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Hédi Bouraoui: On Transcultural Belonging

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More of a perspective than a fixed concept or even discipline, transculturation permits us to re-read homogenized histories that construct belongings as fixed that essentialize cultural, ethnic, national, gendered, religious, racial, and/or generational dimensions. Transculturation equally permits us to re-conceptualize difference and diversity as negotiable. As intersectorial. As strategic. And as capital. (Horder, Hébert, Shmitt 14)

Transculture cannot be described in positive terms, as a set of specific cultural symbols, norms, and values; it always escapes definition. It is an apophatic realm of the “cultural” identity. It is the most radical of all possible cultural “beyonds.” (Epstein 333)

Transcultural Stance

While keeping in mind the defining idea of this volume as a study of the way Arab societies in transition are imagined, adopting transculture as the conceptual frame for this research corresponds to its capacity to insure a multifocal, intersectional, and decentering approach to sociocultural phenomena. Transculture is not a discipline with its body of rules, protocols, systems, and rigorous codes. Neither is it a model of society (as, for example, opposed to multiculturalism). Rather, it is a set of principles related to intellectual attitudes toward the increasing challenges faced by the nation-state model. More than anything, transculture is a stance that translates the urgent need to deal with the deep structural evolutions that shape societies in a global world, thanks to new transnational, crosscultural, and technological realities. Keeping this point in mind, the purpose of this chapter is not to define the concept but to explore the way it manifests itself across Hédi Bouraoui's life and work. In other words, the declarative aspect (*I know that transculture is*) is of less importance than the procedural one (*how transculture works and manifests itself*). The essential question is around how knowledge about the relation between the self and the environment is shaped.

Such an approach is mainly about the creativity, the dynamics, and the configurations considered as means to reinvent the sense of belonging according to an individual development path.

When Hédi Bouraoui was once asked about the concept of transculture and if he knew about its first-time use by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, Bouraoui's response was that he heard about Ortiz for the first time in 2005, anthropology not being his domain of expertise (Bouraoui 2005, 10). At the same time, Bouraoui claims that the concept is his own invention and that he coined it while lecturing at the University of York in the 1970s in the context of the debate on Canadian multiculturalism. Such a statement can be easily explained if we take into consideration three factors. First, a concept can migrate from one discipline to another (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari moved "rizhome" from a botanical context to the philosophical one). Second are the intellectual preoccupations of which transculture is a part. Bouraoui applied "trans" to his philosophy of creation that he calls "transpoetics" (Bouraoui 2005) and even to reality itself when he talks about "TransReal" (Bouraoui 2010, 3–4). Some qualify his art as "trans writing" (Brahimi), while others talk about him as a "transcrivain" or "transwriter" (Darragi 2016). Of course, in the "trans" context, culture can never be kept away when taking into consideration the organic nature of the relationship between it and all intellectual activities, including, obviously, writing. And third, ideas sometimes act in a strange way, especially when dealing with common preoccupations. As Giambattista Vico says, "The natural law of nations arose separately among various peoples who knew nothing of each other" (80).

The root "trans" is itself the expression of the need to challenge common views and find other ways to deal with the nature of human interactions. Literature cannot evolve separately from society's tendency to manage what determines behavior: beliefs, choices, and actions. Transculture is about a certain configuration in which these elements are challenged. This effort aims especially at opening new ways of conceptualizing the world. The idea behind this project is to show how transcultural belonging is mainly a critical stance, a product of an active mutual action between the individual and her or his milieu. At the same time, in the context of Bouraoui's writings, transculture is to be considered as a perspective aimed at a better understanding and practice of diversity. This attitude is motivated by a methodological preoccupation: in the absence of the Bakhtinian principle of *exotopy*, according to which the foreigner is always a better judge of a culture, for the transcultural intellectual to be a critic of her or his time, he or she is expected to transcend political and social order to ensure a certain distance with the proper environment and also to open the door toward a better understanding of the world.

