



CLASSIQUES
GARNIER

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James HODAPP (ed.), *Afropolitan Literature as World Literature*. New York et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 233 p. ISBN: 978-1-50134-258-5.

Afropolitanism is a controversial, contested term that polarises African writers and scholars of African literature alike. It has been accused of being elitist, apolitical, commercialised, disconnected from African realities, and of representing only a narrow subset of Africans for Western audiences. It has also been charged with pandering to Western literary tastes, measuring African success by how close it resembles the West, and celebrating privileged Africans while forgetting about the majority of those for whom intercontinental mobility is not an option. Because of this, the label Afropolitan has been rejected by many African writers, such as Binyavanga Wainaina, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or Emma Dabiri.

Yet, as the reviewed collection emphasises, the term's history is much more complex, varied, and not as exclusive as it has been understood by some. The edited volume seeks to rescue the term from its negative perception, while also acknowledging its problems and the resistance it has generated. Asking whether Afropolitan literature is world literature, the book complicates and expands the term, reclaiming it from its current status as a niche elitist literature for Western readers, and opening up a discursive space to think about it outside of its troubled inheritance. Moreover, the book aims to develop the future direction of Afropolitanism. Edited by James Hodapp of Northwestern University in Qatar, it brings together established as well as emerging scholars based at universities in Europe, the United States, Africa, India, and the Caribbean.

In his substantial introduction, James Hodapp gives an overview of the history of the term "Afropolitanism" and the debates that have surrounded it. Coined by Taiye Selasi in 2005 as a response to Afro-pessimism, it was born out of a desire to counter the negative images of Africa by showing its different aspects. It also sought to liberate African identity from essentialist, exclusionary racial and genetic definitions, and

to emphasise the hybridity, transculturality, and worldliness of being African, albeit in an unequal world. Furthermore, Achille Mbembe (2006) used the term to describe the exchange processes that had gone into the making of Africa and to emphasise Africa as being a part of the world, in response to the exclusion of Africa from world history. Another scholar who has significantly contributed to the theorisation of Afropolitanism and who is also included in the present collection is Chielozona Eze. Building upon Mbembe's theory, Eze's Afropolitanism emphasises the openness to otherness. For him, Afropolitanism is not necessarily about travelling around the globe – the entitlement of a privileged few – but about the ability to occupy several cultural spaces at once: “Afropolitanism, therefore, is a rejection of the conventional postcolonial notion of African identity rooted in opposition; it is an expression of African modernity” (138). This means not only that Afropolitan writers are no longer concerned with writing back to the imperial centre, but also that “being African is not reductive to color, heritage or autochthony; rather, being African is expansive” (148). Eze's definition has ethical implications, because it stresses the shared humanity and human rights of Africans and non-Africans. In a world of borders and passports, it radically proposes that the world is to be shared: Afropolitanism is “the audacity to stake moral claims to Africa and the world and, conversely, to admit that others can lay the same claim to Africa” (147).

