Research article

Kamal Sbiri*

Border Crossing and Transculturation in Tahir Shah's *The Caliph's House*

Abstract: This article examines the construction of transcultural identity as it results from the process of border crossing in Tahir Shah's *The Caliph's House: A Year in Casablanca* (2007. London: Bantam Books). Whereas mobility is mostly characterized by the movement from north to south, *The Caliph's House* describes an inverted motion from England to Casablanca in search for belonging. With his roots in Afganistan and historical ties with Morocco, Tahir Shah provides new narrative lines that delve into questions of alterity, mobility, and negotiating difference when crossing borders. With this in mind, I aim to show how alterity is refracted within the migrant's identity. In so doing, I seek to clarify how this refraction helps in producing forms of selves that recognize all notions of silences and transform them metonymically into moments of conversation. With the help of Stephen Clingman's theory on transnational literature, I will show that integration can be achieved successfully when difference is negotiated as part of the process of bordering.

Keywords: Migration; postcolonialism; border-crossing; borderscape; transculturation

Introduction

This article sets out to read for alterity as it operates in literature of migration and mobility. The increasing flow of global mobility in recent years has helped in the publication of several literary imaginaries by writers of immigrant background with focus on the experience of identity construction and border crossings. In addressing the experience of border crossings, this article aims at discussing the implications of transculturation, borderscapes, and bordering on identity construction in the recent published autobiography written by an immigrant writer, Tahir Shah. The intention is to show how alterity is refracted within the migrant's identity and in so doing, I seek to clarify how this refraction helps in producing forms of selves that recognize all notions of silences and transform them metonymically into moments of conversation. These considerations offer new ways of viewing identity as transitive and mobile by the agencies of border-crossings. The main concern is to think of metonymy in terms – not of representation and substitution but – of its functions as combination and contiguity. This process allows for a notion of becoming that includes 'transition, navigation, mutation, alteration, a whole morphology of meanings' (Clingman 14-5) on border.

My argument revolves around the assumption that in every encounter between two paradigms, difference intervenes and otherness becomes the contact zone. This inclination is a fascinating parable of transculturation, and it mostly emerges as an aspect of the process of bordering. My discussion of transition and transculturation is, however, to vector towards the importance of crossing borders in creating a border(e)

***Corresponding author: Kamal Sbiri,** Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco, E-mail: k.sbiri@uiz.ac.ma,
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1607-9350

scape. To illustrate these points in the context of aesthetics, my discussion will take as the starting point, Tahir Shah's *The Caliph's House*, a text where Shah describes his first year in Casablanca. The experience of being caught between different cultural-scapes portrays the creation of border as a space of difference, where difference at borders is recognized as a moment of transcultural conversation. In so doing, I will show how Tahir Shah's integration is achieved when the process of border(e)scapes is enforced, allowing for transitive negotiation of difference as a process of bordering.

From borderscapes to border-escapes: the transcultural dialogue

In this section, I seek to combine postcolonial-diaspora theory with the recent debates in border studies. The objective is to develop a theoretical maneuver that will help in accounting of the new dynamics maintained at borders. I will investigate the relevance of terms such as transculturation, liminality, and borderscapes in exploring contemporary narratives of diaspora and migration, so that advocating the term border-escape can be attained. This paradigm will take Tahir Shah's *The Caliph's House* as its primary source, which stands an example of contemporary narrative of migration and border crossing. Tahir Shah is a 'transcultural' writer whose origin is associated with the Afghan, the Indian, and the Scottish roots. He is a border crosser whose life is divided between England and Morocco, making his own narrative a work of alterity and transculturation.

It is argued, that alterity has temporally been displaced from the dominance of the prefix 'post' to the revolutionary notion of the 'trans'. This shift does not declare that challenges, which happened to matter then, are eventually solved in the current millennium. The prefix 'trans' is significant in the way it is used to assume a potential moment of negotiating and understanding certain aspects of difference (McLeod, "Sounding" 3). This moment Kwame Appiah calls a moment of conversation that transitions boundaries and engages people in multiple chains of associations (84). To change one's position for the other is different: it is not easy to understand how the self may put weight on difference, as the self cannot completely be detached from its social and cultural boundaries (language, home, and the imagined community).

When silence cannot signify absence (McLeod, "Sounding" 11), speaking is just an aspect of conversation. This sort of conversation is transitive in the sense introduced by Stephen Clingman, suggesting that recognition of singularities cogitates between navigation through the self and the construction of difference beyond that self (5-7). Accordingly, Tahir Shah's decision to leave the fragments of the multi-ethnic city of London aims at engaging the self in this chain of associations, because Morocco for Shah is considered a cultural gift that he seeks to pass on to his children. Though his decision was generally refused by his family members and friends and viewed as eccentric, Shah believes that crossing borders will enable him to construct a transcultural identity through which he can recognize his own singularity.