Even if Bouraoui's transculture looks like a *sui generis* concept, a kind of micro ecosystem that has evolved away from the academic debate of its time, it is interesting to see how behind this apparent insularity, one can detect common grounds with other thinkers of the transcultural. Fernando Ortiz used *transcultural* in a colonial context, especially in the domain of the production and trade of tobacco and sugar. A decade later, this same concept resurfaced far north, in Canada. In 1956, Eric Wittkower, from the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University, launched a joint publication with McGill's Department of Anthropology: *Transcultural Research in Mental*

Health Problems (Bains). Two years later, the same academic institution inaugurated transcultural psychiatric studies to become one of the pioneering universities in Canada in conceptualizing the changing face of a society constantly defined by immigrant flux. Under the influence of Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, relativism and diversity began questioning cultural homogeneity and shifted the debate toward what can be qualified as social heuristic, the will to discover new conceptual tools to explore the dynamics behind the changing nature of human interactions. As Bains suggests, time came to challenge “cultural Darwinism,” its “absolutist” definition of culture (142). These new orientations in research are rooted in post-Second World War Canada, where the study of culture starts to leave the usual paradigms. Once again, it is at McGill University that scholars from both Francophone and Anglophone sides began to reach out to each other. Everett C. Hughes was one of the central figures of that time, an illustration of the exotopic mind. He used to consider himself to be the outsider (he left the University of Chicago for McGill), interested in studying the nature of contacts (or lack of contact) between Francophone Canada and Anglophone Canada. He is one of the first to research ways to break the ice between scholars from Québec and the rest of Canada. Since the 1950s, transculture has become part of a myriad of disciplines, from museum studies to literature, neurology, history, business, and social work.

Still, the bulk of research takes place in the domain of health, especially in psychiatry, where transculture plays a key role in understanding the nature of the relationship between the practitioner and the patient. This option is clearly dictated by ethical concerns. When the Other, even in her or his radical difference, is respected in her or his integrity, then the relationship is a constructive and collaborative one. As Wright formulates it, “The emphasis of the transcultural paradigm is on an equal partnership” (3) between members of the same society.

Dirk Hoerder applies transculturalism to the history of cultural diversity, especially in the Mediterranean, and to the institutional frames allowing its management. On the other extreme is the work by Michael Epstein, a Russian scholar who emigrated to the United States in the 1990s. For him, transculture is to be regarded as the appropriate stance in times of profound rupture, a response to the deep changes brought about by the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is treated as the response to limitations proper to multiculturalism and globalization, both considered as forms of social determinism. For Epstein the purpose is to fight against the subjugations proper to culture, to explore strategies to challenge one’s culture to the point that even language is taken as a source of alienation: “Transculture represents the next level of liberation, this time from the ‘prison house of language’, from unconscious predispositions and prejudices of the ‘native’, naturalized cultures” (327). Following his views, it is time for what he calls a “supra-cultural creativity” (330). For him, culture is trapped in all kinds of determinisms, and it is time for a *tabula rasa*, a radical divorce from all symbolic structures. Such a view is not concerned when looking for ways to legitimate transculturalism through the study of diversity as the way to approach the nature of interactions between peoples. It is more about deconstruction with the objective of neutralizing all kinds of categories including gender, color, and religion.

Belonging as a Critical Stance

The more one gets acquainted with Bouraoui's work, the more the organic nature between the concept of "locality" as it is defined by Appadurai and the conception of the world becomes clear. This allows us to explore how the imagined environment shapes how we consider truth. Alain Badiou talks about "procédure de vérité," which means an experience where a certain type of truth is constructed" (Badiou 2009, 39). What matters is that truth is the offspring of experience, a construction, a course. Truth's value depends on the horizon of possibilities it opens, and its status rests on the degree of respect for the principle of openness. It is more of a process than an achievement. Badiou's idea of truth is related to that of infinity, as what is "in-finite" and incomplete. To illustrate his purpose, he uses the zero in relation to any number. Every number (let's suppose four) is waiting for one or more zeros to become something else (a 40 or 400 for example). The same applies to truth. Contingency plays the role of the zero. A truth's existence depends on the sum of challenges that ensure its openness toward infinity (Badiou 2010, 17).

