

Conclusion

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The papers in this collection address the subject of migration between places and between cultures, primarily as expressed in literature. The movement of people from their place of origin to a new environment is as old as human history, but it has perhaps been accelerated in the last couple of centuries, as the capacity to travel has become more widely distributed, and the pressures to relocate – whether arising from the economy or from violent conflict – have become more urgent. More and more people have the experience either of being migrants themselves or of encountering migrants in the land they call their home. Small wonder that we seek to understand the consequences of so nearly universal a phenomenon.

Migration has been a focus of attention among both social scientists and humanists, but the dialogue across the boundary between these academic cultures is itself an interesting example of the promises and challenges of cross-cultural contact. I approach the subject initially as a social scientist, for whom the principal questions involve population numbers and distributions, and verifiable relationships among variables like language and ethnicity, religious practice and community acceptance, economic success and political influence. Meaning for a social scientist lies in the measurement of causes and effects, and conclusions that can be generalized to groups. For the humanist, there is as much to be learned by exploring the expression of individual experience and the emotional reality it creates.

As a student of public policy moreover, I am conscious of the debates that have arisen in recent years about the efforts by governments to

facilitate the integration of migrants while minimizing conflict over clashes in cultural norms. In recent years some governments have tried, regrettably often without the agreement of their citizens, to evolve from the policy of assimilation – a negation of the cultural life of the migrating population – to one of toleration for diversity. In rare instances there have even been signs of a willingness to do more than tolerate – to value and celebrate new ways of seeing and being. But the issue is not without contestation. Other governments have been quick to pass legislation to “protect” the culture they presume to be that of the majority of long-time residents. The concept of “multiculturalism” which, at least in rhetoric, forms a significant element of the Canadian core self-image, is in parts of Europe criticized as an unrealistic dream that preserves the culture of new migrants only at the cost of their acceptability to their neighbours. If multiculturalism is subject to intense debate, how much more so is a concept like “pluriculture” where the implication is not just acceptance of one culture’s values by the practitioners of another, but possibly the creation of a new culture by the dialectic of contact?

In this milieu, what can the social scientist learn from the humanist about migration and culture? Learning anything will mean going beyond a mere tolerant acknowledgement that some people approach the problems differently. It may indeed need more than the recognition that we may have some things to teach one another. Ideally it may mean a genuine interdisciplinarity – academic pluriculture, if you will – in which social scientists begin to incorporate some elements of the humanists’ understanding into their own analyses of their shared subjects.

As a social scientist then I look at the papers by literary scholars in this collection and ask, what can they teach me that will advance my understanding of migration and culture? What can I learn from novels, poetry and short stories that will take me beyond the statistics and experimental findings on which I would otherwise rely?

I can perhaps be forgiven, temporarily at least, for looking first to the work of some other social scientists who have studied the effects of

exposure to literature. Psychologists at York University and the University of Toronto (it is reported by Harris Seyall in the *Express Tribune* of the *International Herald Tribune*) have studied the ways in which reading fiction affects the development of the mind. Seyal, quoting Keith Oatley from University of Toronto, says reading narrative provides us with “the ability to sensitize...to the emotions of other people, transcending the limits of our own experience and perspective.” Reading fiction gives us, says Seyal, “expertise in identifying with the struggles that manifest in the lives of others.” Social scientists can tell us what happens, and they hope often to be able to tell us why. But it takes artists and novelists to help us understand how it “feels.” And literary scholars can show us how that is done.

The first entry in the collection is the keynote address to the conference at which most of these papers first appeared. In that essay, Patrick Imbert uses the contrast between a zero-sum game and a non-zero-sum game as an organizing frame for the discussion of immigration and the cultural contacts that it involves. The notion of the zero-sum game is one that promotes ideas of dominance and inferiority; the non-zero-sum game permits the expectation of expanded horizons and hence of individual linguistic and cultural complexity. Imbert reviews some literary texts to elaborate this point and concludes with the observation that we are best able to live one with another, in a spirit of inclusion and creativity, by means of a literature that eschews the causality of victimization in favour of one that features coincidence, simultaneity and transcultural encounters.

