Brazil were so peripheral as to be "terra ignota" (Mendizabal i Riera, 1999).

In the same years, more or less, a conference had been organised in Bordeaux to discuss the growing gap between Anglophone and French geographies, many papers of which were subsequently published in a volume edited by Christine Chivallon, Pascal Ragouet and Michael Samers (Chivallon et al., 1999). In the introduction, Christine Chivallon pointed out that "geographies on either side of the Channel appeared to us so different they seemed unable to communicate, as if they were functioning in parallel and ignoring each other" (1999, 11). The major difference Chivallon identified was the unwillingness, in French geography, to

question the objectivity and rationality of geographic knowledge (1999, 19). She and her co-authors emphasised the importance of "cultural contexts". Stephanie Condon, a geographer who trained in Britain but works in France, reported that in her experience, French colleagues would, in conferences or seminars, be at pains to define themselves and justify their methods and ideas in contrast with the "Anglo-saxon" universe which she was taken to represent (Condon, in Chivallon et al., 1999, 56). The impression therefore was not so much of a gap as of an explicit antagonism, which in many ways resonates with my own experiences. Resentment of anyone "taking sides", or likely to take sides, with "Anglo" geography was rife at the time, probably as a result of the sense of a loss of influence of French geographic tradition, which had enjoyed international recognition until the 1950s (Staszak, 2001). The French were not, as were for instance the Catalan, and others, at the time, busily challenging "Anglo hegemony" in geography, but were in a way quietly fuming at the demise of their own hegemony.

This became obvious with the events which surrounded the publication, in 2001, of a reader of Anglophone geography edited by Jean-François Staszak, Béatrice Collignon, Christine Chivallon, Bernard Debarbieux, Isabelle Géneau de Lamarlière and myself (Staszak et al. 2001). Entitled *Géographies anglo-saxonnes. Tendances contemporaines*, at the insistence of the publisher, Belin, despite our misgivings about the term "anglo-saxon"[6], this anthology aimed quite modestly at outlining a few trends in Anglophone geography which seemed interesting and unparalleled in French geography to us, and making available, primarily for teaching purposes, a selection of articles which had never been translated into French until then. In the introduction of the book, Staszak explained what postmodern thought had contributed to the development of Anglophone geography during the 1990s, in order to make the general context of the various fields presented in the chapters intelligible to readers. The general tone was not one of outlandish praise for Anglophone geography at the expense of French geography, more of a fair-minded assessment of the potential interest of these new ways of thinking in geography, and an attempt to bridge the gap and foster better communication. However, reactions to the book proposal were surprisingly extreme, with one of the book series editors, for instance, refusing point-blank to have his name appear on the volume. Several of the co-editors were "invited" to a public discussion with many major and senior figures of French geography who expressed strong reservations about the content of the book (this discussion was subsequently published in a 2004 issue of *L'Espace géographique*, along with a few contributions about "Postmodernism in geography"). We were considered by some as "Troyan horses" of Anglo hegemony, which probably says something

[6] "Anglo-saxon" is one of the most popular "ethnic" designations in a country, France, where mentioning ethnicity or race is still taboo. It is used in a way that justifies this reluctance to take into account ethnic identities, since it is used mostly in a negative way, as well as a simplistic one, to designate any or everyone writing in English, regardless of the diversity of Anglophone academic production, and often implies undeserved hegemonic power.

about the siege mentality of some French geographers. We had acted as translators, since the core of the chapters of the book were articles translated from English, and briefly (and by no means always uncritically) presented by one of the editors; but we were cast as "traitors".

This reaction has a lot to do with a long-standing, and deep-seated, antagonism between the French and the "Anglos", which I understand in historical terms as a result of the ways in which French national identity, during the nineteenth century, constructed itself to a large extent *against* the English, in deliberate and systematic opposition to all things English (see for instance Hancock, 1997, 2003). Despite Germany's best efforts, it has never been able to take over successfully as France's "hereditary foe"[7], and the French are no less ambivalent, and torn between fascination and loathing, with regard to the United States (see Roger, 2002, or Fassin, 2006). Of course, France's specific history during and after the Second World War accounts for much of this ambivalence (who wouldn't resent being liberated and bailed out by a former colony of one's best enemy ?), in particular because along with many countries in continental Europe, and unlike both Britain and the USA, France had a powerful Communist party, which played a significant role in national politics for a long time, and that the Cold War period was formative for many geographers among the most influential in France to this day. There is a clear generational divide in this respect, as can be inferred from the cast of the "discussion" published in *L'Espace Géographique:* the critics are mostly (male) geographers born in the 1930s (1920s for some of them), while the "defendants" were mostly born in the 1960s (and two of them are female).

In many ways, it looked as though postmodernism had become the last in a long line of vices for which the French and the British like to hold each other responsible[8]. In France, and in French geography in particular, "postmodernism" has become shorthand for what some dislike about "anglo" approaches and that against which they attempt to define their own, sound and "scientific" approaches; in particular it is taken to refer to cultural relativism and "political correctness" (see for instance Pumain, in *L'Espace Géographique*, 2004), or wordy theoretical discussions where French readers expect more empirical material.