In this regard, the transitive and the transcultural are concepts that delineate movement and help in the production of mobility. By engaging in this discussion, I intend to build an assumption that threads silence with conversation transculturally. In order to do so, I will explain further the relevance of transculturation and how it helps in foregrounding new paradigms of conversation in the contact zones. The prefix 'trans' in transcultural elaborates transitions that break identities into different singularities by suggesting that difference is born out of singularities. The term transculturation was first introduced by Fernando Ortiz in his *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, where he offers alternative forms of modernity in post-colonial societies, by suggesting that the history of the modern societies is now defined by its 'transculturations' (98). David Attwell views transculturality as a concept that pushes dialogue to operate 'in both directions' (19). As such, it can be argued that transculturation as introduced by Ortiz and reflected by Attwell works towards building connections between minority cultures and the majority 'beyond certain constructions such as assimilation' (Sbiri 36). Wolfgang Welsch defines transculturality as a form of mobility across the nation, where its productive transformations prevail across the nation and beyond (6).

This aspect of moving words in different worlds is further advocated by McLeod, who proposes an approach that structures the field of postclonialism in the ways it guards against the negative experiments ("Sounding" 5), and which at some points have divided the world into the first and the third worlds. This

division, it is argued, has been imperative for a third world to exist *only* to help in the promotion of the first (Jameson 77). This approach prioritizes notions of 'cross' and 'beyond' without necessarily denying the importance of the old in creating the new (McLeod, "Sounding" 3). The insistence on division seems to matter now and the urgency to think 'across and beyond the tidy, holistic entities of nations and cultures' is at stake 'if we hope to capture and critique the conditions of our contemporaneity' (McLeod, "Sounding" 3). The epistemological understanding of postcolonialism seems to fix identity within the vertebrate system of nation and nationalism, suggesting that identity can only be produced within the scope of national allegory, and within its borders.

The constant displacement of the subject has been important in the construction of the self. This self sometimes appears as definite, sometimes not, and most often as singular. The same can be true for borders. The manifold crossings and border transits make borders appear as fluid, mobile, and mostly marked by its bordering (cf. Pötzsch and Brambilla 2017; Brambilla 2015; Manzanas 2007). While borders are introduced as sites of interactions and mobile spaces (Brambilla 22), bordering is viewed as the process of identity construction, where this construction results from negotiation on borders (Brambilla 2).

In this respect, Shah's memoir represents a significant contemporary narrative of migration that debates the dynamics of border crossings and identity construction. His narrative delves into transcultural qualities that make the self lives with its other. It also interrogates the cultural principles of a nation that foreshadows certain cultural encounters. Crossing borders, therefore, remains the main gate towards debating the construction of identities on border. By focusing on the multiple processes taking place on border, Brambilla in her 'exploring the critical potential of borderscapes concept' points out that due to the overflow of migration and the increase of global mobility, the notion of borders has moved from being 'naturalized and static territorial lines' into an imagined space that involves the 'delimitations of sovereignty' (Brambilla 2015, 15). This transition involves a myriad of processes of border relocations, where different cultural practices are engaged to comprise borderscapes.

Elena Dell'Agnese and Anne-Laure Amhlihat Szary argue that the notion of borderscape is becoming 'trendy', and the concept itself undergoes transitions (4-5). Dell'Agnese and Szary also outline a number of stages since the concept is first introduced by performance artists Roberto Sifuentes and Guillermo Gómez-Pena in 1999 to the recent project funded by the EU as EUBORDERSCAPES in 2009. Borderscapes, in its recent usage reconfigures the space of otherness, and its implications are the insurgence 'of multiple tensions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic imaginaries' that help in the creation of borders as dynamic (Brambilla et al. 2). In this respect, the notion of borderscapes is viewed as a space of multiple mobilities that 'enable a productive understanding of the processual, de-territorialised and dispersed nature of borders' and their practices (Brambilla et al. 2).

However, the production of borderscapes as a site of negotiating differences can also entail hegemonic sovereignty. The fact that performing (borders) can only take place within a predefined social space (Pötzsche and Brambilla 70) undermines the potential exercising of difference within identity. This operation further complicates the construction of identities at the borders, and makes use of borderscapes as a border(e) scape. Within this network of multiple crossings appears another notion of alterity that proposes versions of identity as unique, transitive, and contiguous. The process of bordering produces a border as a site of negotiating difference. My understanding of borderscapes entails recognition of bordering processes manifested by the border crossers as the first steps towards transcultural conversation at borders. In so doing, the cultural encounters that emerge out these processes lead to enunciating difference as it deconstructs the binary opposition of me and the other. This approach is clearly manifested in Shah's memoir who seeks to articulate difference at borders, without thinking that difference is the main transcultural product. This articulation of difference is not radical or representational as Jameson proposes, but metonymic and navigational. It moves beyond cultural and national manifestations of the identities. It is argued, though, that '[d]ifferences within the self or between the self and other selves are not overridden or transcended... Rather, they become the foundation of *identity as a kind of meaning* – but meaning considered always as navigation, exploration, transition' (Clingman 12; emphasis original).