Bouraoui was born in 1930 in Sfax, a city in southern Tunisia, at a time when this country was still a French protectorate. From his biography, a set of interviews with Rafiq Darragi, we learn that as a child, he was impacted by life not in the Medina (the part of the city usually reserved for the natives) but by the environment proper to Moulinville, the colonial quarter, where his father used to own a mini-market. Customers were mainly French and European settlers, all people (among them Tunisians) from the three confessions. The family business was a kind of neutral zone where diversity was welcome and where all that mattered was interacting, socializing, and negotiating one's belonging. At this stage, the trauma of occupation and its "infernal binarities" (Bouraoui) didn't yet affect the author's life. To Darragi he confessed, "I cultivate tolerance through dialogue and dignity. This is a stance I have adopted since childhood. I owe it to my father who lived in a multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious community" (Darragi 2015, 19). What we learn here is that the truth about the self is a multimodal and ethical one. Far from rejection and essentialist simplifications, the relation to the Other is made possible in a "locality" with all the characteristics of a micro-society in which plurality is a fundamental value. To shape this environment, the author portrays a cultural body in which the sense of belonging operates through spiritual, ethnic, racial, and religious channels. The multi (as in "multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious") is opposed to the essence of the colonial global society as the guardian of an imposed monoculturalism, based on indisputable hierarchies sustained by an oppressive state apparatus.

If we consider this episode in relation to Bouraoui's works, it is obvious that the objective is to show that in its innocence, a child's eye can elaborate a critique of power by focusing on the ethical "ought to be." As a "locality," Moulinville is stripped of the common coordinates that usually determine the reading of colonial space to become a place for the "possible" and for emancipation where cultures can intersect, interconnect, and be open to each other. It all happens according to the idea of recuperating a memory proper to aseptic conditions far from violence. It is as if all

that matters was not the intension behind the Europeans but their humanity in its complexity, the contact, the gaze, the You (Thou) as synonymous with infinity, just as Buber refers to it. Bouraoui's account of this period is determined by the will to find a common ground, a sense of togetherness as open and incomplete as the truth that Badiou talks about.

Before going further, I would like to emphasize the fact that this attitude doesn't mean sweeping colonial violence under the carpet. As we will see, Bouraoui is not the kind of author to stay in an ivory tower. He has always shown an indisputable interest in the human condition, to the point that in a laudatory poem, Albert Memmi portrayed him as follows: "Inspired, cautious moralist, he [Hédi Bouraoui] is also my/brother in the spiritual combat./I am not sure if we can someday/fulfill our dreams,/but we will at least, together/testify, in favor of fraternity, against/prejudice, misconceptions and injustice" (Villani 71). The author's life is marked by a visceral optimism, which also aims at opening unlimited horizons for truth. The first object to transcend is the self. This is why in his works (where autobiography and autofiction are absent), "ego-centered sentimental narratives" (Pratt 122) are avoided.

In early adolescence, the author moved to France to complete high school. Devastation, as well as the enthusiasm inspired by the project of rebuilding a whole country, characterizes this period. This is a time marked by his love of philosophy, his contacts, and his discoveries. Once again, the will to reach the Other, to know her or him, to understand her or him, is constant. These years are described with rare affection. All happens in a quest for human contact, conviviality, and knowledge. France, the country that occupied the motherland since 1881, is contextualized far from even the slight feeling of victimization. Once again, one has the impression of dealing with someone who appropriates the location, submits it to his own expectations, and makes it his own, to the point that nostalgia and all kinds of feelings that one would expect from a young boy landing in a foreign country are absent. The Latin *identitas* as sameness is here redefined according to ideas and values in an accumulative logic. This sounds as if Hédi Bouraoui were telling himself, "To live in a place, I have to look for common grounds to ensure my own growth." Philosophy as systematic doubt applied to literature is the privileged territory for such a pursuit.

From France, Bouraoui moved to the United States, where he completed his PhD and published his first book *Musoktail* (1966), a set of poems that bear the impact of a life under the sign of movement and quest. His life in the United States is marked by his status as a witness to the way discrimination works. In his biography, he depicts the absurdities of the racialization processes. As an African who doesn't fit the stereotypes around skin color, he describes with humor his navigation between the race line. After defending his PhD, Bouraoui decided to move to Canada in the late 1960s. He joined the faculty of York University, where he still keeps his office in his capacity of writer-in-residence for life.

This is not a common itinerary for a Francophone North African-born writer. First of all, writing in French in the United States and in Canada gives his work a unique character. In fact, he is the first author from this part of the world to do so.

