

## **Mobilities and Cosmopolitanisms in African and Afrodiasporic Literatures.**

Anna-Leena Toivanen.

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*Mobilities and Cosmopolitanisms in African and Afrodiasporic Literatures* (2021) is an ambitious reading of practices of mobility, with the stated intention of analysing the “outcomes of movement rather than movement itself” in postcolonial literature. Situated within the analytical frameworks of mobility studies, postcolonial and literary studies, the book cleverly addresses the overrepresentation of the figure of the migrant, or reductive readings of postcolonial mobility in migration and diaspora studies. Engaging a range of Francophone and Anglophone African and Afrodiasporic literatures, the study expands the sometimes narrow scope of mobility to encompass technologies and sites of mobility. This conceptualisation of the signifiers of the porosity of a globalised world, taking seriously the mobilities produced by technologies such as cell phones or television, or locations such as hotels and airports, results in a rich and layered analytical base. Moreover, it enables Toivanen to extend her inquiry to the relationship between mobility and cosmopolitanism as a signifier of utopian “worldliness”. Consequently, the study also sets out to problematise the rather reductive readings of privileged African mobilities through the contested notion of Afropolitanism. These intersecting lines are neatly structured into the three analytical sections of the study—namely, “Trouble in Business Class”, “Budget Troubles, Practical Cosmopolitanisms”, and “Abject Travels of Citizens of Nowhere”. While Toivanen makes it clear that mobility alone does not necessarily produce “cosmopolitan consciousness, ethic, or aspiration” (9), this structure delineates forms and outcomes of mobilities based on social class.

The first section, “Trouble in Business Class” most closely aligns cosmopolitanism with representations of economic power and transnational mobility in third-generation African literature. Toivanen cleverly subverts expectations by opening with an analysis of a novel by Ama Ata Aidoo, an author whose representation of the class dynamics of a newly independent Ghana is used to read seemingly banal access to mobility in the form of automobiles, hotels and travel agencies, as a precursor to contemporary readings of transnational Afropolitanism, positing the existence of “Afropolitans *avant la lettre*”.

Subsequent chapters explore the more conventional terrain of Afropolitanism, examining the short stories of Afrodiasporic writers Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi (Chapter 2) and the homecoming narrative of the Francophone writer Alain Mabanckou (Chapter 3). Toivanen's association of various types of class privilege with anxiety produced by the contradictory freedoms of "modern forms of mobility" creates a thread of postcolonial *malaise* running through the "troubled" psyche of the privileged postcolonial subjects examined in this section, countering the myth of carefree and somewhat facile cosmopolitanism defined by Taiye Selasi in "Bye-bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)", published in 2005.

The middle section of the book, "Budget Travels, Practical Cosmopolitanisms", moves further down the economic ladder, reading technologies of mobility through selected works by Liss Kihindou, Véronique Tadjo, NoViolet Bulawayo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. Given the number of texts in this highly interesting chapter (Chapter 4), one wishes that more space could have been given to delving deeper into the texts and developing ideas around the "mobile poetics of communication technologies" (91). The idea of non-physical or virtual mobilities of producers of an accessible form of "worldliness" or practical cosmopolitanism offers a fresh perspective on these texts.

In subsequent chapters, the notion of practical cosmopolitanisms is related to urban mobilities through works by Alain Mabanckou and Michèle Rakotoson (Chapter 5), and migrant mobilities in Fabienne Kanor's *Faire l'aventure* (Chapter 6). Again, the strength of Toivanen's analysis lies in the cartographies of the everyday, and quotidian acts of crossing social, economic, and cultural borders. Within the urban context the French concept of "*débrouillardise*" (resourcefulness) emerges as a term that encapsulates the sort of practical cosmopolitanism that is developed by the need to adapt to new or unfamiliar environments and technologies (115-9). Productively, the line of argumentation around anxieties produced by Western modernity, developed in the first section of the study, is connected to the fragilities that necessitate "*débrouillardise*" as a border-crossing strategy of survival (136).

The final section of the study, "Abject Travels of Citizens of Nowhere", takes us to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, covering the familiar representational terrain of clandestinely, precarity and unbelonging. This culminates in the chapter that reads "zombification" as the ultimate failure of

cosmopolitanism through an analysis of J. R. Essomba's *Le Paradis du nord* and Caryl Phylip's *A Distant Shore* (Chapter 9). Although the metaphor of the zombie is developed with reference to imaginaries of "contagious alterity" and Fortress Europe protecting itself against a "contagious blackness" (202) is evocative, this as Afropean mobility unwittingly precludes a discussion of the mobility with reference to longer histories of African descendants being European. That said, this weakness does not necessarily undermine the critical intervention made by Toivanen's study.

Overall, the book is structured, through its three sections, as complex taxonomy of cosmopolitanisms produced by class-based forms of mobility. Moreover, the fine-grained reading of an impressively broad corpus produces a multi-layered understanding of postcolonial African and Afrodiasporic cosmopolitanisms and mobilities that complicates the simplistic opposition between the privileged Afropolitan at one end of the scale, and the abject figure of the migrant at the other.

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