Mostly it is the other that has shaped and decided who *we* are and how *we* should have appeared. Silence has been seen as a weakness, but rarely interpreted as a moment of self-reflection. As the argument

goes, the need for a new dialect that takes 'cross-cultural exchanges that happen beyond the conceptual poles of margins and centers' is emphasized now than later, one that heralds for a thought-provoking model of negotiation that highlights the 'incommensurability of singularity in the "contact zone" of cultures' (McLeod, "Sounding" 2-3). The incommensurable feature of transculturality is inescapable in any sort of conversation. Engaging in conversation can bring notions of conviviality 'without a promise of final agreement' (Appiah 44). The engagement is important in its way to dissolve the old doctrines of difference-based structures of postcolonial discourse and solidly frame another type of conversation with the aim of enforcing contiguities and hospitality. In his *Beginning Postcolonialism*, McLeod considers this engagement as it results from the production of cultural texts that predominantly deal with movement and mobility ("*Beginning*" 235). This is true if we take into consideration the arrival of people from different once-colonized nations to the former colonizing powers, and how these experiences produce cultural encounters and racial discrimination in the metropolis. The experience of migrancy was (and still is) based on two important indicators: 'adaptation to changes, dislocations and transformations, and the construction of new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing the world' (McLeod, "*Beginning*" 237). These two indicators are emblematic of the diasporic subject who, in living between two different worlds of here and there, becomes a product of border dynamics.

The notion of diaspora debates how the diasporan becomes a composite of narratives of difference, home, and mobility (Brah 193). Many critics argue that diaspora emphasizes shared experiences of memory, displacement, and identity construction (Koser 2003, 7; McLeod, "*Beginning*" 236; Nyman 2017, 185), yet the diaspora subject also undergoes 'multiple complexities' that affect the 'the subject perceptions of the self through its interplay with the Other' on border (Barbour et al. 10).

It can be argued that postcolonial studies has rejected the attendance of the common by privileging discourses of difference. Rather, as Salman Rushdie emphasizes, in contemporary world of liquidities and rhizomes, 'the things that we have in common are perhaps greater than the things that divide us' (Tonkin n.p). The new global mobilities have made the construction of identities appear not only as complex but also as dispersed and scattered spatially and temporally. In order to understand how identities negotiate difference, I seek to use the notion of border(e)scape as a framework for understanding these new mobilities, which are not affected by the postcolonial condition. Accordingly, the sort of conversation I am proposing in this article is a result of a process that is similar to cultural transformation and motivated by creative transpatriation: 'the process generated by life circumstances, attitudes, imposed or self-imposed rootlessness, cultural dislocations, and physical deterritorializations by which writers attain a transcultural orientation' (Dagnino 155). This transcultural orientation may account for the different versions of mobilities created at borders, and which regard borders not only as spaces of negotiation, but also as sites of construction, transition, navigation, and identity formulations. The self's inclination towards the detachment from 'social, economic, psychological, and identity ties or bonds that people can hardly do without … appears unavoidable' (Dagnino 175). In creating borders between the self and its cultural and social sensibilities, identity escapes from the homogeneous social and cultural affiliations that force the self back to its origins, while offering notions of singularities that are 'made of a plurality of affiliations' and 'cultural practices' (Dagnino 175). Yet if conversation is an aspect of transculturality, how can silence become transitive? What is transitive after all?

The focus on transculturation and literary imagination has been the subject of many academic debates on literature of migration and mobility. In her 'The Transcultural Novel', Sissy Helff argues that the proliferation of global movements and the emergence of new modes of literary expression within the field of English literary studies force the production of transcultural studies (Helff 76). While issues of place, space, and memory play crucial roles in this production (cf. Schaff 2009), borders and migration remain two main strands characterizing the transcultural novel. Mike Phillips for example argues that the emergence of immigrant identities 'begins with the tension of operating several selves at the same time' (Phillips 146). This emergence of differences and multiplicity of identities can only operate when crossing borders seems attainable and with the intensification of mobility and movement without border.