Bouraoui's Work and the Birth of North African Literature in French

Maghrebi literature in French was born in Algeria. At its beginning, it was the product of the same “infernal binarities” proper to the colonial project. All goes back to the first attempt to conceptualize identity when in the beginning of the twentieth century, French and European settlers laid the foundations for an apartheid system expressed by what was called “Algerianism.” For Martin Thomas, “Algerianism’s central claim was that colonial society had evolved a unique identity, distinctly French and yet different from, and in no way subordinate to, the dictates of Paris. The only true ‘Algerians’ were European settlers” (164). Natives were considered as a mere “mass of others” (Thomas). In the 1930s, while Algeria was the center of a flourishing intellectual activity, with the purpose of redefining French Algerian identity far from the Algerianist nativist ideology, a new movement was born: the School of Algiers (1936–56). French Africans (not to be confused with French Muslims), also called *pièdes noirs* with reference to them as rednecks, as poor “bare-footed” land workers, found in the future Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus and his two friends Gabriel Audisio and Emmanuel Roblès the adequate representatives of their cause. Their school was against colonialism, regionalism, and conformism. Starting out with ethnocultural and racial concerns, the debate shifted toward deep philosophical questions, such as Camus’s existentialism.

Under Sartre’s influence, members of this school, especially Jean Senac, began to talk about the need to open to native Algerians; it was then, in the 1940s, that those non-Europeans began to write in French. However, the first production that fulfills the standard of a literary work was published in 1950 (while Hédi Bouraoui was still living in France), *Le fils du pauvre* (The Poor Man’s Son), a novel by Mouloud Feroun (assassinated in 1962, the year Algeria gained its independence). In the 1950s and the 1960s, a whole generation of Maghrebi writers (Albert Memmi, Mohammed Dib, Ahmed Sefrioui, Kateb Yassine, and others) produced a body of literature marked by colonialism, immigration, social justice, modernity and tradition, ethno-religious conflicts, and political violence.

Bouraoui did not share the same views about locality as the Francophone Maghrebi writers of that time. Appadurai considers locality as “primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar of spatial” (178). It is the “relational and contextual” aspect that makes the difference. Charles Bonn and Naget Khadda put the first Francophone Maghrebi works (in the 1950s and 1960s) under the following categories: “literature of alienation,” “exotism,” and “acculturation” (7–10). Bouraoui’s early work—poetry books written while in North America (*Musocktail*, *Tremblé*, *Éclate-Module*, and *Vésuviade*)—are all about topics related to existential problems rather than postcolonial ones. The main topics are language and love, not to mention violence, existence, creativity, and the universe. This has nothing to do with the kind of “binarities” proper to a colonial legacy, the United States and Canada being so far from the conflictive realities proper to postcolonial Maghrebi societies. If among the first generation of North African Francophone writers, creation goes through the filter

of the “colonial’s gaze” (Bonn, Khadda, and Mdarhri-Alaoui 8), in Bouraoui’s case, writing is inscribed in the will to connect with humanity in what can be qualified as cosmopolitan construction, poems where the local is questioned or implicit to the point that it vanishes or becomes impersonal. In *Échosmos* (1981), poetry enters what can be called a post-humanistic stage, where man is no longer at the center of the world; he is just an echo of the cosmos (*echosmos*).

What all of these books have in common is a constant interest in creative subjectivity. The poet delivers a radioscopy of the act of creation. The sense of belonging is scrutinized with the intention to show how locality in its “contextuality” (Appadurai) is all about human action and freedom. The world is considered as a place where free subjects are expected to create a place of their own. Nothing is assumed—all is open to interpretation—and the artist is the one who impacts the world around him or her.

Transculture and Creaculture

In 1971, Bouraoui published the first volume of *Creaculture*, a two-volume textbook on French culture. The invention of this concept is to be considered in the context of cultural belonging, especially when it comes to the question of which attitude to adopt when studying culture. The main idea is to show how culture is all about interpretation and subjectivity. After going through different perspectives (historical, literary, artistic, Marxist, structuralist, etc.), the author came to the conclusion that until now, scholars have not come up with a way that would allow the study of culture in its totality; what we have instead are only “perspectives.” He then invites the reader to focus more on how cultural values are created and to explore the nature of this process, knowing that “creaculture is a neologism that refers to the continuous of cultural values It is thanks to a constant dynamism that the major fundamental ideas in a cultural context evolve and change constantly” (Bouraoui 2005, 32). It is a response to all kinds of essentialism, an effort to challenge the nation-state as an immutable territorial, political, and cultural body.

