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A Time for Emptiness

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A Time for Emptiness

The EJTS Editorial Board

- 1 The EJTS editorial board has from the beginning joined the struggle against both the draft 'Multi-Annual Research Programming Act' (loi de programmation pluriannuelle de la recherche - LPPR) and the reform of the French pension system. Like other journals, we have chosen to make this mobilisation a key part of our activity by producing journal issues that record its trace.
- 2 This trace is double. On the one hand, we want to imagine what journals like ours would become if the competitive logics promoted by the LPPR, which are already quite widespread throughout the world, were to prevail: This issue, a 'blank' issue, is devoid of research. On the other hand, we want to bear witness to the forms of solidarity and enthusiasm brought to life by the movement, and the way they bring us back to the journal's raison d'être, that is, to be an engaged collective. It will be the task of our next issue, the "In Struggle" issue, to extend far beyond our usual fields of study the reflection on academic knowledge and the social struggles at stake in it.
- 3 The time devoted to this issue - this time for emptiness - is not a luxury. The issue comes as a matter of urgency in order to mark our disapproval and opposition. We must take the time to understand why we wanted to react and to determine how best to move forward.

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- 4 Why are we, as the EJTS editorial board, reacting? The first reason is circumstantial: Historically, most of the present and past members of the editorial board have worked as lecturers or researchers in France or in French-speaking institutions abroad. We therefore have sociological and intellectual frames of reference in common with the 'Revues en lutte' collective, frames that are mentioned several times in the text of the collective editorial: for example, notions of civil service and public service, or the memory of recent social conflicts (at France-Telecom, at La Poste, and in the public hospital) – things that a readership less familiar with the French situation might find exotic, or even difficult to understand. This singular position is also embraced, for

example, in the beautiful editorial of *Politix*'s 'In Struggle' issue: 'what is at stake today is also the defence of the specificity of *French* journals in humanities and social sciences' (Gaïti et al. 2020: 36, emphasis added).

- 5 Let us take the time to recall the history of the EJTS, a journal designed and conceived within a French Research Institute abroad, the French Institute for Anatolian Studies (IFEA). To emerge, the journal needed no call for applications, no funding agreement setting out shared objectives and resources: The cohesion of a group, facilitated by the hospitality of the institution, was enough. At that time (2003–4), these early career researchers and lecturers could count on positions and status – now considered a luxury of the past by younger colleagues – that offered them freedom of action and initiative. Certainly, this may have helped. In order for the journal to be born, there was no need to fill in budgetary forms or lists of deliverables: A few drinks on the IFEA terrace, some association statutes, an application for membership to the open access journals platform revues.org (now OpenEditionJournals), and the deal was struck.
- 6 The unconditional support of two research centres, the Centre for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan, and Central Asian Studies (CETOBaC, UMR 8032), and the IFEA (USR 3131), provided valuable assistance for the preparation of the issues. Behind each entity were also its respective supervisory institutions: the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), the College de France and the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) for one; the CNRS and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs for the other. The support of one of them in particular, the CNRS, was key in that it provided the salary for a full-time editorial secretary. That is how the journal has functioned and lived up until now.
- 7 Today, at a time when the CNRS aims at promoting 'open science' (CNRS 2019), it lacks the means to steadily support the activity of an online journal like ours. It is time for "resource pooling". That catchphrase would be beautiful if it did not serve as a cover for the most brutal economies of scale. That is how, one fine day in 2015, our editorial secretariat was assessed worthy of one-third of a salaried post at most. That is why issues had to be postponed. This "blank" issue, dated 2019 but prepared in 2020, fills the place left empty by one of those overdue issues.
- 8 So much for the Franco-French context, well described by other editorial boards of 'Revues en lutte': A context of scientific publishing recognised as a public utility but underfunded to the point of slipping into the interstices of the working day, filling the leisure time of researchers (read for instance Addell 2020: 249). The journal literally runs on emptiness.

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- 9 The EJTS proclaims itself European. The journal does not intend to be a place of French Turkish studies, but of a field of research that extends the geo-academic frontiers (cf. Ficquet et al. 2020: 239). Our mobilisation against the LPPR is therefore not only focused on France. It is also a reaction to an international context characterised by the development of methods of scientific evaluation whose protagonists are for-profit companies producing opaque indicators, whose logics are the utilitarianism of the paying author and the cynicism of article premiums, and which, as a consequence, exhaust editorial boards and decimate the format of the "special issue" (cf. Marie et Savy 2008 ; Damerdjil et al. 2018).

- 10 Some of these phenomena affect our work on a global scale. This is the case of bibliometric indexes, software products developed (with a few rare exceptions) by digital data processing companies. As with international university rankings, the bias and limitations of these tools are well known. With them, scientific relationships based on curiosity and selective affinity are transformed into calculations of attractiveness. Quantity – and therefore, often, repetition – prevails over research driven by an ideal of deepening and of constant self-examination, for which slowness is a condition for ‘innovation’. Let us add that this world of proprietary formats and data monetisation has shown little affinity with that of open-access journals. Does anyone ask the GAFAM to evaluate open-source software?
- 11 Other derivations of scientific evaluation have a more local or regional look, yet present transnational family traits. In France, institutions that call themselves “experimental” are trying out forms of scientific employment that are supposed to be as ‘attractive’ as traditional academic positions. In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu - YÖK) recently introduced an ‘incentive’ (*teşvik*) system of points awarded to lecturers-researchers - a sort of fee-for-service pricing of scientific labour with each publication ‘placed’ in indexed journals worth a remuneration bonus. Our next issue will shed necessary light on how to conduct critical work on such matters. It will give some hints about what the social sciences can say about these so-called international standards.

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- 12 Our mobilisation is therefore inscribed in the ‘French’ history of the journal. Yet, in its own way, it reflects the dissonant echoes of academic experiences in Europe and beyond. It is under this dual heading that our mobilisation occurs. How can we make it happen under these conditions? Should we not assume that the objects, fields, and areas of studies have different elasticities, or viscosities, with regard to the ongoing realignments, thereby compromising from the outset the cohesion of the movement? How can we, practitioners of specialised knowledge, build a shared culture to map out other horizons for a common future of knowledge and scientific journals?
- 13 The experience of this journal and of all the others that are part of the ‘Revues en lutte’ collective contradicts the pessimistic perception that knowledge and experience are being atomised (cf. Tissot *et al.* 2020 : 18). Brought together by the mobilisation, we have all shown that it is not a matter of fending for ourselves. Dealing with ‘Turkish Studies’ – a field which is similarly divided, bringing together political scientists, sociologists, geographers, anthropologists, and historians, to name just a few – does not differentiate us in any way from the 157 other editorial boards of the ‘Revues en lutte’ collective: We run a journal, we do science. And we intend to continue.

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