Likewise, the new currents have made the act of travel more demanding, chaotic sometimes, and more alarming in others. The pursuit of bridging differences and constructing hybrid chains of contiguities have

pushed many to cross borders and engage in transcultural conversations through imagining the process of bordering (cf. Rosello and Wolfe 2017). Tahir Shah is one example whose voyage elucidates the urgency to think beyond the fixed categorization of ethnicity and color. In his *The Caliph's House*, Tahir Shah seeks to show how borders no longer delineate the limits between two nations. Rather, they are presented as sites of negotiating difference and transcultural encounters, and as an escape from the social and cultural boundaries that exercise hegemonic power over the self. Shah decides to take the risk of leaving London for Casablanca with the promise to live the One Thousand and One Nights in the modern world. Shah's narrative employs the same colonial metaphors of travel in an attempt to reconstruct a fluid self in a fragmented and decentered space: a self-transformed image of a Londoner by crossing borders and boundaries and live in the metropolitan Casablanca. Shah as a traveler seeks to have a name of his own. His movement to Morocco is meant to negotiate a new space for accommodating a house of identity, and to gradually erode difference. And at the basis of this point, one could argue that the idea of travel has changed, not because of the postcolonial condition, but as an effect of mobility and bordering.

Metonymy, Navigation, and the Aesthetic of difference

Whereas home and memory have certain remarkable effects on the construction of diasporic identities, both notions of belonging and displacement do not seem to matter when the issue concerns the new mobile identities. When debating diaspora, cultural differences and 'race' remain important factors around which singularities question their spatial belonging. Shah's autobiographical narrative assumes that negotiating identity can only take place when escaping from borders. This escape is imagined as the self becomes aware of its difference before thinking that difference is definitive. A number of autobiographical texts tend to explore the routes that the subject takes to reach the roots of belonging. An example of these is V. S. Naipaul's memoir *Finding the Center Two Narratives: Prologue to an Autobiography; the Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro* (1984), where Naipaul follows the route of Indian immigrants to reach the Caribbean. Eva Hoffman's *Lost in translation* (1984) also examines the pain of being caught between two worlds and the effects this position has on the diasporan identity.

Another example is Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007), whose narrative tends to put stress on the survival of the protagonists through their relocations in new locations "far away from their homes embedded in violent conflicts" (Nyman 56). These experiences differ from the one that Tahir shah has in Morocco as it imagines how the self and its route to a new space is established while crossing borders. Whereas in the previous experiences, the writers examine the effect of forced migration on the migrant, Shah's narrative seeks to negotiate difference from the periphery and how this difference account for the transcultural identity. Both questions of home and memory do not seem to matter in shaping Shah's identity. His narrative therefore delves into questions of mobility and how the experience of mobility reshapes identity. It traces Shah's movement and his family's from an apartment in London to live in a palace, in the heart of Casablanca, named *Dar Khalifa* (Caliph's House).

Tahir Shah's mobility to the house forces him to accept the house and its heirs, including the servants and their attitudes towards the supernatural forces like Jinn. Shah at first regards their beliefs as fallacies, but through consecutive cultural encounters, he regards these fallacies as instances of the locals' original way of life. Confrontations lead him nowhere, except to the indeterminacy of unfulfilling the house renovation plans. In the end, Shah begins to understand that difference is an integral part of human nature, and in sharing with the locals his difference without necessarily imposing his view point as the ultimate truth, Shah recognizes how important it is to negotiate cultural differences on borders. With this in mind, Tahir Shah accepts that singularities are many, but difference is not all.

The central concern in Shah's narrative of mobility is the question of identity, and how to construct an individual subject for his reader with whom he has an implied contract. Shah's narrative is an attempt to fill in a void, an empty signifier with a referential and existential signified. His is a trajectory that bridges the gap between the author, narrator, and the locals in the autobiographical text. The text under study shows that identity undergoes internal transformations without necessarily seeking cultural mixing. This aspect

calls for refining the field of postcolonialism as it regards mobility as a forced movement from the margin to the metropolitan center (Nyman 7). Shah's conception of the self in *The Claliph's House* is woven in the shape of the traveler, a mobile identity. Such a construction of self, which owes its procedures to a transcultural identity construction, presents the traveler in motion as a remedy, or a constructed scenario 'bringing back the disturbing proximity of what has been' (de Certeau 196) considered as a chosen exile. This mobility is aesthetized and transformed 'into a blank page on which a scriptural operation can produce indefinitely the advancement of a will-to-do, a progress' (de Certeau 197). The transformation of the traveler's identity has been affected by a series of cultural gaps, language, and social forms of belonging. This process has forced Shah to embark on a journey that involves a moment of conversation back to the old moment of British acculturation in order to negotiate the space of transculturality: his becoming in the liminal space has been a stage of remarkable transcultural belonging.