The essays in the book show that being Afropolitan is a much more varied affair than had been previously understood. In her essay on Yvonne Owuor's *Dust*, Birgit Neumann points out that, in this novel, it is the common people and not the economically privileged jet-setters who epitomise the Afropolitan ideas of cultural plurality and movement. She argues that *Dust* illustrates the cultural mixing and heterogeneity that have gone into the making of Kenya. In her close reading of the novel *Biskaya* by a Black German writer who goes by the pen name SchwarzRund, Anna von Rath analyses how the Afropolitan identity of the characters is never easy because they are confronted with racism as well as homophobia. Shilpa Daithota Bhat, focusing on the novel *And Home Was Kariakoo* by M.G. Vassanji, points out that Afropolitanism is not only about leaving Africa for the West, but can also be extended to the Asians who migrated to Africa in the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries and contributed to its diversity and cultural hybridity. Amatoritsero Ede reminds us that Afropolitanism, in fact, began in the eighteenth century with the writing by African and African American freed or emancipated slaves and their descendants, such as Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, Phyllis Wheatley, or Edward Blyden. Aretha Phiri, in her essay on the quintessential Afropolitan novel *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi, argues that the novel's Afropolitanism lies not simply in its theme of migrancy from West Africa to the United States, but in enacting what Eze terms "a transcultural affinity": "a moral investment in the being of others that transcends cultural particularities" (154). Julie Iromuanya, in her chapter on A. Igoni Barrett's novel *Blackass*, argues that the novel invokes Global South affinities between African and African American literatures. Juan Meneses stresses a different kind of worldliness for African literature: an ecology-based African world sensibility. Based on his analysis of Zakes Mda's novel *The Heart of Redness*, his eco-Afropolitan theory draws attention to environmentalist efforts emerging from the Global South, to environmental justice, and to an "earth democracy" that would ensure "the ability for Africans to develop a relationship with the environment that permits them to pursue a fair, dignified and good life" (91). M. Rocío Cobo-Piñero, in her essay on Noo Saro-Wiwa's travelogue *Looking for Transwonderland*, explores the role of travel writing in redefining Afropolitan identity as political. She analyses the modes in which the Afropolitan gaze confronts the readers with the impact of globalisation and modernisation in Nigeria. The last two chapters by Julian Wacker and Lara El Mekkwawi look at novels by the Nigerian authors Teju Cole and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, which have been perceived by critics as defining the Afropolitan genre, alongside the novels by Taiye Selasi, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Imbolo Mbue. Wacker argues that Cole's work questions essentialist outlooks on African identities and reveals an obscure poetics that challenges the perception, interpretation, and categorisation of his texts. According to Wacker, at the heart of Afropolitan writing is intertextuality, which produces temporary constellations and ever-changing fields of tension. Lara El Mekkwawi, in her chapter on Adichie's novel *Americanah*, observes that Afropolitanism as a way of perceiving the world does not guarantee easy mobility if one only possesses an African passport. For this reason, she argues that Adichie's protagonists are not Afropolitan in a comforting

sense, referring to them instead as “hesitant locals, who do not fully fit in anywhere they go; who are not to be seen as fully excluded but as worldly; who are forced to deal with limitations yet still choose to engage on a global scale” (212).

So, is Afropolitan literature world literature? Certainly yes, if we consider it through the lens of David Damrosch’s (2003) definition of world literature as texts that circulate and gain meaning beyond the milieu in which they were created. According to Amatoritsero Ede, Afropolitan writing is not world literature in the sense of symbolic worlding terms, because it is alienated, individualistic, and has no aim to reduce the alienating effect of history on Africans and cause a revolution in ideas and a socio-political and cultural transformation: “The question of ethics, which engaged previous generations of African and Black writers going back to the 1700s thus becomes superfluous in the ideologically vacuous, market-ruled, individualistic, and impersonal metropolitan publishing” (121). Afropolitan literature’s world literature status, Ede insists, resides only in its global circulation, which tells us more about the transnational literature market and its demand for certain narratives than about the literature itself. In contrast, Chielozona Eze argues that what makes Afropolitan literature world literature is its openness to otherness: “Any literature from Africa or by a person of African ancestry that embodies this spirit of openness, any literature that gestures toward the world as a limitless space is, by definition, a world literature” (147-148).

Comparing the different perspectives opened up by Eze’s and Ede’s discussion on world literature is particularly fruitful. Regrettably, the other contributors to the book do not make their considerations of the world literature aspect of Afropolitan literature as explicit as Ede and Eze. With its intense focus on the term *Afropolitanism*, the book overlooks that the term *world literature* is equally contested and controversial; a close scrutiny of its various interpretations in a historical context would have made this otherwise excellent collection even more interesting.

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Nanjala NYABOLA, *Travelling While Black. Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move*. London et al.: Hurst, 2020. 264 p. ISBN: 978-1-78738-382-1.

