

# Translation and greening!

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In their book about Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari put forward three characteristics for a minor literature which they claim to have been embodied in Kafka's work including the ability of a minor literature to deterritorialize, its being "collective" and its being "political"<sup>1</sup>. Here we are not asked to spell out these key features of a minor literature but instead we try to define 'the minor' in translation, and especially in translating Deleuze into Persian, which in consequence would mean those territories which such a translation deterritorializes (how translating Deleuze may affect the actualities in Iran and to what extent the actualities in Iran may produce a different Deleuze) as well as the collective and political senses of such an attempt. The minor is believed here to be more deterritorializing, collective and political when it happens between two majors, it is exactly the way that the assemblages work; they create something unexpected, something singular or "the new" where two territories touch or try to "communicate". Literature can provide us with a more telling example, Kafka is a German Jewish writer who writes in Prague, while both "Prague" and "German" are established territories Kafka writes in a way that "makes" these neutral territories give rise to an element of deterritorialization. Accordingly, translation can be held as a task to *betray* the majorities residing in both target and source languages; the task of translator in this regard would be to create the elements of differentiability which have been captured in both source material and target language.

## Majority of Deleuze

Translating into Persian? Translating Deleuze into Persian? What is the sense of such a work if not "accumulating" some new

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, translation by Dana Polan, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 16-17.

philosophers again in the libraries? A neutral symposium! This paper wants in a sense, to *start* with this problem that seems to be an essential one (at least today that we witness to what extent a philosopher can be reduced to a literary or artistic toolkit); the "whyness" of translating Deleuze today in Iran especially in the present-day critical situation that our society is passing through, and the reason(s) for talking of molecular resistance in face a fascist molarity which has surrounded us. What could be the reason behind translating from a philosopher who wrote not only in a different geography but more importantly lived a different history. Deleuze is the self-confessed philosopher of concepts, the one who creates some concepts which work in his oeuvre as a whole. This could be a point to emphasize because as he himself puts it, the trouble arises when one avoids dealing with a philosopher as a "whole". The Deleuzian scholarship has gone miles away from this very fundamental warning that Deleuze himself gives. But what is wrong with *not* dealing with a philosopher as a whole? One could find the answer in another aspect of Deleuzian thought; Deleuze is not a philosopher of "depth". One can say that avoiding to treat a philosopher as a whole is the beginning of a "deepening" that philosophy, and it is in effect, this "depth" that is totally against Deleuzian oeuvre, as he quotes from Paul Valéry "what is deeper than the skin?" And now "what is deeper than the skin of a philosophy?" Deleuzian scholarship today in majority of departments turns very easily the minor sense in his works into a major academia which means the reception of Deleuze sounds to be a major reception that gets increasingly institutionalized and less challenging with the status quo!

## Majority of Persian language

But what does it all have to do with translating Deleuze into Persian (for instance)? Does it mean that translating a major academia today into a language of a minority is a salvation of this philosopher; the one who even his Marxist critique notes that

I think Deleuze is alone among the great thinkers of so-called post-structuralism in having accorded Marx an absolutely fundamental role in his philosophy – in having found in the

encounter with Marx the most energizing event for his later work<sup>2</sup>.

It is a worn-out logic of today's academia to "accumulate" the grandeur of a theoretical authority through applying, implementing and localizing ideas and reconciling different domains with no speed limit. But back to our primary question, what would be providing us with an incentive – at least – in translating Deleuze into Persian? The problem sounds to be primarily rooted in the moment that the Persian translator starts assuming that Persian is a minor language (as a gut reaction to western languages), the illusion which is perilous at least for translation and has dire consequences; a sort of resentment in front of Persian. In fact it would be deceiving to think of Persian as a minor language at least in Deleuzian way. That is why here we should distinguish minorities from the minor in Deleuze which is vitally important.

As far as a language exists it is besieged with its limits which are the sources of identity for that language and since translating stands out of these limits it automatically *starts* with the limits, in other words translation always gets started *au travers de* limits. We have to start with the limits that identify a language, the limits which profess to be the essences of that language. As Thoburn puts it:

Minor and major are expressions that characterize not entities, but processes and treatments of life. Essentially, major processes are premised on the formation and defense of a constant or a standard that acts as a norm or a basis of judgment<sup>3</sup>.