The liminal space invoked here is not a result of constant move between two distinct constructions – home and away – but an aspect of transcultural belonging. Liminality is defined as the moment when one enters to the tunnel. It is a movement from being at the stage of symbolism to that of the threshold. Victor Turner classifies the liminal as the 'ambiguous' who dwells 'neither here nor there, betwixed and between all fixed points of classification' (Turner 232). Where the liminal is 'betwixed' and fixed between static points, Jopi Nyman sees this 'betwixity' as structured in three phases, thus categorizing the individual (migrant) in a large web of ambiguities, 'the physical, the symbolic, and the spatial' (Nyman 21). For Nyman, every migrant narrative imagines border crossings through the three phases of liminality, and these include border patrolling, narrative structure, and displacement (Nyman 21). However, these phases operate differently in Tahir Shah's narrative. This is so because the movement that Shah takes is not configured as one, but multiple and shaped by difference, where the objective is to escape from the borders of sovereignty. Also, liminality functions differently because Shah's movement is not defined by the experience of postcolonialism, but by the urgency of pursuing his transcultural identity forced by the historical changes related to his identity.

The transfigurative forms of innovative cultural movement and borrowing from remote sites of belonging that Shah shows can be offered as examples of enduring untameable transcultural identities that have no relation to British colonial legacy, and the case of Shah is unique in its insistence on convergence of difference within dialogue. This particular aspect represents an important indicator to read Shah's autobiography as a story of mobile identities that further accounts for the different mobilities already at work. Maurice Halbwachs reminds us that remembrance can be operational 'as long as we adopt the point of view of one or more groups and put ourselves in one or more streams of collective thought' (Halbwachs 65). This is mainly true for many diasporic individuals and groups who seek a return to their home, where homesickness appears solvable only through memory (Ribert 63). Memory and forgetting are not however testimonies that need be taken for granted as the ultimate forms of displacement. Memory and forgetting are metaphors of diaspora, and in considering them as such, Shah's narrative deviates from this argument to offer a critique of the nostalgic feelings of belonging and the cultural dominants that stand between the self and the other.

In saying this, I would argue that Tahir Shah's *The Caliph's House* represents a new narrative mode of mobility with a design of transcultural encounters that rereads the postcolonial condition with offering new visions for how the dialectic of I and the other should function. In his work, the cross-cultural spectators/ readers are drawn into what might be called a transcultural encounter, becoming aware of their own role in the construction and reconstruction of identities. Through his travel and border crossing, Shah seeks meaning of his identity and origin, and for him meaning can only be 'produced through transition across boundaries, through the navigation both in time and space' (Clingman 22). The engagement of the reader with Shah's narrative is an example of how cultures weave in and out of already constructed identities.

Shah's story seems to be a similar to any story by a migrant who seeks dwelling in the world of (trans) cultural mobilities, both in time and space. His choice for Morocco is a choice of roots to reroute his identity. He and his pregnant wife and daughter live in a dreary English apartment where 'the warring couple next door plagued us through paper-thin walls' (Shah 2). Since moving to the West from India, he has found himself longing for an identity of his own, a space that he would know. He wants to see the world of fantasy

where 'market stalls are a blaze of color, heaped with spices … paprika and turmeric, cinnamon, cumin and fenugreek' (Shah 2). It is not an easy decision, however, to leave the security of London for the 'untamed' Casablanca where no one seems very supportive of his decision to seek new home in Morocco.

> I have often wondered [he says] At first, they scoffed at my plan to move abroad, and when they realized I wasn't interested in the usual bolt-holes – southern France or Spain – they weighed in with fighting talk. They branded me as irresponsible, unfit to be a parent, a dreamer destined to be a failure. (Shah 2-3)

The question of travel becomes a threshold of different dynamics, since 'it lacks the ability to separate a legitimate space from what is deemed as alien exteriority' (Manzanas 22). The illustration of the idea of travel does not spring from the forced elements that describe the migrant as celebrating the 'terminalia'(Manzanas 22). Rather, it is a choice that operates from the writer's belief that travel to the periphery may grant him the tools to reshape a lost identity. His father was an Afghan, he was raised in England, and the family vacations were mostly spent in Morocco. Leaving for Morocco is part of a journey into the past, to give a voice to his familial silent history that triggers in him the passion for a transitive self, a metonymic self of transculturality. The notion of metonymy is used here in reference to Clingman's argement that the moment when the migrant recognizes himself as a unique individual who can live in relation to other different individuals, can be viewed as transnational. The notion of transnationalism as proposed in this article functions in relation to the grammar of the self 'that will recognize difference without assuming anything like hard and fast boundaries … without cutting off the possibility of connection' (Clingman 6). Based on this, it can be concluded that this form of difference can easily 'account for the many without assuming that difference is all or that all is simply one and the "same"' (Clingman 4).

The possibility of connection is what Tahir Shah seeks to elaborate through crossing different borders. Borders are neither mere geographical, spatial realities, nor are they constructed in the imagination of the individuals as purely symbolic. Their existence marks difference as well as similarity. Rather than representing a conventional aesthetic of borders, Shah is not able to control his prejudices at first when accusing the north Africans of irrationality, since, for him, this is the only way to account for his bad luck. In this narrative, borders are drawn so long as the locals can negotiate difference with the foreigner. In doing so, the spatial and temporal constructions of border are becoming blurred when conversation takes place without previous conditions (differentiation).