Travelling While Black, as the author, Nanjala Nyabola, states in her foreword, is not a travel memoir. Nyabola envisions her book as a contribution to a chorus of voices that force a “reckoning in the global conversation around race” (xi). To that end, she masterfully weaves together different stories of her travels around different parts of the world to lay bare the various ways race and racism shape the politics of human mobility. She travelled around the world in her capacity as a human rights lawyer working for organisations whose very procedures and philosophies, at times, had effects on race, and yet those organisations discouraged any discussion of race. Similarly, when working on immigration and refugee studies as a student at university, she was expected to theorise about how “a state would exclude thousands of people, possibly condemning them to a watery grave, without using the word racism” (225). This realisation led Nyabola to organise her advocacy beyond the prescriptions of her legal education and the usual rules of procedure, and to adopt what she calls “small acts of resistance” (41).

The book is divided into seventeen essays of various lengths ranging from four to twenty pages. Each of the essays tackles different facets of mobility including topics such as the draconian migration policies of many countries (in the Global North and the Global South) and their effects on racialised bodies; the politics of visa applications; her trips to South Africa and Botswana where she was tracing the biographical details of her favourite writer, Bessie Head, and her near-death experience hiking in the mountains of Nepal, to name but a few. The scope of this review does not allow for an exhaustive exposé of the seventeen essays that compose the book. It will suffice to draw from a few of them to highlight what are their overall themes: the various ways racialised bodies experience mobility, and the political practices that emerge from the reflections on dislocation, migration and disempowerment. Nyabola

nestles these politico-philosophical musings in stories and personal narratives because, she argues, they can do more to communicate, where theory fails, the violence produced by racism in the politics of mobility.

A few of the essays are dedicated to her travel within African countries. She narrates how she noticed that there are parts of the world that travel guides write extensively about, warning “innocent” tourists to be careful of the dangerous natives who might harm them. Moreover, she realised that the travel guides she read “religiously” (typically written by white men) have a specific target audience and that she, as a Black African woman, is not part of that audience. When travelling to Burkina Faso, Haiti, Ghana, Togo and South Africa, she was riddled with fear instilled in her by the travel guides that were not written for her to begin with. However, she quickly realised that looking at Africa or the Caribbean through the lenses of stereotypes fostered by travel guides hindered her from connecting with beautiful people and experiencing fulfilling and wholesome moments. The minute she let go of her fears, she was welcomed by strangers into their houses, and she got to experience the help of a stranger whom she would not have otherwise spoken to. Lastly, Nyabola discovered that when she travels in African and some Caribbean countries, her Blackness opens up doors of possibilities that are shut for her in European and North American countries. In African countries, she walks the street unbothered; because she is Black, everybody assumes she is a local. She disappears in the background. No one finds her presence to be a noteworthy thing, no one is curious about her hair, and no one follows her around in shops. Thus, disregarding the stereotypes fostered by travel guides and certain western media outlets helped her experience different parts of Africa she would not have experienced if she had continued to subscribe to the narratives perpetuated about the continent.

Another focus of her book is Nyabola’s journey as a lawyer and activist. She brings complexity and nuance to concepts that have become so ubiquitous we are scarcely aware of the weights they carry. This is the most instructive part of the book. She draws our attention to stories of people who have been displaced from their homes by war, terrorism, and other factors. She draws from those encounters to explicate the ways in which sympathy and love can remain useful as political tools. Working with victims of sexual violence in Haiti, she found that the

methods prescribed in law school could not measure up to the issues she was grappling with. Therefore, contrary to what she had been taught, she decided to get to know her clients and become invested in all the facets of their humanity, as people who represent more than the total of the violence they experienced (13). Her Africanness and Blackness afforded her a space in the hearts of the children she was working with, because although she was a foreigner, she was Black like them. Nyabola's anecdotes do not constitute self-congratulatory memoirs of a lawyer-activist. She painstakingly argues that people's suffering should not be reduced to mere lessons for the spectators to feel grateful about their privileged lives. Love and sympathy as a political practice come from a conviction that "it is not about helping people because we feel bad for them but helping people because we want them to experience the same fullness of life that we ourselves aspire to" (15). However, for that to happen, we must name the beast that hinders those aspirations: racism. Nyabola's work aims to uncover the myriad of ways (covert and overt) racism infiltrates our experiences of being in the world.