However, what the French often criticise as "postmodern", i.e. concern for the politics of difference, the recognition of minorities and or communities, a distrust of centralising State, to name but a few, seem to reflect specific

[7] There were many comments about this on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the "Entente Cordiale" in 2004: *The Economist*, for instance, reported on a survey which showed that whereas 84% of French people surveyed said they trusted the German, only 51% trusted the British (in *The Economist*, April 7th, 2004 "On entente, understanding and Verständnis").

[8] For instance, "to take French leave" is "filer à l'anglaise" in French, a "French letter" is a "capote anglaise", and so on… A French colleague told me that in the early 2000s, while attending a conference abroad, he was quite abruptly asked by one of the British participants "hey, you're French, so what's this whole postmodernism thing about ?".

understandings of society and of the body politic in the US or the UK, more than actual "postmodern" influences. Such differences already fed the antagonism between the French and the English in the nineteenth century: in the confrontation between Paris and London, then rival "capitals of the world", the English would value the private, and privacy, above all, while the French identified with the public, and the state (Hancock, 2003). This also accounts for another misunderstanding between the French and English-speaking world: whereas in the British or US contexts, social justice is unthinkable if it does not take into account difference, the French position would be to see justice as blind to difference, as a pre-condition to making universal statements (Hancock, 2009).

'False friends' and other people's universal

> French colonization proclaimed itself 'assimilatory', while British colonization saw itself as 'respectful of cultures'. The other White is also the bad White. Each White nation is spiritually 'the whitest': in other words, it is both the most elitist and the most universalistic (Balibar in Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991, 43)

Augustin Berque, in the debate about postmodernism in geography, warned of the "Anglosphere's cunning (*ruse*)", and insisted on the need not to abandon the quest of the universal, lest the "world (…) which won the war" impose onto others the "predicates which constitute its own world, and which are necessarily ethnocentered" (Berque in *L'Espace Géographique*, 2004, 26). This resonated with Wacquant and Bourdieu's 1998 indictment of "American" cultural imperialism, the title of which also referred to "cunning", and which began with this statement: "Cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such" (1998, 109, 41 of the 1999 translation). True, Wacquant and Bourdieu were prompt to make clear, in a footnote, that

> It bears stressing at the outset to avoid any misunderstanding -and to ward off the predictable accusation of 'anti-Americanism'- that nothing is more universal than the pretension to the universal or, more accurately, to the universalization of a particular vision of the world; and that the demonstration sketched here would hold, mutatis mutandis, for other fields and other countries (notably for France: see Bourdieu, 1992). (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1998, 1999, 52)

However, the statement that "nothing is more universal than the pretension to the universal" seems excessively general, and it is probably the case that, as seems to be implied in the Bourdieu 1992 reference quoted here, there are in fact two competing bids to universalism, and that the French bid only comes second to the "American" one (the title of the piece is "Deux impérialismes de l'universel"). I should add that "cunning" (*ruse*) has long been part of the vocabulary used in France to denigrate the strategies of (cowardly) English-speakers, first and

foremost the "perfidious Albion", the implication being that if the struggle were conducted in a loyal, up-front (and manly ?) way, rather than by stealth, the French point of view would necessarily prevail.

Bourdieu and Wacquant also poke fun at those who are fooled by 'false friends':

> Knowing the precautions which ethnologists take in introducing indigenous words, one cannot but be surprised - although one is also well aware of all the symbolic profits that this veneer of modernity provides - that social scientists should stock their scientific language with so many theoretical 'faux amis' ('false friends') based on a mere lexicological facsimile (minority for minorité, profession for liberal profession, etc.) without seeing that these morphologically twinned words are separated by the whole set of differences between the social system in which they were produced and the new system in which they are introduced. Those most exposed to the 'faux ami' fallacy are obviously the British because they speak apparently the same language, but also because they have often learnt their sociology in American textbooks, readers and books, and do not have much to oppose to such conceptual invasion, save extreme epistemological vigilance. (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1999, 54)

In geography, this process had been described quite perceptively by Paul Claval[9] who pointed out that there are instances in which "geographers trying to imitate each other (…) move further from one another" (Claval, 1997). And indeed, there are multiple examples of inaccurate translations producing new vocabulary, that tends to be used in diverging ways in French and in English. A case in point is the French translator's mistake on the title of Saskia Sassen's famous book on "The Global City": "mondial" is the French word to designate phenomena occurring at the global scale or taking worldwide importance, however the title of the French version published in 1991 was *La Ville Globale*, carrying very different connotations and implications for the way the book was received[10]. Alongside "mondialisation", French has imported the term "globalisation" from its brushes with English, and French analysts have discussed and established the difference between the two phenomena (in ways that are of course impossible to translate into English, and many other languages). It has become very fashionable in French urban studies to talk about "la fabrique de la ville", to refer to the *making* of cities,

[9] Paul Claval is one of the French geographers of the generation born in the 1930s who consistently worked to bridge the gap between French and English-speaking geographies throughout his career, a fact which earned him international recognition but probably also caused him to remain isolated in French geography, where he was viewed as a maverick. The fact that Claval was also very outspoken in his defiance of Marxism, at a time when this was far from a mainstream position in French geography, tends to confirm my hypothesis of an ideological dimension of choices to engage with, or to ignore, trends in Anglophone geography between the 1960s and the 1980s. Full disclosure: Professor Claval was my PhD supervisor.