In his attempt to delve into a series of conversations, Tahir Shah chooses to cross borders of cultural issues through narrating his mobile identity. The ability to cross these cultural differences and connect them with his internal differences of identity enables Shah to connect beyond alterity. He was born and brought up in Great Britain, and has travelled extensively with the aim to move across cultural boundaries and initiate transcultural conversations. His humorous narrative style encourages readers to cross with him the boundaries of ethnicities and cultures. The use of humor as his narrative style indicates a celebratory function towards 'destabilizing and subversive possibilities' (Holoch 33) that fix identity on border. Yet this association cannot be relevant to every foreigner who in stepping into difference may not necessarily understand the nature of that difference. When the family Frank visits the Caliph's House, it is difficult for them to accommodate to the new space of untameable culture. After five days as hosts in the house, they decide to leave with a note of accusations: '*Where are you??? This is Hell on Earth…There is shouting from the mosque all the time, the noise of dogs and donkeys…We will NEVER visit you again*!' (Shah 196; emphasis original). Clingman explains the incapability to tolerate difference as attributed to the self's refusal to accept possibilities of change 'both within itself and in relation to others, in time as well as space', therefore disclosing new possibilities that permit navigation (Clingman 16).

Shah endeavors to describe his experience of living with the natives in Morocco with a complete engagement in their cultural symbols. Details are paid ample attention in his narrative, especially in comparing the two different cultures, which seems to conflict in the first place, British and Moroccan. Shah cannot perceive why Osman (a local servant) for instance is 'coaxing' his children forward at midnight to hum 'a Moroccan nursery rhyme', where in England nothing appears as sacred 'as the ritual of putting kids to bed on time' (Shah 148). Such a comparison has positioned Shah in the threshold, neither in England

nor in Morocco, but inside a tunnel, not able to anticipate that waits for him. Interesting in this position is that Shah begins to make sense of the surrounding cultural differences and to give meaning to certain cultural symbols. This makes Shah navigate towards a new culture, after understanding that difference only represent weakness and fear within the self. Clingman's view of navigation as transitive rests in linking silence to conversation and blurring differences that make their existence to appear as the ultimate. This transition across boundaries helps in producing meaning,

> and where meaning is not complete, or is deferred, then further navigations are both invited and required … the self can be a combinatory reality both in space and time, and what provides its transitive form is the capacity for navigation. Differences within the self or between the self and other selves are not overridden or transcended in such a formulation. Rather, they become the foundation of identity as a kind of meaning – but meaning considered always as navigation, exploration, transition. (Clingman 22)

Difference remains the foundation of Shah's identity and gives him meaning vis-à-vis place and space. The notion of otherness is explored through place in particular when Shah resumes his plans in leaving Fès for Casablanca. The house he chooses – *Dar Khalifa* – remains an important character, setting up a special mood of the book. It is from this particular space that 'Tahir Shah is set on describing and explaining differences between the Eastern and Western way of life' (Žindžiuvienė 12) in a transcultural mode.

Shah is looking for his house in Casablanca, and in so doing he is inviting the reader to do the same and look for difference on their own. This is clearly indicated when Shah mentions that, 'Some people find their story right away' whereas others 'search their entire lives and never find it' (Shah 48). This is the kind of transcultural dialogue that Shah seeks to initiate based on his social and cultural crossings. Interesting in this respect is the way the author invites the reader to first look for stories of their own before looking for the other's stories. Thus, it is not surprising to note that the structure of the travel narratives on Morocco includes a central journey symbolized by the search for the new home.

Tahir Shah discusses in detail the origin of places in order to understand their transcultural nature, and therefore foregrounds transcultural identities based on navigation, transitions, and transcultural understanding of difference. The discussion of the Caliph's house aims at focusing on the double role that place plays in identity construction: the house is the main character around which events rotate, at the same time it is the space that pushes Shah to look for his own story if he needs to find home. Every home 'could give up its secrets' (Shah 149) that could tell about its past. And Shah's dream is to restore that particular past 'to its former glory, to a time when it would have been decorated in traditional Arab styles' (Shah 116). Many times, Shah seeks to find an answer to the persisting question 'What brought [me] here?' (Shah 163). This he finds in Pamela, an American who ends up living in Tangier, and remains the only living source of memory that could tell his grandfather's history.