In later parts of the book, Nyabola frequently returns to the question of the suffering of others and reflects on the approach needed to elicit appropriate responses to people's suffering. She leans on a quote from an indigenous women's rights activist that has been seared into her consciousness who said, "If you have come to save me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us struggle together" (16). Following this advice, she learned to walk with the people she wishes to help rather than observe them from a distance (18). What does this entail? Nyabola highlights certain complexities that arise when one takes the question of struggling alongside people seriously. For instance, how can advocacy preserve the dignity of those it means to support? About photography, an indispensable means for activism, she wonders: "Why should Black and brown bodies be immortalized in the archives of humanitarianism solely as helpless objects of pity, often devoid of nuance and complexity?" (41) She takes as an example the famous Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of 1993, Kevin Carter's *Starving Child and Vulture* (42). It is a picture of an emaciated African child crawled up in the ground, and behind the child is a vulture that seems to be waiting to pounce on him. The photograph became a powerful symbol of the devastating

effects of hunger and famine in Sudan. However, it also sparked a lot of controversy around photography and ethical responsibility. Nyabola argues that photographers must balance capturing important stories with respecting the well-being and dignity of the individuals involved.

Consciousness-raising is a valuable part of activism and, as Nyabola reminds us, images are a powerful tool for evoking emotions. When one wants to draw the world's attention, especially through photography, to the atrocities committed on Black and brown bodies, one has to reflect on the question of how to represent the suffering of others. Nyabola reminds us that this question is at the heart of how we organise our societies and our world. This is particularly relevant in a time when we have become accustomed to scrolling on social media through pictures of dead bodies, starving children, and people being humiliated by the police without asking why it has become so normal to see these kinds of pictures and what that says about our society.

Toward the end of her book, Nyabola wrestles, though very briefly, with the question of how to live your life in a way that takes into account the fact that you have witnessed the horrors of the suffering of others. This is a question of ethics, moral consistency, and responsibility. She cannot pretend that she has not witnessed the plight of the immigrants who travel the perilous Mediterranean Sea only to encounter hostility once they reach European shores – on many occasions, barred from entry and forced back to an almost certain death. Moreover, she has seen how immigrants are treated in camps on the outskirts of countries where children are born with no prospect of a prosperous life due to the colour of their skin. Significantly, she has also witnessed how European cities like Paris, Barcelona and Palermo rallied to welcome refugees at their doors, contradicting the harsh policies of their national governments that sought to keep their countries closed-off (81). In Palermo, she saw a small group of volunteers, in defiance of their government, waiting to help the immigrants who had just got off a rescue boat. Moreover, having witnessed first-hand how Congolese people and their children suffer systemic violence at the hands of global companies mining conflict minerals that are used in mobile phone manufacturing, how can she live a life that reckons with those realities? Working in advocacy, she has seen people use mobile phones to demand social justice in contexts where they would not have been able to do so without such tools. On

the other hand, the mobile phone industry has destroyed numerous Congolese lives. How can she reconcile the contradiction between the usefulness of such technology and the misery others endure due to the mobile phone industry? Nyabola briefly alludes to what she calls small acts of resistance. Her conception of these acts can be attributed to her witnessing the atrocities committed against racialised bodies by harmful policies implemented by powerful countries underscoring the importance of witnessing and reacting to injustices faced by marginalised individuals, and the transformative potential of individual actions even in the absence of institutional power. Nyabola provides examples of how she organises her own life around small acts of resistance: she tries not to change mobile phones needlessly every year, she sacrifices aspects of her personal comfort in an attempt to live with the fact that she has seen first-hand, through her travels, how many lives are destroyed in the process of creating the things we take for granted.