[10] *Global* in French means general, or holistic, and is not used to talk about the "globe" or world.

while the phrase comes from a misunderstanding of the English "urban fabric" (*tissu urbain*, in proper French, *fabriquer* meaning to make). The term "embourgeoisement" was used in French to talk about "gentrification", until "gentrification" was imported into French and it became necessary to reflect and elaborate on the difference between the two processes, thereby effectively attributing a much more specific meaning to the term in French than it has in English. The result of such importations and re-significations in the local idiom tends, as Claval implied, to give different meanings to the same term in the two languages, and therefore hinder, rather than facilitate, communication. Nor is the process exclusive to French, as was underlined by Vaiou who emphasized that: "(d)ebating issues outside of one's own linguistic and academic community raises intricate questions about the frequently assumed interchangeability of concepts and categories and about the problems of using terms which turn out to refer to different, sometimes incommensurable, meanings and practices in different communities of knowledge" (Vaiou, 2003, 134).

Clearly, some concepts central to geographical analysis of social situations do not travel well, as I too have become keenly aware over the course of fifteen years navigating both French and Anglophone geographies. My experience also coincides with that of Fall, who writes:

> Simple attempts to bridge such divides, such as providing foreign translations for key terms – as attempted in one French-language dictionary that provided translations of chosen terms into English and German (Lévy & Lussault 2003) – are far from convincing, and at worst suggest that the question of translation is only one of simple word comprehension, rather than complex embedded meanings. (Fall, 2014)

How can we unpack the "complex embedded meanings" from the words we use, and how also can we thrash out grounds for understanding, such as those Fall and Rosière called for in another piece (2008) ? Well, a process of "in-depth" translation, in which we work hard to make ourselves intelligible to those with whom we do not share assumptions, might be a place to begin. So I list here a few terms which, in the course of a long experience of shuttling backwards and forwards between French and Anglophone geography, I have identified as needing this additional effort.

The first one of these I will not discuss here, because it has already been discussed by Bernard Debarbieux in the edited volume mentioned above (Debarbieux in Chivallon et al., 1999): it is the very widely used term "territoire", which plays a major part in French geographic vocabulary but which usually proves difficult to render in other languages; the connotations of the English "territory" or the German "Territorium" fall well short of the meanings it has been loaded with in the French context, and which are discussed in Debarbieux's piece, as well as in the several entries entitled "territoire" in Lévy and Lussault's 2003

Dictionnaire de la Géographie et de l'Espace des Sociétés (mentioned above by Fall). In a country now graced with a ministry "for the Equality of Territories", it is quite obvious that "territoire" has lost most of its original political connotations to designate any local space appropriated by any human group. It has also acquired some of the qualities and uses of the English "place", as opposed to "space/espace". As such, it is used extensively, but remains either impossible or very difficult to translate into other European languages.

Another term that has gained much greater currency in French geographical parlance than in English-speaking academic geography is "identity". There are of course underlying, historical reasons that account for the wide use of this term: one of them is underlined by Lévy who emphasizes that French geography was not only complicit, to a large extent, in French colonial ventures, but also played a major part in the construction of nationalistic discourse, with a foregrounding of "national territory" and "the identity of France", in ways unparalleled in Anglophone or Scandiniavian countries (Lévy, 1997, pp. 339-340). It is telling that in the Lévy-Lussault dictionary of geography mentioned above, there are two entries about "identity", one written by each of the editors of the book[11]. Overall, the space devoted to the term is equivalent to the "identity" entry of the English-language *Dictionary of Human Geography* edited by Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts and Whatmore (I refer here to the 2009 fifth edition), that is, approximately two pages (in both cases the volumes are a little over a thousand pages). The definitions, however, could hardly be more different, in multiple ways that say a lot about styles of writing, thinking, and of conceiving what the use of a dictionary of geography may be (for in-depth remarks about the Lévy-Lussault dictionary, see Cox, 2006). Lévy and Lussault criticised the *Dictionary*, in the introduction to their *Dictionnaire*, as "heterogeneous and eclectic", "lacking in general consistency", which they consider as "both a limit and an attraction of the book", and they comment it is a "very postmodern paradox by itself !" (2003, 9). They set out, conversely, to "harmonise vocabulary and stabilise meanings", to provide a "coherent and consolidated ensemble" (2003, 13)[12].

It is telling that, in the 2000 edition of the *Dictionary of Human Geography*, the entry for "identity", on page 367, sent the reader over to "subject formation, geographies of", whereas there was a lengthy discussion of "identity politics" with ample references to Nancy Fraser's theories of social justice.