Belonging is about the sum of the individual’s actions to the point that even space has to be considered, not as what the group manages according to a certain symbolic organization but as “the diverse environments of our personal evolution” (Bouraoui 2005, 33). In its local, national, or regional dimensions, locality can’t have a meaning outside of individual experience. Everyone has a certain imagination of environment shaped through interaction according to networks, historical legacies, and social class realities—all of which are included in what Bourdieu considers as “social capital.” In the “construction of locality,” interpretation as a performative and subjective appropriation of environment is determined by sociocultural and economic realities. That is why Bouraoui warns against what he calls the “cyclist perspective,” a study of French cultures like someone who participates in the famous Tour de France, the annual bicycle race that goes through rural France to reveal the secrets of the *terroire*, reducing cultural realities to products, such as cheese and wine or historical monuments such as the Castles of the Loire.

While talking about Bouraoui's childhood in colonial France, we were dealing with a world in which the sense of locality was determined by an idea of togetherness that privileges contact and dialogue between the components of a multiethnic neighborhood. As a "materialization of locality," the neighborhood offers certain modes of interpretation from where one of the main ingredients is missing: colonial violence. When reading Bouraoui's biography, the representation suddenly changes because of the eruption of violence. The first event is the Second World War, especially when the bombardment started and also when his parents sheltered a Jewish family, a mother and her disabled child. The multi (as in multiethnic, multireligious, and multinational) as a truth is now challenged. The historical event, as a rupture in the normal flow of time, imposes a new definition of belonging. This is the first time that Bouraoui questions the ethno-religious element.

What makes a Tunisian a Tunisian or a French person a French person under the pro-Nazi Vichy government? Second World War is considered to be one of the main challenges to France and the colonies. The deportation of Jews helps to put the finger on a structural contradiction proper to the French nation-state model. Based on Hoerder's analysis, one can conclude that the nation and the state have not always been in full harmony. On the one hand, as a concept inherited from the Enlightenment, the state can be considered a legal body with one mission: to ensure that all citizens are equal before the law. On the other hand, the nation is, based on a Romantic idea, a group of people sharing the same culture (Hoerder 2012). However, instead of equality, in colonies and protectorates, it is a question of forced homogenization, abstraction, and reduction according to a center formed by the Parisian elite. For Hoerder, the Republican-nationalism model is about hierarchy, not equality. In a situation of crisis such as the war, the system can't hide its own contradictions. The state, as the guarantor of the rule of the law, finds itself impotent in front of the idea of a nation where the ethno-religious element transcends fundamental values of the republic—liberty, equality, fraternity. In such a scenario, the question of belonging goes together with responsibility. How, under Nazi occupation, could the French people oppose the deportation of the Jews? To answer this question, implicitly, Bouraoui opens the door to another one: How could the Tunisian people protect a segment of their own population while being under a double occupation, by France and Germany? Under Moncef Bey, Tunisia was a disappointment for the Vichy government when it came to the question of racial laws (Watson, Bahri, Bajohr, and Löw).

Can transethnicity and cosmopolitanism go together with colonial power? How is it possible that even though the majority of the Jewish community chose to become French (Manzano), they found themselves in a scapegoat position? What determines the feeling of belonging? From a creacultural perspective, one has to take into account "the diverse environments of a person's evolution" (Bouraoui). What is said about an individual can also be applied to a group. Being French or Tunisian is not an *a priori* state, a given quality, constant and immutable, but rather fluctuates in response to political and geopolitical factors. The sense of belonging commonly depends also on implicit rules of conduct, networks, and connectivity, untold codes of conduct,

all resting on symbolic frames. However, even if this *modus vivendi* looks like the natural way of sociability, it is also shown to be something unpredictable. In Bouraoui's biography, one of the darkest moments in the history of his family is when the country got its independence in 1956 and Moulinville found itself deserted by the majority of its inhabitants (the ones who chose to flee to France). Many left without paying their debts (Darragi 2015, 20). As a result, Bouraoui's father faced bankruptcy, and his family entered into a dark period in their lives.

The eruption of these two events (Second World War and the War of Independence) and their effect on what looks like organic social ties is the pretext for a transcultural definition of the sense of belonging. According to Jeff Lewis, "It [transculture] is interested in the destabilizing effects of non-meaning or meaning atrophy. It is interested in the disintegration of groups, cultures, and power. In other words, transculture emphasizes the transitory nature of culture as well as its power to transform" (24). There is no better test for the "non-meaning or meaning atrophy" than agency. Conflict shows the contradictions of social order, especially its moral code. On the one hand, this code is to be considered as atemporal and beyond the filter of reason. It is embedded in what Bourdieu calls "*habitus*," a set of instinctive dispositions that determine feelings and actions to allow social reproduction. On the other hand, agency is more about accidents and reactions. It is the product of expectations and contingencies.