The book is thought-provoking and offers insights into a wide variety of topics. Nyabola presents her complex ideas in an accessible way. She avoids the pitfall that some theorists dealing with similar topics commit, namely writing books that are inaccessible to people outside their academic circles. However, Nyabola is writing a book about travelling and says almost nothing about the environmental impact of travelling. She only makes one mention of it in her foreword which is that she recognises that, if more people travelled as much as she does, it would be catastrophic for the environment. This is inadequate because Nyabola writes about small acts of resistance and the extent to which they can bring about change. As she discusses the moral dilemmas she is faced with due to her use of mobile phones, it is easy to imagine that she has witnessed how marginalised people are bearing the brunt of environmental crises. Therefore, it would be consistent for her to also discuss the ethical dilemmas of travel and its environmental impact.

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Isabel KALOUS, *Black Travel Writing. Contemporary Narratives of Travel to Africa by African American and Black British Authors*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2021. 274 p. ISBN: 978-3-83765-953-5.

Isabel Kalous's *Black Travel Writing* is an in-depth look into contemporary Black diasporic travel to and across Africa through the prism of travel writing. Although Kalous mainly deals with African American perspectives and texts, she also goes beyond an exclusively national scope by including Black British texts. Her analyses focus on travelogues from the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, whereas the more theoretical chapters also bring in a historical perspective. Taking diverse sources from different fields such as history, literature, and cultural mobility studies into account, Kalous aims to illustrate how the desire to journey to Africa is deeply embedded in questions of identity and history.

Before diving right into the analysis of eight selected travelogues, Kalous maps out the historical as well as the cultural context of Black travel, or more specifically, Black mobility in the United States. Travel experiences and their literary representations are never and have never been produced in a vacuum. They are influenced, shaped by, and based on existing knowledge about places and stories – individual, collective, and cultural memories that have been told and experienced by literary forbearers such as narratives of the Underground Railroad or the Negro Motorist Green Book. The second chapter “Traveling Black – Traveling Back” sheds light on the various historical and contemporary movements that have shaped the African diaspora and shows how history is linked to present-day journeys of Black diasporic subjects. Black history in the United States has been defined by diverse forms of im/mobilities in the past, beginning with the Middle Passage and the repeated flight of enslaved people to freedom. The forced voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and into slavery lead to a rupture between cultural and geographical roots, to dehumanisation, and to racial violence. Though Black mobility has been restricted in many ways throughout American

history – through slavery and later through laws, regulations, and the criminalisation of the Black body in motion – African Americans have been carving out multiple ways to undermine these limitations put upon them. To classify the Middle Passage as a form of travel and to further examine how Black subjects have been mobile and immobile across centuries challenges the conventional belief of a “natural” connection between travel and freedom and opens up a broader and more diverse understanding of the term “travel”. Africa has served and continues to serve as a canvas for the dreams, hopes, aspirations, and imaginings of Black people in the diaspora who have been uprooted and constantly denied their civil rights and privileges throughout the history of the United States. As Kalous shows, the question of the meaning of Africa – individually, collectively, and historically – remains central to Black people in the diaspora today and is reflected not only in actual travel to the continent, such as the Back-to-Africa movement in the twentieth century, but also in literary and cultural engagements.