To be fair, there is no phrase in French to say "identity politics", and the whole idea remains alien to French ways of thinking[13]. Some of the difficulty has to

---

[11] By contrast, "altérité", otherness, has only one entry, written by a foreign guest author, Angelo Turco.

[12] Full disclosure: while I had personally accepted to write a few of the entries for the 2003 edition, I declined to have anything to do with the second edition.

[13] Though arguably it corresponds to what a group like the Indigènes de la République have been trying to promote in France (see Kipfer, 2011), or approaches that major figures of French feminism like Christine Delphy, or, in a younger generation, Elsa Dorlin, have actively and convincingly defended. On the French denial of the relevance of identity issues, see Amiraux and Simon, 2006, Bancel et al., 2010.

do with the virtual impossibility of translating "politics of" in French, which has probably contributed to many a misunderstanding of, for instance, Iris Marion Young's book on *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (which remains untranslated into French to this day, see Hancock, 2009). While gendering of nouns in French allows for subtle distinctions between *le* politique and *la* politique (see Dikeç, 2005), politics as an ideal abstract (masculine) and politics as practical and hands-on (feminine), the word *politique* is also the one used for policy. This has led many commentators of Young, and others, to misinterpret her concern for the politics of difference as advocacy for *policies* in favour of difference, i. e. multiculturalism, affirmative action, etc. The meaning of "politics of", as careful theoretical and politically informed consideration of, is generally lost on French readers, and though in recent translations of Nancy Fraser, for instance, "la politique de" is being used, it is not necessarily always understood in the English sense of the phrase (e.g. Estelle Ferrarese's translations of several Fraser articles**,** 2005).

Another problematic and controversial term is "communauté", which is virtually devoid of any positive connotation in French, and nearly always carries implications of "communautarisme" (communitarianism) or "repli communautaire" (closure of a community onto itself). This is obviously at odds with a far more wide-ranging, and generally either neutral or positive, use of "community" in English. Thus when Gill Valentine writes that

> The notion of community as a positive social relationship embracing a sense of shared identity and mutually caring relationships dates (…), back to the Latin term *communitatem* (sic) (fellowship) and has been in popular use in this way since the sixteenth century (2001, p.111).

she is not only treating as a-historical and general an understanding that is specific to her place and time, she is also writing something as abhorrent to French minds as a positive assessment of sects and the togetherness, caring and sense of belonging they provide sect-members. Compare and contrast with the definition of "communauté" by Jacques Lévy, who draws upon the classical distinction made by Tönnies between *Gemeinshaft* and *Gesellschaft* to define community as "a group that is not chosen and to which an individual delegates automatically, generally and irreversibly his competence and strategic action" (2003, 177). Lévy's depiction of "community" as "given" not chosen, as fixed and unlikely to change, as diminishing an individual's capabilities rather than empowering him/her, gives a sense of the disrepute of community and associated notions in French. One cannot but subscribe to Christine Chivallon's comment in the same volume, in the entry on "communitarianism": "The communitarian position is strongly related to the Anglo-American cultural context, and has little echo in France, where the notion that the relation with the State is but one community allegiance among others clashes with the universalist pretention of the national-"Republican" ideology" (2003, 176). In another context, Chivallon remarks that "One could interpret the hesitation of French intellectuals to explore the field of difference as a consequence

of their social universe, which is reluctant to use those very categories" (Chivallon, 2004b, 218).

French roosters or hens ?

> The difference between involvement and commitment ? Think of bacon and eggs. The hen was involved. The pig was committed. (source unclear)

Strangely enough for the country that provided the world with the notion of the "intellectuel engagé", courtesy of Sartre, French academics in general and geographers in particular shy from any overlap between research and activism. So in a sense, the gap which exists between French and Anglophone geographies is not merely one of vocabulary or even culturally determined views of society, but also a divergence about the question of "relevance". While it is broadly accepted that geography is likely to provide "expertise" to enlighten public decision-making or help frame policies, there is a reluctance on the part of geographers to take part in public debates or militate in organisations, associations, etc; or to put it more accurately, those who are also activists take care to keep their activism as separate as possible from their research. There is an interesting piece about this by Claude Grasland, who tells of his profound personal misgivings when he was asked by local friends to assist them in a campaign against the opening of a potentially hazardous factory; he writes:

> If one day someone asks you to do such a thing, refuse drily and put the request at the back of your mind. For to produce this first map is the beginning of a fatal spiral (*engrenage*) that will crush your scientific objectivity and transform the proud researcher thriving on "axiologic neutrality" (Weber 1959) into an abominable "social organizer" willing to mix science and civic action to achieve an end that appears fair (*juste*) to him. (Grasland, 2012)

"Juste" is a key term here, and this quote gives a sense of many French geographers' discomfort with its use in relation with their academic pursuits. The morally normative overtones of the idea of justice are seen by many of them as out of bounds, or "out of place", in scientific, "objective" discussions of "facts", which is how they define their academic work.