After the keynote, the collection relies for its next section on a number of essays addressing the work of an author who has devoted the bulk of his work to the crossing of cultural, geographic and linguistic borders. Hédi Bouraoui – poet, novelist and professor of French literature – is the founder of York University’s Canada-Mediterranean Centre and one of the world’s foremost contributors to migration literature, especially as it involves the Mediterranean and Canada. The scholars who comment here on his work enable us to learn something of the ways in which an author may use poetry and fiction to enhance our understanding

of the migratory experience, as well as to convey a philosophy of cultural contact.

Rafik Darragi begins with the observation that poetry for Bouraoui is a matter of unceasing interrogation, with the principal questions being, “Who am I?” and “Who are ‘the Others?’” These of course are the questions that are highlighted by migration from one community to another. While Bouraoui recognizes full well the fragility of the immigrant’s condition and the denigration that is often visited upon the newcomer, he also sees the experience as an opportunity to adjust one’s worldview with each turning of a street, a page or a plan. The rootlessness sometimes attributed to migrants is not presented as an inevitable condition; migrants can also be seeking to expand from their roots and finally come to know “the other” in a community of spirit. Darragi explores the ways in which Bouraoui uses elements like love, violence and spirituality in his novels to explore the sentiments of his migratory characters and to demonstrate the ideal of “transcultural” development.

Nicola D’Ambrosio takes a different approach to Bouraoui’s work, seeing in his migratory writings some foreshadowing of a world social, cultural, economic and political crisis that has particularly struck some Mediterranean countries. As well, he suggests that one can derive perspectives on the future from this work, arguing that literature has the capacity to show us (with modesty and without complacency) the road that must be travelled. From Bouraoui’s novels, D’Ambrosio suggests we can see the possibility of a future in which efforts to preserve cultural diversity in the face of the homogenizing influence of globalization rely on the sharing of cultural knowledge in an atmosphere of dignity, liberty and democracy. In Bouraoui’s terms, a “nomadanse” in which cultural difference is explored, equal to equal, in a spirit of mutual respect. It is the ability of literature thus to expose possible futures for us at the same time as we address the crises it foreshadows.

Abderrahman Beggat engages with the use Bouraoui makes of what he calls “mots-concepts” or concept words – a special set of terms to convey succinctly some of the elements of his worldview. Some

of these words, Beggar notes, can be found in a standard dictionary but they are given a non-standard meaning in Bouraoui's usage. Others are words formed by the addition of a "trans" prefix, signaling a border-crossing variant of the term (e.g., "transculture" or "transcriptural"). Still others are genuine neologisms, such as "nomadanse" or "originalitude" or "émigressance," in which combinations are made from parts of other words to show a relationship or suggest a concept. Beggar explains the way in which Bouraoui uses these terms to encourage his readers to innovative thinking.

Boussad Berrichi explores, in a detailed historical and linguistic analysis, the way in which Bouraoui's use of Amazigh (Berber) words, phrases and proverbs in two of his novels assists in "translating" the living culture of Tamazgha (the Maghreb) into the novels' structure in such a way as to convey to his readers some appreciation of that culture's values and traditions.

Two other pieces in this section – by Angela Buono and Bernadette Cailler – assess the ways in which Bouraoui's poetry conveys his worldview. The analysis is somewhat opaque to a mere social scientist, but one can see some of the techniques applied by literary scholars to explain the effects of the work they assess. They also touch on the intersection of Bouraoui's art as a poet and his scholarship as a literary critic.

The second last piece in this section (by Samira Etouil) touches on the relationship between migration itself and writing about migration. It also examines the uses the author makes of geographical displacement, and the particularities of architecture and environment, to enhance the reader's sense of the migration experience.

Finally there is an extensive comparison, by Elizabeth Sabiston, of one of Bouraoui's novels with a novel by the early 20th Century American novelist Willa Cather, with the unifying theme of female migration. While many of the other pieces in this section focus on Bouraoui's language and metaphors, Sabiston adds to those a thorough and thoughtful reading of the plots themselves, showing the symbolism and meaning that is embedded not only in language but also in

events. There is also here an intriguing implication – that the migratory experience, like most other aspects of our life, has a gendered character.