Black travel writing as one such literary engagement has been a rarely discussed genre in the academic field of travel writing, although Black diasporic subjects have been travelling in a myriad of ways throughout history. Befitting its title “An Invisible/Kaleidoscopic Genre: Black Travel Writing”, the third chapter shows how Black travel writing is not just an underestimated, but also a very diverse genre. The umbrella term “travel writing” is by itself an ever-shifting concept, defined by fluid boundaries, instability, and societal dynamics. However, Black mobility has often been overlooked, oversimplified, and homogenised as being connected to involuntary movement. Consequently, a variety of texts by Black diasporic writers have been ignored. Kalous, thus, aims to establish a broader and more inclusive definition of travel writing for her concluding analysis and to pinpoint the characteristics of the genre, especially Black travel writing. She states that travel writing is predominantly non-fictional though it is not always clear what is fictional and what is not. Another key feature is its autobiographical perspective. This aspect might mislead readers to believe in the literal truthfulness of travel narratives. However, travel narratives cannot be objective as they are to be understood as lived experience turned into text, shaped by literary, cultural, societal, and historical contexts, e.g. travel narratives of predecessors.

One of the contexts that Black travel writing is informed by is the theme of race. It can be found in one of its earliest forms, namely slave narratives. Slave narratives not only show that travel or, more broadly, mobility has always been a dominating feature of Black diasporic literature, but also that these and later written texts were produced within the Atlantic world and not confined to American soil. By giving examples like Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), or Fredrick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), Kalous stresses the transnational character of the slave narrative, thus shedding light on the manifold ways in which "people, ideas, political movements, and genres cross and transcend national boundaries" (79). Furthermore, slave narratives also demonstrate the interconnectedness between mobility, travel, emancipation, resistance, knowledge, subjectivity, and agency. In view of the impossibility to sketch out all the themes and forms of past and present Black travel writing, Kalous foregrounds three major facets which she finds particularly relevant for the genre: 1. how Black travel writing has been used as a form of resistance, empowerment, and critique challenging the social and political conditions Black diasporic subjects encountered at different times; 2. how the transformative potential of Black travel writing is connected to the crossing of different borders, which provided Black travellers/travel writers with a change of perspective and, consequently, the ability to reconstruct the concepts of identity, nation, and home; and 3. how Africa has been attributed a central, though changing, significance in Black travel writing.

The third aspect, in particular, is characterised by the desire for a place outside the United States which is free from racial discrimination. Black writers thus often imagined Africa as their desired home and their journey to Africa as a return to the motherland. Nevertheless, travels to Africa have evoked ambiguous feelings among Black returnees, often caused by the rift between expectations and lived experience. This tension between feelings of familiarity and feelings of alienation – sometimes even anxiety – towards Africa is also reflected in many travel narratives, which shows that Africa is a terrain where identity and the self are discovered, reasserted, and renegotiated. Even though Kalous identifies some major thematic and narrative elements of Black travel

writing, she emphasises throughout her work that it cannot be limited to only a few topics, as this would impose essentialising presumptions on Black travel narratives.

In her last and definitely most significant chapter, Kalous puts her theoretical findings into practice. Through the analysis of eight travelogues, she exemplifies how this thematic complex, which is already prevalent in earlier written travel accounts, is negotiated and transformed in contemporary travel-themed literature by Black writers. The corpus of the study consists of six travel narratives by African American (Eddy L. Harris, Saidiya Hartman, Barack Obama, Emily Raboteau, Keith Richburg, Isaiah Washington) and two by Black British (Ekow Eshun and Caryl Phillips) authors. By also including travelogues by Black British writers, Kalous wants to put attention to more broadly found themes within Black diasporic travel writing. Instead of focusing on national literary traditions, her analysis rather concentrates on the transnational character – literary and metaphorically – of this genre. While the selected literature varies in tone and style (which also reflects the diversity of Black travel-themed literature) and reaches from the early 1990s until the early 2010s, the narratives all share common questions of identity, nation, history, home, and belonging. In all the texts, Africa operates as a terrain to negotiate these questions. Kalous decided not to organise the eight travelogues chronologically, but in four major sections, each with two narratives. Every section focuses on one recurring theme in Black travel writings about Africa: 1. *(Re)Writing Roots*, 2. *Disenchanting Africa*, 3. *Searching for Home*, and 4. *Tracing Routes*.