Shah repeatedly invites readers to use their roots in order to reroute their cultures. Pamela's encounter heralds a new route to Shah's identity. What has been lost for him historically is found in Pamela's narrative about his grandfather. His journey to Tangier provides for him an opportunity to reconsider his singularity in Casablanca, not as a foreigner, but as an individual who shares many attributes with the locals. The change in Shah's perception of cultural differences is further elaborated as he begins to reconsider why things are not done the way he wants. Frustrated by the fact that the local people cannot do their work properly, Shah asks his wife who answers him smilingly that 'there is only one way to get the house done' which is 'to be like a Moroccan' (Shah 290). In other words, to navigate through difference, and accept it, not as a final trope of negotiation but as an internal movement of self-negotiation. Or, as Clingman emphasizes, not to be

> crossing or having crossed, but *being in the space of crossing*. It means *being prepared to be* in the space of crossing, in transition, in movement, in journey. It means accepting placement as *displacement*, position as *disposition*, not through coercion of others or by others of ourselves, but through 'disposition' as an affect of the self, as a kind of approach. (Clingman 25-6; emphasis original)

And this is what navigation means. This kind of representation ascertains the notion of border as an imaginative and dynamic border.

The editors of the volume *Border Aesthetics* clearly refer to the difference they make between the performative notion of (invisible) borders as *a* (representation of) border and the visible, sensed notion of borders as *the* (already existing) border. While Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe tenaciously advocate the difference between a border, the border and they overtly suspect the existence of the border as 'a product of the aesthetic laws' that guide and rule social life outside border-zones (Rosello and Wolfe 2017, 6). Still,

> One most evident aesthetic aspect of the border is its statistically high level of visibility ... A border that is not sensed by someone or something is not a border ... they organize symbolic differences and separations between neighborhood or communities ... Borders become meaningful through sensory perception. (Rosello and Wolfe 5)

Since border posts move and border guards change their uniform colors, the border is already afflicted aesthetically. This sort of representation calls for an attentive observation to how Shah represents (designates) borders in his narrative as a border(e)scape. Said differently, the urgency to understand difference – within a community that Shah shares nothing with except a history that he seeks to trace as a palimpsest endeavor towards a lost past and recovered identity – forces him to accept difference in himself first so as to accept it in others. These he tries to state in the ways he represents borders. Borders no longer separate him from the other; borders 'imply interactions. The separation axiomatically generates a connection between the separated entities' (Rosello and Wolfe 2). By the same token, Shah admits that between him and the other exists what Nancy Jean Luc terms as 'contiguity but not continuity' (Nancy 5). The gradual waning of Shah's performance of a British national in Morocco challenges the notion of national identity to appear as utopic *per se*. Identity is mostly viewed as bound to a certain place, and it is this boundary which stands against transitions within the self. Tahir Shah refuses to change England for Casablanca, but this insistence has only made his identity complex. Boundaries are very important but 'as long as they are transitive. For without a sense of internal differentiation and transition, the result may be the singular claim: the entire nation as "x"' (Clingman 23-4). This particular aspect is understood by Shah, leading him in the end to accept difference in himself before accepting it in others. Towards the end of the *The Caliph's House*, Tahir Shah's perspective on Moroccan culture is changed, and all that has happened to him is viewed as a life experience, which for him 'a life not filled with severe learning curves was no life at all' (Shah 346).

His views of cultural differences are perceived as part of the process of border(e)scape, where the need to negotiate his new identity beyond borders is confirmed. Shah's narrative insists on dialogues as means of border crossing. This has been emphasized through the multiple stories that Shah evokes as metonymic, connecting him with the new world of Morocco. An illustration of this connection is also emphasized through Shah's creation of his own story. The act of renovating Dar Khalifa provides Shah with the devices to tell the other stories on border. Of course, the whole process appears demanding because he has to appear as British most of the time, but 'the secret was to get up and carry on, however harsh the situation. I have gained so much from escaping England, but most of all I feel proud to be myself again' (Shah 346). Border(e)scape is indicated as a push factor that helps in regenerating stability within difference and regarded in this narrative as a route to reconstructed identities on the move.

Conclusion

This article has explored border crossings and the emergence of transcultural identities in a contemporary migrant narrative written by an immigrant in Morocco. I have suggested that the narrative uses the trope of travel as an instrument for the border(e)scape to take place, and to negotiate the establishment of transcultural identities beyond borders. Whereas Tahir Shah seeks to negotiate difference within the other's culture, he insists that crossing borders provides new opportunities for identity construction. Through this narrative, the notion of identity that Shah has sought to advocate is in a state of becoming, motivated by the notion of border as 'a product of symbolic difference' (Rosello and Wolfe 2).

As a result of his dwelling within the self-creation of a Moroccan national culture, national identity in itself becomes what Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff call as 'national fantasy' forced to recognize

difference (127), when difference is reconsidered. The change in Shah's perception of the local cultures and traditions can be understood as the production of the process of border(e)scape, that influences how one can survive in and apprehend the world. In saying this, the book stresses that reconstructing identities on border may provide new opportunities for the individual to negotiate difference and generate moments of conversations that consider the self and its incommensurability.

Works Cited

Appiah, K. A. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. Penguin, 2006.

Attwell, David. *Re-Writing Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005.

Barbour, D., et al., editors. *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race'*. PULM, 2015.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora*: *Contesting Identities*. Routledge. 1996.