Hence much of the reluctance encountered in recent years by a group of French geographers led by Philippe Gervais-Lambony, and who have been at the forefront of an attempt to bring discussions of "spatial justice" or "environmental justice", into French academic geography. This is the group which organized a 2008 conference in Nanterre entitled *Justice et injustice spatiales*, and has been painstakingly publishing the bilingual online journal *Justice Spatiale/Spatial*

Justice since 2009[14]. Several of the editors have reported criticism from colleagues implying that publishing in English, or publishing texts by or interviews of Anglophone academics constitutes a form of "selling out" or kowtowing to Anglo hegemony (interestingly, as was the case in the aftermath of the 2001 reader, noone has ever reproached me with any of those things: there is presumably an essentialist assumption that with my British birth and surname, I could hardly be expected to know any better). The most upfront of critics attended the conference and made their reservations clear both in their presentations and in the written contributions to the proceedings of the conference: for instance, Vincent Veschambre stated that in his view, and it is a quite widely shared view among French social geographers, the word "justice" pertains to the political sphere, and to forms of political activism which should remain separate from academic research: there, he argued, we had a number of terms neither moral nor normative, such as "unequalities", to describe what was going on without stepping out of an academic position (Veschambre, 2010). That a researcher with as many unimpeachable credentials as Veschambre, who has been working for years with deprived and discriminated people, the Roma, the very poor, inhabitants of the *banlieue*, remains reluctant to think of his work as in any way a form of activism or a way of exposing injustice says a lot about the different intellectual universes we inhabit, and the difficulty of making them communicate. Because there is no, or little, room in France to reflect on the "politics of difference", the forms of systemic violence or discrimination encountered by people as a group, and not just as individuals, eloquently described by Young (1990), there is little leeway to think poverty, for instance, as having to do with anything else than class structure or exploitation (though see Fassin and Fassin, 2006). One also gets the sense that French intellectuals avidly seize any work critical of multiculturalism: for instance, W. B. Michaels' book *The Trouble with Diversity. How we learned to love identity and ignore unequality*, published in 2006, was translated into French in 2009 under the tellingly different title *La diversité contre l'égalité* (i.e. Diversity against equality), and published by Raison d'Agir which specializes in "critical" and committed titles.

While a subtext of French criticism of Anglophone geography is its perceived ineffectual wordiness and excessive attention to discourse and representations, at the expense of "real-world facts", paradoxically, there is in a sense less regard, overall, for the "relevance", or *utilité sociale*, of the research carried out. Much of the discomfort expressed with postmodernism had to do with the fact that it seemed like a renounciation of the ability of geographers to progress in their knowledge or understanding of the world; moreover, it seemed reactionary because of the challenge it apparently posed to the possibility of progress, or the possibility of setting the academic's interpretation of facts apart from other, "vernacular" ones, or the possibility of making statements with universal value. French geographers in

[14] Full disclosure: I have been a member of the board of this journal since 2009. See www.jssj.org for more information about the journal and its objectives.

the late 1990s and early 2000s seemed unwilling to think, along Foucaldian lines, of knowledge as power, and the preservation of what they thought of as "objectivity" was a major concern, as pointed out by Chivallon et al (1999). Individual researchers who discussed their personal misgivings about the stance of "objectivity" and the ethical dilemmas they faced, for instance when witnessing situations of great injustice in which they felt they couldn't but take sides, were dismissed as unprofessional or immature (see for instance Morelle and Ripoll, 2008). I get the sense from recent publications, though, that the ethical dimension of research in geography is now more openly acknowledged and discussed than it was in the past (see for instance Collignon, 2010), and other papers in a similar vein have been published (see for instance Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll, 2012, or the Grasland paper quoted above). So maybe "axiological neutrality" will no longer seem to be a requisite for proper academic geography.

Concluding remarks

> I too am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion (…) that something can also be gained. (Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, 1983, 29)

Along with Chivallon, and others, I believe in the determining role of social and cultural contexts on the production of scientific discourse, and I posit that the differences between French and Anglophone geographies are a function of socially and culturally shaped preferences and ideologies of which we would like to believe that we are completely free when producing academic work. It is often the case that hostility to "others"' ideas have more to do with knee-jerk reactions to perceived hegemony than with considered and arguable disagreement. I think an implication in translation opens one's eyes to the ways in which specific social and political contexts shape, more than we care to acknowledge, the issues we as geographers choose to address, and the ways in which we do it. Both aspects seem to validate the Italian play on words *traduttore/traditore*, in the sense that, when translating geography from English to French, one is seen as a "Troyan horse" of Anglo hegemony, but also in the sense that, because s/he sees all that determines geographical thought and writing in each language, the translator is necessarily aware of the relativity of discourses that claim to be scientific and objective, and s/he is therefore likely to expose the Emperor's nudity…

There is probably a specific role of "neutral" or "peripheral" countries in this conflict: the Swiss, for instance, not being directly involved in the ancestral feud between the French and the Anglophones, seem to be able not to waste the better part of their energy on squabbling and to produce original readings of their own, as was argued by Fall (2005) in her discussion of the reception of Foucault by Francophone geographers.