The first two sections illustrate a very contrasting engagement with Africa. For Obama and Washington's texts, Kalous asserts that Africa symbolises the long-lost ancestral homeland, with the journey thus aiming at the connection with their roots and the construction of their identities – personal and cultural. In contrast, Harris and Richburg demystify the image of Africa as a homeland for Black diasporic people and stress the impossibility of diasporic return. Consequently, they also construct their identities in opposition to the cultural “other” and emphasise their Americanness. The travelogues by Eshun and Raboteau focus on questions of home and belonging and on how travelling to Africa (and other places in Raboteau's case) can offer them new perspectives on their home societies and the place they left behind. Home, it turns

out, is something you actively create rather than a mythical place. In the last section, Kalous examines the two travel narratives by Phillips and Hartman. Both travelogues engage critically with the history of the Black diaspora and challenge traditional generic boundaries of travel writing through reflections on the genre itself – its tradition and history. By creatively mixing fictional and non-fictional writing, historical writing, essay, autobiography, travel writing, and memoir, Phillips and Hartman, Kalous concludes, offer multidimensional stories of the past in order to put monolithic historical narratives into question.

In conclusion, Kalous's study is very convincing in investigating and explaining the history and the key concepts of Black travel writing such as questions of identity, home, and belonging that constitute a thriving force for many Black travellers. Additionally, it also offers a glimpse into how diverse and multi-layered travel accounts of the Black diaspora and their literary representations are. The exemplary analysis of eight travelogues focusing on journeys to the African continent further illustrates how these travel narratives reveal more about the travellers – their intrinsic motivations, their position in society, their visions of Africa, etc. – than they do about Africa. Shifting the focus to Black travel writing and its diverse forms also paves the way to a decolonising of the genre and the challenging of Western norms. Though there are still many questions unanswered regarding travel narratives in other languages besides English and with other destinations than Africa (which Kalous also points out), this study offers a starting point to do further research on Black diasporic travellers.

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Jeannot Moukouri EKOBE, *Die (Re-)Imagination des Nationalen in Zeiten der Transformation. Eine afropäische ästhetische Intervention*. Münster: edition assemblage, 2021. 260 p. ISBN: 978-3-96042-117-7.

In his award-winning dissertation,¹ published by *edition assemblage* in the series *Postcolonial Intersectionality and Transcultural Literary Studies* (edited by Susan Arndt, Shirin Assa, and Julia Dittmann), Jeannot Moukouri Ekobe analyses how three different authors strategically use aesthetic devices to narrate the transformation process from a national to a transnational understanding of history and identity. To follow the steps of this social transformation process and to show the narrative recreation of interwoven histories, he studies books set at different points in time: Léonora Miano's novel *La saison de l'ombre* (2013) is set in the past, Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996) in the present, and SchwarzRund's *Biskaya* (2016) in the (near) future. Methodically, Ekobe highlights the aesthetic strategies with which the three Black authors subvert societal concepts of the nation, national history, language, and gender. He draws on postcolonial theories, cultural studies, Afro-feminism, intersectionality, and critical whiteness studies to investigate what Miano, Adebayo, and SchwarzRund want to communicate on a text-external level, that is, in relation to the non-fictional world.