"Atrophy of meaning" happens in the absence of a critical stance toward the way the sense of belonging is shaped. In this context Bouraoui's critique of Canadian multiculturalism is an interesting one. It is not a rejection of the model (as in the case of right-wing critics who act in the name of a certain exclusive idea of the nation) but rather a call to avoid historical anemia. Revolutions are processes and transitions; if there is a truth in a revolution, it is in its incompleteness. In the 1970s, when the Trudeau government adopted multiculturalism, Bouraoui warned against what Stanley Fish qualifies as "boutique multiculturalism," the one around "ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high profile flirtations with the other." Bouraoui also guards against the risk of "ghettoes," the conversion of society into a plethora of disconnected communities. His critique is based on what he calls Canada's two ontological "solitudes" (based on Hugh McLellan's idea) when referring to the antagonisms between Québec and the rest of the country. Bouraoui added two other solitudes, one proper to the Natives and the other to the category labeled as "newcomers" or "new Canadians" (Bouraoui 2005, 62–3). If cross-culture and multiculturalism are, at least according to Wright, interested in comparing cultural groups (216), for Bouraoui, transculture is about "*passages ou résonances*" (crossing or resonance) (Bouraoui 2005, 34). The transcultural mind is about a nomadic attitude that goes beyond what is already fixed and assumed. The purpose is not to focus so much on disconnect, barriers, closing off, and compartmentalization. Nomadism is about movement, transit, flow. It is a "nomaditude," which Bouraoui defined in the following terms: "Nomaditude deconstructs infernal binarities proper to the relation center vs. periphery, majority vs. minority, omnipotent vs. marginal, external vs. internal" (Bouraoui 2005, 10).

Transcultural Territoriality

Retour à Thyna (1996), a novel about the city of Sfax, the author's birthplace, is about the life of a group of young people in a country trying to invent itself after seventy-five years of French occupation. This social novel depicts mechanisms of domination, existential contradictions, and a deep malaise proper to the need of coming up with new meaning for a new life. The critique of these transitional times is part of the global configuration of postcolonial Tunisia. The goal is to define the country and its people not exclusively according to occupation. The historical perspective encompasses thousands of years. French occupation and the subsequent violence are just an episode in a long saga of contacts and conflicts. It is as if the author does resist the postcolonial paradigm by not accepting a reading of the national history according to just one of the many cycles of encounters, clashes, and metamorphoses. Correcting history goes through the construction of meaning in a manner that relies on rewriting narratives and configuring them idiosyncratically. In 2012, Bouraoui published *Paris berbère*, a novel dedicated to the War of Algeria. The protagonists, Théo and Tassadit, are a Franco-Algerian couple living in France who met in 1968, just six years after the independence of the North African country. Both are dealing with their pasts, especially as each comes from a family involved in the conflict. Théo invents his own way of thinking, an approach that allows a critical distance toward the traps of common sense. He calls this attitude a *faisance*. It can be embraced when action is free from finality and meaning and is the offspring of a pure act of creation. Théo's is a skeptical and indifferent mind when it comes to the question of morality, considered as a set of commands. He is a transcultural being who believes more in ethics than in fulfilling a historical promise, like his father, who fought in Algeria in the name of the "greatness of French civilization." The dialogues between father and son show how Théo tries to decolonize the colonizer, colonialism being an almost metaphysical entity that transcends judgment and produces finite and closed truths.