I became aware, thanks to a reviewer's thoughtful discussion of an earlier version of this paper, of the extent to which Francophone geographers outside France view the persistence of an alternative tradition of scholarship as "refreshing", and relish work that does not conform to Anglo-American rules, and fads. One should not make light of the extent to which Anglo hegemony is resented, within France too, by many who experience pressure to publish in a language that is not their working language: the process places an uneven burden on them to "master a good portion of the literature published in English (on top of the literature published in their own language) and engage it in their own papers in order to increase the chance of seeing their papers accepted in "big" Anglophone journals", while "We are all aware that authors publishing in English need not read anything else" (reviewer's comments).

There are therefore legitimate concerns about Anglo hegemony, in particular when it is backed by an ability to export, via journals, foundations and research funding, ways of theorising, or categorising social facts and groups of people which derive from the specific historical experience of one country, which fails to see itself as specific, as was cogently shown by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1998, 1999). Wacquant and Bourdieu heaped criticism on the "middlemen" (*passeurs*) who benefit personally from their role as importers of concepts, which of course raises all sorts of relevant questions about what translators are really up to. However, I believe most of the translators I have met in academia are quite careful to critically reflect on the embeddedness of ideas in specific cultures and to counteract what Wacquant and Bourdieu warned against, the "dehistoricization that almost inevitably results from the migration of ideas across national boundaries" (1999, 51).

But in a way, it is quite possible that we *do* need Anglos to adopt Fanon (or Lefebvre, or Foucault) and load their work with all sorts of anachronistic or out-of-place interpretations in order to re-discover their relevance to the French society he was addressing first and foremost, and to understand our present as strewn with what Ann Stoler has termed the "ruins of empire". If we do object to French thinkers become the ready-to-think tools for theorising any and every conceivable situation, then we need to work harder to reclaim them, for instance, by not editing Foucault's considerations about the "lutte des races" out of our readings of his work, as we are prone to do (Stoler, 2010).

As Elsa Dorlin commented recently:

> From Europe, we perceive, seize on, import or "vampirize" Anglophone thought: a symptom of academic imperialism as well as an effect of the globalization of thought and of resistance movements. We operate a certain re-moulding of concepts, distorted by the Atlantic crossing, to fit them to the problems, and the struggles, we are confronted with here and now. In this context of cultural translation of our research, we need to inscribe our conceptual tools in a *genealogy*—

> and I do not mean here some "national" specificity of thought, but the local forms of power which make it necessary for us to constantly situate our critique (Dorlin, 2012).

Many of the contributions, from many parts of the world, to a 2003 special issue of *EPD* talked about a sense of "Anglo hegemony", but also of the impression that "Western critical thinkers of the 1990s were losing touch with the non-Western world, while still presenting themselves as 'universal' and while possessing the power to dictate 'global' knowledge and scholarly fads" (Yiftachel, 2003, 139). More recently, there have been further discussions of the discomfort experienced by many when postcolonial theories are not applied by the very academics who preach them (Dikeç, 2010) or when producing "world-class research" seems at odds with being accountable to the communities one works with in the field (Jazeel, McFarlane, 2010), discomfort also with the unspoken assumption that "the West" is where theory is produced, with "the rest" of the world serving as little more than empirical fodder. In the case of social geography, Peake has spoken eloquently of "two entertwining dimensions, an unwillingness to engage with (social geography's) own whiteness and to move outside its own established repertoire to encompass non-western knowledges" (Peake, 2011). Fall (2014) draws on stimulating work by Canagarajah to provide an analysis of the "geopolitics of academic writing", and echoes the postcolonial critiques formulated by Linda Peake, Patricia Noxolo, and others in geography.

Entertaining as it may be to witness the tortured response to Anglo hegemony of French geographers who seem to think that the hegemonic position belongs by rights to the "Homeland of the Rights of Man" (sic), the *patrie des Droits de l'Homme*, here we have a much more important issue to confront in geography. Who speaks, and of what, are probably more important considerations than what language is spoken. Up to a point, the burden of the "complex embedded meanings" in French and English probably give the latter the edge when it comes to putting these issues out in the open and taking them seriously, if only because race remains unspeakable in French academic discourse as in French political life. It is however ironical that the scholarly tradition that makes most of "the politics of difference" retains such a massive blind spot when it comes to its own role in homogenizing and imposing sameness on the output of geographers working in a variety of contexts, with a variety of references they are often obliged to jettison to satisfy to the expectations of "world-class" journals…

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the editors of this special issue for inviting her to contribute to it, for many interesting discussions, and for their patience. The reviewers provided helpful and thought-provoking feedback. Thanks also to Jean-François Staszak for a most helpful suggestion as well as for inviting me on board "GAS" fourteen years ago, and thanks to all my friends and colleagues for being such a wonderful bunch of people to work and argue with, and write about.