To return to my naïve social scientist's question – what can humanists teach us about migration, and how? – there are some answers to be found in the papers addressing Bouraoui's work. Whether in events of a novel's plot, or in the use of innovative language, or in the skillful application of metaphor, it is possible for an author simultaneously to give us some sense of what some migrants feel and also what the means and prospects are for cultural sharing in circumstances of migration. By showing us characters' emotional responses to events, familiar or unusual, and by describing possible realities we have not yet seen, the novelist and poet can enhance our understanding beyond the graphs and tables on which we otherwise rely.

The next section of the collection treats immigration in the specific context of France. Of these six pieces, one is very clearly a social science example – a sociological description of the Lebanese community in Marseilles by Liliane Rada Nasser, based on interviews with around 100 immigrants and their descendants. While I felt at home in this milieu, I regretted that the scope of the paper did not permit a kind of interaction with the interview texts to assess how the author had arrived at her conclusions.

A paper that almost bridges the gap between social science and humanities is a discourse analysis conducted by Nadia Grine, with the material drawn from posts to a website discussing immigration and the French government's policy reactions. Like a literary scholar, the author engages with texts to assess what they reveal, but like a sociologist, her categories involve the differing expressions of identity and what they might say about the realities and preferences of their authors. Professor Grine notes that in reviewing the discursive identity revealed in these texts, we must recognize that the writers are surely taking account of the effects of the posts on their readers, and as such they cannot reveal as full and complex an identity as might be found if other means were used to expose it. Nevertheless she is able to show some interesting differences in the way three women present themselves – one a devout

Muslim who dresses in western style, another who wears a veil, and a third who uses *niqab* (i.e. a full covering of the face, except for the eyes). She also notes that all of the posts, regardless of their own modes of dress, condemned the idea of a ban on veils or other culturally specific forms of sartorial expression.

The other articles in this section are grounded in literary scholarship. Sylvia Brodziak makes the explicit claim that art (e.g. novels) can be a means of making up for the absence of archives and first-person accounts of experiences like slavery. Social scientists will be skeptical of the reliability of fictional treatments of such history, but in the absence of better data, they may be of some value. And we are increasingly aware how much speculation, not to say invention, informs even scholarly historical interpretations. Brodziak turns to the novels of Léonora Miano to explore the way in which she reports individual memory and its exchanges with the public memory of the black community in France. She also looks at the use Miano makes of concepts of body image to explore the resistance of migrants to transforming themselves to conform to “Western” norms. From such fictional accounts, one can get a sense of what pressures are faced by migrants who are visibly distinct.

Sabrina Fatmi-Sakri starts her work on the novel *Little Big Bougnoule* by Nor Edine Boudjedia with the anthropological observation that hybridization is the common lot of all living cultures. But she also observes that post-colonial literature asks the question about hybrid identity – what happens if two parts of my identity are in conflict? The novel in question posits a child of immigrants who has been taught by parents and school to admire the culture of France, but who in going to Algeria experiences a kind of peace and happiness he finds hard to explain. Nevertheless he knows that he is experiencing Algeria almost as a tourist, until he meets another “hybrid” character – a man of mixed French and Algerian background whose integration in his community is not a problem because of the protection of his clan – and an elder who details for him the Algerian history of which he is unaware, but on which he is assured his identity also rests. Thus are

the variety of possible kinds of “hybridity” explored, with the emotional responses they can engender.

Kay Li departs from the focus on Mediterranean migration to look at the variety of cultural expression and understanding to be seen in the literary work of a Chinese migrant to France, Gao Xingjian, winner of a Nobel Prize for literature. Li shows Gao’s movement in the direction of the self and in the direction of the universal, and in so doing explores what cultural contact and plural identity can mean.

From migration in France the collection turns to migration in Canada. Sophie Bastien considers three characters in a two-volume epic about post-World War II immigrants from Poland, one of whom settles in rural Manitoba and two of whom land in urban Quebec. Their different experiences of “settling” are explored.

Rosa de Diego examines the story of Bashir Lazhar (by Evelynne de la Chenelière), later made into a prize-winning movie, in which an immigrant from Algeria, bearing terrible grief and guilt owing to the deaths of his family whom he left behind, enters a school to replace a teacher who has committed suicide in her classroom. The school is seen as a locus of transculturation, in which there is reciprocal transformation of the migrant’s world and the world to which he has come.