This way the operation that translation is expected to undergo is very similar to writing a minor literature and it is in fact the very ability of translation and a minor literature to create singularities even through the borders of the language. Thus thinking of Persian as a minor language is a ready-made solution of the Deleuzian scholarship to the present-day problems of a target language and society such as Iran. On the other hand, what is more strenuous is to

start with the major of a language and transform it to the minor, something which puts forward a composition which neither belongs to Deleuzian scholarship nor to Persian, something in "between", neither present in the source language nor in the target but felt on the skin, on the boundary of these two languages! At the same time one could raise this question that whether it is possible to translate as well from Persian thinkers or philosophers into other major languages (English, French) without falling in the trap of (as the present government in Iran claims we need) importing our "precious tradition" to other corners of the world or trying blindly to absorb these thinkers in the western local studies?

What is interesting and to some extent unique about Deleuze is his style, but here style (like a lot of other common words) bears a new sense in Deleuze, it is no more a linguistic style to play with words but a style which is more invested on creating concepts embodied in problems, what makes his translation something beyond a pure aesthetic endeavour. His challenge with the common signification of words shows best how far he starts with the major. This way translating Deleuze requires not only translating his concepts but also translating the implicit problems which made him create such concepts. Translating implicit attitudes of him or what Buchanan about Michel de Certeau calls "the inner prickling" of his thought<sup>4</sup>, sets us in Persian in more motion and its political upshot would be permeating onto other territories of society as a minor which is being formed.

The minor then operates to upset any simple affirmation of a new people, or logic of an already constituted movement that is already here, indeed the minor is always a 'movement in becoming' in this sense<sup>5</sup>.

This is what one can understand through univocity in translation; taking the problems into consideration. This paper tries to emphasize that the "act" of translation goes hand in hand with the

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson. « Marxism and dualism in Deleuze », *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (3), Summer 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Thoburn. *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, Routledge, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Buchanan. *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist*, Sage Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Simon O'Sullivan. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 77-78.

“theory” or better to say the concept of translation which means none of them should be reduced to the other.

Translating his book on Foucault (by Afshin Jahandide, in 2008) and his Hume (by Adel Mashayekhi, in 2009) and some other papers translated by [www.mindmotor.com](http://www.mindmotor.com) (on his conception of Kafka, Sade, etc.) and [www.shavand.com](http://www.shavand.com) could be a more appropriate opportunity to get in touch with this inner prickling of Deleuze which can mean we are on the way to touch his philosophy as well as his non-philosophy for betraying a philosophy (even in translating words, sentences and texts) is not possible until one knows what a philosophy has *encountered*. What comes in the following part is a quick overview of the move from translating Deleuze as an organized philosopher to a philosopher that teaches betrayal and is destined to be betrayed!

### **In the absence of a plane.**

Apparently it was around two decades ago that Deleuze was first translated into Persian in a book which was a compilation of articles of some new continental philosophers from Barthes to Derrida and Deleuze. It was there that Deleuze was introduced through a paper titled “On Simulacrum”, and by Mani Haghighi. This selection of papers compiled in a book was something to some extent unprecedented as the atmosphere of those days in Iran was totally different from that of the book, an atmosphere which was the upshot of the Cultural Revolution and the endeavour to purify universities and Humanities and also the eight year war between Iran and Iraq. This atmosphere was mainly based on an orthodox Islamic approach to the sciences that was in effect replete with strict limits. That is why this book was a bit strange to that atmosphere and was hardly successful to be more than an introduction to these quite various philosophers. Amongst the translators of this compilation were some graduates of western universities (B. Ahmadi, M. Haghighi) and some others who were following philosophy non-academically. It seems as if they were in a way trying to *import* their experiences to the cultural and philosophical atmosphere in Iran and perhaps that was why they easily accepted being labelled as “postmodernist”. It should be considered immediately that in reaction to that

homogeneous dominant ideology what happened was no more than another homogeneous reaction through this so-called postmodernism especially amongst young students of philosophy or literature and sociology departments. This knowledge not only did not provide those who could not read originally in English or French with the contemporary continental thought but also fuelled a reaction to these philosophers under different labels from ‘feminist’, ‘poststructuralist’ to ‘postmodernist’. I believe that this shortcoming was the result of omitting the historical from that book (and not only Deleuze’s texts).