References

Aalbers, Manuel. 2004. Creative destruction through the Anglo-American hegemony: a non-Anglo-American view on publications, referees, and language, *Area*, 36-3, 319-322.

Amiraux Valérie, Patrick Simon. 2006. There are no minorities here: Cultures of Scholarship and Public Debate on Immigrants and Integration in France, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 47-3/4, 191-215

Amiraux Valérie, Alana Lentin. 2012. "Retirer le mot race de la Constitution ne règle rien", *Le Monde*, 21 mars

Agnew John, Josée Pénot. 1998. How cultural boundaries limit intellectual horizons: reflections on the untimely death of Joël Bonnemaison, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16-3, 253-256.

Bancel Nicolas, Florence Bernault, Pascal Blanchard, Ahmed Boubeker, Achille Mbembe, Françoise Vergès (eds.) 2010. *Ruptures postcoloniales. Les nouveaux visages de la société française*. Paris: La Découverte.

Balibar Etienne, Immanuel Wallerstein. 1991. *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*. Verso Books

Bernardie-Tahir Nathalie, Camille Schmoll. 2012. La voix du chercheur et la parole du migrant. Ce que les coulisses du terrain maltais nous enseignent, *Carnets de géographes* 4, URL http://www.carnetsdegeographes.org/carnets_terrain/terrain_04_01_Bernardie%20Tahir_Schmoll.php

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. Deux impérialismes de l'universel", in Christine Fauré, Tom Bishop (dir.), *L'Amérique des Français*. Paris, Éditions François Bourin, p 149-155.

Bourdieu, Pierre, Loïc Wacquant. 1998. Sur les ruses de la raison impérialiste, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 121-1, 109-118; English translation On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason, *Theory, Culture and Society* 1999, 16-1, 41-58.

Chivallon, Christine, Pascal, Ragouet, Michael, Samers (eds.) 1999. *Discours scientifiques et contextes culturels, géographies françaises et britanniques à l'épreuve post-moderne*, Bordeaux, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine.

Chivallon, Christine. 2004. Débattre autour du postmodernisme: commentaires de textes choisis", *L'Espace Géographique*, 33-1, 43-58.

Claval, Paul, Jean-François Staszak. 2004. Confronting geographic complexity: contributions from some Latin countries, *GeoJournal*, 60-4, 319-320.

Claval, Paul. 1997. Les rapports de la géographie française et des autres géographies. In Knafou, Rémy (ed.), *L'état de la géographie. Autoscopie d'une science*, Belin, collection Mappemonde p 282-284.

Clout, Hugh. 2005. Cross-Channel Geographers: a century of activity, *Cybergéo*, URL: http://www.cybergeo.eu/index2966.html.

Collignon, Béatrice. 2010. L'éthique et le terrain, *L'Information Géographique* 74-1, 63-83

Cox, Kevin. 2006. Une lecture anglophone et marxiste. *EspacesTemps.net,* URL http://espacestemps.net/document2115.html

Cusset, François. 2003. *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze et Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis*. Paris, La Découverte.

Derrida, Jacques.1996. *Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse d'origine*. Paris, Galilée.

Desbiens, Caroline, Sue Ruddick. 2006. Speaking of geography: language, power, and the spaces of Anglo-Saxon "hegemony", *Environment and Planning D. Society and Space*, 24-1, 1-8.

Desbiens, Caroline, Georges Benko, Pierre Hamel, Etienne Rivard, Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin, Simon Betterbury. 2002. Guest editorial: speaking in tongues, making geographies; French language geography, *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space*, 20, 1-25.

Dikeç, Mustafa. 2005. Space, Politics and the Political. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23, 171-188.

Dikeç, Mustafa. 2010. Colonial Minds, Postcolonial Places. *Antipode*, 42-4, 801-805

Dorlin, Elsa. 2012. L'Atlantique féministe. L'intersectionnalité en débat. *Papeles del CEIC*, septiembre, URL http://www.identidadcolectiva.es/pdf/83.pdf

Fall, Juliet. 2005. Michel Foucault and Francophone geography. *EspacesTemps.net*, URL http://espacestemps.net/document1540.html

Fall, Juliet. 2014. Writing (somewhere). In Lee, Roger, Noel Castree, Rob Kitchin, Vicky Lawson, Anssi Paasi, Chris Philo, Sarah Radcliffe, Susan M. Roberts, Charles Withers (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Human Geography. Practising Human Geographies*. London, Sage, p 300-319

Fall, Juliet, Stéphane Rosière. 2008. Guest editorial: On the Limits of dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone political geography, *Political Geography* 27-7, 713-716

Fassin, Didier, Eric Fassin (eds.) 2006. *De la question sociale à la question raciale? Représenter la société française*. Paris, La Découverte, Cahiers libres.

Fraser, Nancy. 2005. *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale ? Reconnaissance et redistribution,* translation by Estelle Ferrarese. Paris, La Découverte.

Garcia Ramon Maria Dolores, Kirsten Simonsen, Dina Vaiou. 2006. Does Anglophone hegemony permeate Gender, Place and Culture? *Gender, Place and Culture*, 13-1, 1-5.