The *faisance* approach frees human contacts from the weight of collective mythologies, even in the context of conflictive situations or in a worse scenario, such as the collapse of a system with its institutions, economy, security, and politics. This way of thinking places Bouraoui's definition of transculture in opposition to Epstein's rupture. The Russian scholar conceptualizes culture from a distinct place. His work is limited to the Soviet Union, where, at least according to Georgi M. Derluguian, especially since the 1960s, the relation between politics and culture was one of subordination. Instead of a world where culture defines politics, it is politics, under the control of a bureaucratic nomenclature, that decides the faith and nature of cultural practices (104–28). While in Bouraoui's works (especially in his novels *La Pharaone*, *Ainsi parle la Tour CN*, *Cap Nord*, *Les Aléas d'une odyssée*, *Méditerranée à voile toute*, *Le Conteur*, and *Puglia à bras ouverts*), stories are about more than one country, and rupture has an ethical and aesthetic value (Beggat 2012) motivated by the need to reach the Other, to develop intellectual tools that allow a better understanding of diversity, to put communication into the service of culture, and to encourage life in a "world for everybody" (Bouraoui 2005, 60). On the aesthetic side, as a poet, Bouraoui has developed a particular interest in the power of words, in ways to express the world in its complexity, and in a constant thirst for experimental writing.

My intention until now has been to show how culture is a subjective matter and open to interpretation. In this sense, we are in the logic initiated by Nietzsche when he talks about interpretation instead of truth, the objective world being a fallacy, a “fiction,” and all that we have are mere constructions that all go through the filter of “model realities” proper to our beliefs and the way we interpret them (Nilsson 65–6). In a world where all is metaphorical, what matters is interpretation. Umberto Eco came with another question: What about the interpretation of the interpretation? What about the interpreter herself or himself? (78–9). In his response to this question, Bouraoui doesn’t agree with a total rupture with culture, being the work of centuries. He defines the transcultural subjects as “wanderers” who “believe the world belongs to everybody” and “one’s culture is a preamble of other cultures” (2005, 60). Culture is about “fluidity” (Bouraoui). It is “processual” (Hoerder). Such definitions explain why transculture is hard to define: the object (culture) is an inconstant one, something whose essence is movement.

How does one conciliate infinite possibilities of interpretation and unity of the thinking subject? Bouraoui believes that the world is singular and plural at the same time. It is as William James calls it a “plural monism” (79); plural if we look at it according to a network of conjunctions, intersections, and concomitance; and plural if we are concerned only with disjunctions, oppositions, idiosyncrasies, and disconnectedness. For this purpose, being transcultural is about conjunctions and disjunctions. It is about “being with the other,” envisioning an inclusive togetherness where difference is respected and creating a place beyond what the nation-state model is offering. Keeping in mind the need for this unlimited horizon, Bouraoui deterritorializes even the Mediterranean. By deterritorialization, what is meant is the subversion of the common ways that this sea is represented. Being Mediterranean is not only about living on a shoreline. It is more about a certain vision of the world that is marked by a “fluid” essence, the one that inhabits waves, accidents of time, and a cosmic body that transcends even time. This sea, as portrayed by the author, is an “alive metaphor” (Bouraoui 2005, 77–84). The use of metaphor invites to the Nietzschean interpretative freedom mentioned earlier. In the trilogy *Cap Nord* (2008), *Les Aléas d’une odyssée* (2009), and *Méditerranée à voile toute* (2010), the locus is organized according to the idea that the world is one and multiple. Hannibal, the protagonist, is a young Tunisian immigrant who leaves his hometown to travel across the Mediterranean in search of a father who left him while he was a child. His deconstruction of prevailing conceptions works both vertically and horizontally. It has a vertical dimension because of the way Hannibal challenges the compartmentalizing of history into periods. Hannibal is in reality a kind of trinity: he is himself, his own father, and the famous Carthaginian ancestor who crossed the Pyrenees on the back of an elephant. As for the horizontal side of this journey, the hero challenges borders by stripping them of their martial and estate value as what delimitates and protects a territory. They are all meaningless, a signified waiting for a signifier, and this signifier is an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of Tunisia and the Mediterranean world. Hannibal deconstructs borders while challenging maps as an imposed reading. He goes through thousands of years of history to show his interlocutors that the essence of borders is inconstancy and how they are shifting all the time.

Conclusion

In French, the verb *comprendre* (“to understand”) is composed of the prefix *com* that expresses the idea of togetherness and the verb *prendre* (“to take”); understanding is therefore about a shared “apprehension” of reality. Thinking is thus motivated by the will to enjoy the world, to make it one’s domain of action, and to alter it. In the case of Hédi Bouraoui, transculture is a critical stance toward the environment that the writer is supposed to belong to in order to make it his. If for his generation, writing in French presupposes a myriad of conflicts rooted in realities as old as Algerianism, colonial wars, acculturation, assimilation, and racism, for Bouraoui himself, it is first of all an effort to find a place for oneself, name the world differently, and remodel it according to the proper existential itinerary while taking into consideration all the aforementioned problems.