Translating some other works by Deleuze (and the others philosophers) into Persian did not help this situation and was in a way a disposition against the common perception of philosophy and it was no surprise to see one single translator translating Lyotard, Lacan, Sartre and Cixous at the same time. It was as if “choosing” (which is a very formative component of translating) any special text for translation was secondary to “importing” new texts (as confusing “new things” with “the new” in Deleuze).

### **Looking the words up in the street!**

One can say with some confidence that it was translating western Marxism from Georg Lukács to Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin that helped Deleuzean movement to clarify itself and ponder more on its limits and its possibilities. In fact it was through the inabilities or the deficiencies of this Marxism that this movement started to be more “active”. That is why after a decade, translating Deleuze was not only a reactionary import against the mainstream academia in Iran and the translators were more and more accurate both philosophically and linguistically in “choosing” and “translating” a text as these works were seen “in relation” with other works of not only Deleuze but the other philosophers from Hegel to Kojève. The “terms” became “concepts” made up of components which were all crucial. That is why one can say that translating Deleuze influenced reading philosophy, reading Bergson, Hegel, Lacan and even Žižek where one is able to implement the concepts. This way what is interesting about Deleuze today in Iran is that unlike the majority of western universities which try to restrain

Deleuze to some special 'cultural studies' framework to neutralize his concepts, people (however limited) try to work with the concepts in different domains from culture to politics of the day. A real *in actu* way of experimenting philosophy.

But the act of translating by itself can be a resistance that gives rise to new forms of living without trying to do what Paul de Man calls "thematization". This way translating evades all *teleological* definitions that History puts forward as determined possibilities, a point which is more critical about a society like Iran that seems to be categorized as rather a "sovereign" society. It means translating is an act that like literature and art can produce some *affects* and *percepts* which do not necessarily belong to a special society but to *absolute* deterritorialization as Deleuze and Guattari put it in their *What is Philosophy?* however they immediately add that:

Nonetheless, absolute deterritorialisation can only be thought according to certain still-to-be-determined relationships with relative deterritorialisation that are not only cosmic but geographical, historical and psychosocial. There is always a way in which absolute deterritorialisation takes over from a relative deterritorialisation in a given field<sup>6</sup>.

That is why we emphasize that this field is not something given or an endowment but political par excellence, this plane of immanence has been affected by the *green movement* in Iran against the dominant, fascist government (but ironically in the *agora* which means stretching the possibilities of the society as well). Today translating in whatever way cannot avoid this plane as it is this plane which is supposed to give rise to the lines of flight. *Betrayal* in Iran was in dire need of this plane which is now at avail and any betrayal devoid of plane is no more than a nihilism (be academic or non-academic). Here is the turning point that aesthetics becomes political as perceptions become percepts in art or ideas become concepts in philosophy.

Translation becomes betrayal as the translator, the text and the words are primarily immersed in the event or as Guattari puts it

*transversalize* through it. Where nobody looks for "the" *equivalents* as everything is a *univalent!* Translation in the present-day society of Iran is not based on a morality to guide the bodies how to combine, but is itself a process, an ethics which is synchronized with the bodies and is being created just as in a *simultaneous translation*, a *being-in-the-middle* and how could one ignore the protests in the streets, the ruptures that the bodies make and *start* translating from a "void", from the house? That is why we emphasize that betrayal is not a theme or an apriori or a neoliberal or academic décor but the very result of what surrounds us and makes us act. Betrayal is paradoxical and must remain paradoxical; it is a (non) method that is achieved on a plane (whether plane of composition or consistency) and does not transcend the differences. And that is here that one can say that the very foe to this betrayal is fascism to transcend or to find the final, correspondent equivalents; a dictatorship, a machine of dictionary. It is needless to say that "here" textualized or even contextualized translation is affirming the "state of the affairs" but more importantly betrayal is never a reaction to text or context but the very praxis of *adding* something to the text, to the context and in a Foucaultian way to the *self* when the event enters *untimely* into the politics of translation. We should not forget that translation is an act which first of all monitors the *courage* to progress even in pain and danger. This courage is not something individual which the translator acquires or not even merely a result of the personal talent, but quite the opposite something collective which faces the translator. This courage is required exactly where a *style* needs to be created, where a combination is inevitable for the translator, courage is the very *yes* to this force, this new, this political greening.

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 88.