Brambilla, C. "Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept." *Geopolitics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, pp. 14-34. Taylor and Francis, doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561. Accessed 12 Jul. 2017.

Brambilla, Chiara, et al. "Thinking, Mapping, Acting and Living Borders under Contemporary Globalisation." *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*, edited by Chiara Brambilla, et al., Routledge, 2016, pp. 1-8.

Cash, J., and Kinnvall, C. "Postcolonial Bordering and Ontological Insecurities." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2017, pp. 267-274. doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2017.1391670. Accessed 4 Apr. 2017.

Clingman, S. *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary*, Oxford UP, 2009.

Comaroff, J., and Comaroff, J. L. "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypses, and the Post-colonial state." *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World*, edited by T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputut, Princeton UP, 2005. 120-148.

Dagnino, A. *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*. Purdue UP, 2015.

De Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. U of California P, 2011.

Dell'Agnese, Elena & Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary. "Borderscapes: From Border Landscapes to Border Aesthetics." *Geopolitics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, pp. 4-13. doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2015.10142845. accessed 4 Apr. 2017.

Halbwachs, M. *La mémoire collective*. PUF, 1950.

Helff, S. "Shifting Perspectives: The Transcultural novel." *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, edited by F. Schulze-Engler, and S. Helff. Rodopi, 2009, pp. 75-90.

Hoffman, Eva. 1989. *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. Penguin books.

Holoch, M. Adele. *The Serious Work of Humor in postcolonial literature*. 2012. Iowa U, PhD dissertation., Iowa Research Online, https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5684&context=etd, accessed 14 june 2017.

Jameson, F. Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism. *Social Text*, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 65-88.

Keitetsi, China. *Child Soldier*. Souvenir Press, 2004.

Koser, Khalid. "New African Diaspora: An Introduction". *New African Diaspora*, edited by Khaled Koser. Routledge, 2003, pp. 1-16.

Manzanas, A. M. "Border Dynamics: From Terminus to Terminator." *Border Transits: Literature and Culture Across the Line*, edited by A. M. Manzanas. Rodopi, 2007, pp. 1-18.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. 2nd ed., Manchester UP, 2010.

McLeod, John. "Sounding silence: Transculturation and its Thresholds." *Transnational Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1-13. https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/25473/Sounding_Silence.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed 4 Jan. 2013.

Nancy, J. *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by R. D. Richardson and A. E. O'Byrne. Stanford UP, 2000.

Naipaul, V. S. *Finding the Center Two Narratives: Prologue to an Autobiography & the Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Nyman. J. *Displacement, Memory, and Travel in Contemporary Migrant Writing*. Brill/Rodopi, 2017.

Ortiz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Trans. Harriet de Onís. Duke UP, 1995.

Phillips, M. "Broken Borders: Migration, Modernity and English Writing-Transcultural Transformation in the Heart of Europe." *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, edited by F. Schulze-Engler, and S. Helff. Rodopi, 2009, pp. 133-149.

Pötzsch, H., and Brambilla, C. "In/visibility." In *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, edited by J. Schimanski, and S. F. Wolfe, Berghahn Books, 2017, pp. 68-89.

Ribert, E. "Between Silences and Rewritings: Two Approaches to Memory Construction by Spanish Refugees and Economic Immigrants in France." *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race'*, edited by S. Barbour, et al. PULM, 2015, pp. 62-80.

Rosello,M., and Wolfe, S. F. "Introduction." *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, edited by J. Schimanski, and S. F. Wolfe. Berghahn Books, 2017, pp. 1-24.

Sbiri, K. *Voices from the Margin: Rethinking Identity, History, and Belonging in the Contemporary Anglophone Novel*. UEF, 2012.

Schaff, B. "Trying to Escape, Longing to Belong: Roots, Genes and Performativity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist*." *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, edited by F. Schulze-Engler, and S. Helff. Rodopi, 2009, pp. 281-292.

Shah, Tahir. 2007. *The Caliph's House: A Year in Casablanca*. London: Bantam House.

Tonkin, B. Salman Rushdie: 'Fiction Saved my Life'. *Independent*. 2008. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/salman-rushdie-fiction-saved-my-life-807501.html. accessed 6 July 2012.

Turner, V. W. *Dramas, Fields, and Metamorphos: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Cornell UP, 1974.

Welsch, W. "On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities." *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, edited by F. Schulze-Engler, and S. Helff. Rodopi, 2009, pp. 3-36.

Žindžiuvienė, I. E. 2013. "In Search of Eldorado: Elements of Travel Fiction in Tahir Shah's Books on Morocco." *The Human: Journal of Literature and Culture*, vol. 1, 2013, pp. 1-20. https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HMF_4.10_Zindziuviene_114.pdf. Accessed 14 Feb. 2016.