Garcia Ramon Maria Dolores. 2003. Globalization and international geography: the questions of languages and scholarly traditions. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27-1, 1-5.

Gutierrez, Javier, Pedro, Lopez-Nieva. 2001. Are international journals of human geography really international? *Progress In Human Geography*, 25-1, 53-69.

Grasland, Claude. 2012. Le chercheur et le militant: réflexions "à chaud" sur l'installation d'une centrale d'enrobés à Bonneuil-sur-Marne. *Métropolitiques* URL: http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Le-chercheur-et-le-militant.html.

Hancock, Claire. 1997. Your city does not speak my language: cross-Channel views of Paris and London in the early nineteenth century, *Planning Perspectives* 12, 1-18

Hancock, Claire. 1999. Du centre et de la périphérie en géographie humaine. Compte-rendu du n°34 (1999) de la revue *Documents d'Anàlisi Geografica* "Noves geografies culturals", *Géographie et cultures*, 32, 129-132.

Hancock Claire. 2003. *Paris et Londres au XIXe siècle: représentations dans les guides et récits de voyage*. Paris, éditions du CNRS, collection Espaces et Milieux.

Hancock Claire. 2009. La justice au risque de la différence: faire une "juste place" à l'Autre. *Annales de Géographie*, janvier-avril, 61-75

Houssay-Holzschuch, Myriam, Olivier Milhaud. 2013. Geography after Babel. A view from the French province, *Geographica Helvetica*, 1, 5.

Jazeel, Tariq, Colin, McFarlane. 2010. The Limits of Responsability: a Postcolonial Politics of Academic Knowledge Production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35, 109-124.

Kipfer, Stefan. 2011. Decolonization in the Heart of Empire: Some Fanonian Echoes in France Today. *Antipode*, 43-4, 1155-1180

L'Espace Géographique. 2004. Debate on "Le postmodernisme en géographie", 1, 6-37.

Mamadouh Virginie. 2003. Some notes on the politics of political geography. *Political Geography*, 22, 663-675.

Mendizabal i Riera, Enric. 1999. Algunes reflexions sobre la (nova) geografia cultural des de la perifèria. *Documents d'Analisi Geografica* 34, 119-132

Minca, Claudio. 2003. Critical peripheries. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21, 160-168.

Minca, Claudio. 2000. Venetian geographical praxis. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18, 285-289.

Milhaud, Olivier. 2005. Les géographes parlent-ils tous du même monde ? Les réseaux intellectuels: hégémonie anglo-américaine et vision du monde, Actes du Festival International de Géographie de St-Dié, URL http://fig-st-die.education.fr/actes/actes_2005/milhaud/article.htm

Mitchell, Katharyne. 1998. Guest editorial. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16-5, 505-508.

Morelle, Marie, Fabrice, Ripoll. 2008. Les chercheur-es face aux injustices: l'enquête de terrain comme épreuve éthique. *Annales de Géographie*, 665-666, 157-167

Morin Karin, Tamar, Rothenberg. 2011. Our Theories, Ourselves: Hierarchies of Place ans Status in the U.S. Academy. *ACME*, 10-1, 58-68.

Peake Linda. 2011. In, out and unspeakably about: taking social geography beyond an Anglo-American positionality. *Social and Cultural Geography* 12-7, 757-773.

Rodriguez Pose, Andres. 2004. On English as a vehicle to preserve geographical diversity. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28-1, 1-4.

Roger, Philippe. 2002. *L'ennemi américain: généalogie de l'anti-américanisme français*. Paris: Seuil

Said, Edward. 2000. *Out of Place: a Memoir*. New York: Vintage Books.

Staszak, Jean-François, Béatrice Collignon, Christine Chivallon, Bernard Debarbieux, Isabelle Géneau de la Marlière, Claire Hancock, (eds.) 2001. *Géographies anglo-saxonnes. Tendances contemporaines*. Paris: Belin.

Stoler Ann Laura. 2010. L'aphasie coloniale française: l'histoire mutilée. In Bancel Nicolas, Florence Bernault, Pascal Blanchard, Ahmed Boubeker, Achille Mbembe, Françoise Vergès (eds.), *Ruptures postcoloniales. Les nouveaux visages de la société française*. Paris: La Découverte, p 62-78.

Vaiou, Dina, 2003, Radical debate between 'local' and 'international': a view from the periphery. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21, 133-136.

Valentine, Gill. 2001. *Social Geographies. Space and Society*. Harlow, Pearson, Prentice Hall.

Veschambre, Vincent. 2010. Appréhender la dimension spatiale des inégalités: l'accès au "conservatoire de l'espace". In Bret, Bernard, Frédéric Dufaux, Philippe Gervais-Lambony, Claire Hancock, Frédéric Landy (eds.), *Justice et injustice spatiale*. Nanterre, Presses de l'université Paris-Ouest, p 263-280.

Yiftachel, Oren. 2003. Relocating "the critical"? Reflections from Israel/Palestine. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21, 137-142.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.