Among Bouraoui’s works, not a single book is dedicated to transculture. The concept is present in some of his essays and is, in reality, a stance that impacts his creative work. More than anything, it is an ethical necessity that inhabits the Canada that the writer chose as his home in the 1960s, an unnamed collective preoccupation, a kind of unborn idea of the nation (or nations, in reference to Québec and First Nations), and an unrestrained need for the configuration of a mutating society according to the constant flux of immigrants. It is in the name of the changing face of the neighbor and the necessity to welcome her or him that transculture has arisen. As translated in this writer’s work, it is also about a thirst for experiments, a transcendence of common aesthetic and generic norms, and a constant fight against all forms of centralism. As a Francophone writer in Ontario, Bouraoui finds himself in the same situation as his colleagues from McGill University, an Anglophone university in Francophone surroundings (Québec). In the middle of collective “solitudes,” there is no better option than transcending the makeup of cultural belonging.

For this reason, both Epstein and Bouraoui see in transculture the adequate response to all kinds of determinism. However, when it comes to multiculturalism, they do not share the same views. Transculture, according to Bouraoui, is not a rejection of multiculturalism; rather, it is the way to make it more inclusive and keep it away from the risk of communitarianism. It doesn’t limit itself to the destiny of one country but extends to the whole of humanity. There is no need to say that compared with Hoerder, Bouraoui is for cultural diversity or that his approach focuses on its historical legitimacy. What distinguishes Bouraoui in this sense is the intention to go beyond the need to legitimate and explore what makes diversity happen. For him, the world is a place open for the nomadic mind (“nomaditude” as Bouraoui prefers to call it). Human beings are nomadic by essence, and the world belongs to the “errand,” as he likes to call the transcultural subject. A look at his concept of transculture shows that education is the key. To be transcultural, one needs to know very well her or his own culture. The contact with others allows a critical distance, as well as accumulation and fluidity. Such a deep knowledge and openness protect against the risk of acculturation, assimilation, and clash.

In *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab explores the question of what makes an Arab while

adopting an etymological stance based on an effort of critique shaped by historical and societal factors from the Al Nahda (the nineteenth-century cultural renaissance) to the postcolonial debate around the relationship to the West. It is an exploration of an evolving ethos, shaped by defeats (notably 1948 and 1967), transitions, and metamorphosis. All of it translated into a constant debate around cultural identity as a dynamic historical construct. From Hédi Bouraoui's transculture, one can conclude that belonging is in itself an object of critique. The author constantly tries to go beyond the primary meaning of this term and the ideas of dependency and possession it implies.

The first and most important element in this critique is the place. Contesting geography as a certain idea of space shaped by borders is behind the discussions triggered by his wanderer heroes across the Mediterranean. In this sense, Bouraoui acts like Miguel de Unamuno at a time when Spain was living almost the same situation as in today's Arab World. The Spanish philosopher was one of the most notorious figures in the so-called Generation of 1898, intellectuals gathered to do the same critique work as Kassab refers to in the aftermath of the War of Cuba, Spain's own *nakba* (Arabic for "catastrophe," in reference to the loss of Palestine in 1948). It all started in 1898, when the Iberian country lost the island and was kicked out of Latin America after a humiliating defeat by the United States. An intellectual debate ensued about the reasons behind the fall of what had been one of the most powerful empires. The common explanation was a geographical one, related to the position of Spain. Was Spain a European country, or, as many at the time preferred to say, does Europe start in the Pyrenees? Were the Moorish roots to blame in a place called by some "Afroeurope"? To this need of belonging to a place and to the idea of modernity it implies, Unamuno, in the end, came with the following solution: instead of becoming Europeans, we have to make Europe Spanish. For Unamuno, one can't "digest" European values without seeing oneself in them. The same is true for Bouraoui, who invents characters capable of discerning communalities and dressing bridges while contesting identity as a systematic totality.

The Manichean Us versus Them is not always easy to contest. How can resistance be possible in the context of cultural hegemony? Who can wander around the Mediterranean and elsewhere to realize the transcultural dream in a world of increasing gated and walled communities and countries? Bouraoui's reaction is far from the spirit of "contradiction" in the Maoist term. It is more about negotiation and compromise.

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