Linda Fasano provides an essay on literary and cultural figure Naim Kattan, and Sophie Lavoie, one on Peruvian-Quebec poet Rojas Bonavente. Both provide insights into the uses of literature to express the struggles of cultural contact and accommodation. Finally Olga Stein takes the unusual step of asking what literary prizes can tell us about the reception given migrant literature. Is post-colonial literature, she asks, constrained to meet mainstream expectations (and therefore lacking in authenticity) and do literary prizes exacerbate that trend? Or, more hopefully, does global marketing (for which prizes are valuable) lead to more diverse reading communities and hence to enabling, rather than disabling, authentic creative impulses?

Expansion beyond France and Canada leads to a variety of approaches in the next section. Mouhamadou Cissé, Ines Horchani, and Jonathan

Russel Nsangou address respectively francophone novels of migration from the Caribbean, the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, transmission of culture in Franco-Arab migration literature, and the role of the “other” as a source of creativity in francophone African literature.

Sabrina Alessandrini and Francesca Gisbussi provide a social science assessment of a literary factor in migration studies. They administered questionnaires and conducted interviews with 27 foreign-born adolescents in five schools to seek answers to the question, “What is the role of migration literature for intercultural education in Italian secondary schools?”

Corine Alexandre-Garner adds another element to the mix of literary tools – the use of an object that “migrates” through time and space to focus the experiences and emotional responses of characters who themselves migrate and encounter the object in question – a large writing desk.

Lesley Higgins and Marie-Christine Leps take the role of object a step further in exploring the way in which a ship is used variously in two novels by Michael Ondaatje to create what Foucault calls a “heterotopia” that “represents, contests and inverts all other spaces produced by established relations of power and knowledge.”

Some apparently narrower forms of migration literature are addressed in the next two sections, though they turn out to be in some ways broader than those previously discussed. Two papers concern themselves with Sephardic Jewish migrants from North Africa, one using two novels by Jewish women who reflect some of their own experiences in their fictional accounts, and the other taking a more general view of Jewish North African migrant writers. Nina Lichtenstein notes that the large migration of Sephardic Jews from Algeria and Tunisia to France in the 1950s and 1960s transformed the face of French Jewry, following the devastation of Ashkenazi communities by the Holocaust. She shows how the very act of writing helps characters in the novels she discusses embrace the past, deal with the present, and plan for the future. In both cases, the impetus for the characters

to write is given a kind of permission by similar “crazy” and “wandering” characters – one a rabbi and one a marabout – reflecting the fact that these migrants are at once Jewish and, in some sense, Arab. Eva Tartakowsky notes the condition of “in-betweeness” represented by Sephardic migrants – Jews in a largely anti-Semitic world, indigenous people in a world of colonialism, and Africans in a world of European triumph. The challenges to transculturalism are as evident as its apparent need.

The penultimate section of the collection concerns the specific differences experienced by women in migration. Nasser Benamara and Samir Messaoudi reference specific women migrant writers and show how they address the particular experience of women. Simona Pruteanu asks whether the space-time of women in migration is different from that of migrating men and answers in the affirmative. The separation from family and tradition – perhaps most keenly felt by women who are expected to be the protectors of family and the carriers of tradition – is paradoxically also the opportunity for women’s emancipation. The complexity of the migrant experience is highlighted with this gendered ambiguity.

Allan Weiss adds a somewhat different aspect from those that have come before. The women in the short stories he describes are not permanent migrants from the developing world to the hegemonic West, nor even from old Europe to new North America. Instead their culture contact is as relatively wealthy, white, temporary residents of East African communities, where they encounter poorer, black residents as servants (when they have been unused to having servants) and strangers whom they would like to befriend, but about whom they are counseled to have suspicions.

Finally the collection closes with two essays that explore other venues of culture contact – theatre and sport – in which some lessons can be learned from reviewing the experience and the emotional reactions that cultural difference engenders in those settings.

At the end of my reading, what has my social scientist persona gained? I have, I believe, developed a new appreciation of the richness in understanding that can be achieved when narrated experience is added to the dry statistics that otherwise inform my knowledge of migration and cultural exchange. Additionally I have learned how some authors have created that narration and that understanding. I remain able to distinguish fiction from non-fiction, but I will be loath hereafter to privilege the latter as the only valid source of wisdom.