The first half of Ekobe's book is dedicated to the theoretical discussion of historical concepts of the nation (chapter one) and concepts of transnationality (chapter two). The nation (or nationality) is described as a historically grown product of the collective imagination and a mode to classify people. It helps its members to get a sense of their own community but is exclusionary towards anyone who is not deemed to be a part of that community. The nationality of a person determines how they are met at a border, what rights they have, and what spaces they are allowed to enter. In contrast, the idea of transnational constellations

1 For his dissertation, Ekobe was awarded the 2022 junior researcher's prize of the African Studies Association Germany (VAD e.V.).

acknowledges the overlapping and interwovenness of those imagined national histories, thereby questioning the nation as an autonomous subject. This is especially relevant, when it comes to rewriting postcolonial histories, because the wealth of the colonising countries is based on the people and resources of the countries they colonise/d. So, ignoring these transnational parts of national histories, and thus the impact of colonialism, is to ignore a large part of what made countries like Britain and France what they are today. Following this theoretical discussion, the third chapter then examines how the three novels deal with the nation and pursue a transnational turn. The authors tell their stories from the Black margins of the collectively imagined, supposedly white nations of France, Britain, and Germany, thus disrupting and subverting them.

The first work Ekobe analyses is Léonora Miano's novel *La saison de l'ombre*, which is set in the colonial past. He shows how the Franco-Cameroonian author brings new light on France's national history by telling the story from the point of view of the colonised people living in what is today called Cameroon in the early days of the transatlantic slave trade. In this way, Miano not only incorporates that part of history into French identity, but also the people who are affected by and connected to it: the Black population of France. Furthermore, Ekobe considers the novel a revision of the colonial narrative of Africa because it portrays different clans – the Mulongo, Bwele, and Isedu – in diverse ways, thus opposing a reductive, hegemonic historiography based solely on skin colour. He focuses, for example, on Miano's revision of colonial vocabulary and on her ways of using the language of the colonising power to communicate the needs and realities of the periphery. For instance, she utilises the term "minister of religion" for people who were often called "shamans" or "witch doctors" in colonial historiography. Furthermore, the term "slave trade" does not appear in the novel, since the word "trade" evokes the impression of peaceful, consensual transactions (107). Indeed, these people had not been slaves before the arrival of the Europeans, but free people or sometimes war prisoners. Miano denies a voice to the European characters, who never get to talk in the novel. In the way she portrays the female characters of the story, Ekobe sees a subversion of both the patriarchal system and hegemonic feminism. One of these female characters, Eyabe, is described as inhabited by a male soul and perceives herself in this way: "[*dies*] *unterstreicht die Möglichkeit des Zusammenlebens*

so genannter 'männlicher und weiblicher Energien' im Körper derselben Person." ("[this] underlines the possibility of the coexistence of so called 'male and female energy' in the body of the same person.," 126).

The next novel Ekobe analyses, *Some Kind of Black* by Diran Adebayo, is the story of a second-generation, middle-class Nigerian Oxford student. Ekobe focusses on the novel's perspective on ethnic fragmentation within the British nation, the intricacies of belonging, and Black masculinity in the west. As in Miano's novel, he detects a questioning of the western mainstream narrative in *Some Kind of Black*. Adebayo also tells a story from the perspective of the margins, subverting the illusion of a post-racial society and "colourblindness". He recognises the fragmentation of the nation in the way the text presents a multitude of spaces within Britain – be they multicultural like London at night, which the protagonist Dele calls "black London" (150), or white-elitist like the London suburbs of Brixton and Peckham. Additionally, the novel's handling of Black masculinity by using and revealing clichés, stereotypes, and hegemonic structures is discussed, as well as its aim to suggest an alternative form of (Black) masculinity. Most of the male characters are part of the so-called *Gangsta culture*, where violence and criminality are means to achieve dominance and earn more money to resist the oppressive white capitalist British leading culture that underpays and undervalues them. They are portrayed as hypersexual – a stereotype they identify with themselves. Ekobe relates their urge to penetrate white women to bell hooks' and Frantz Fanon's considerations on symbolic vengeance, since Dele wishes to sleep with Helena, a white woman, who is a metaphor for Britain, British society, and its culture from which he is excluded. In the end, the protagonist and his father, who had been fighting, are pushed by the mother into a cathartic emotional moment of reconciliation where both men hold each other in their arms and cry "man-like tears" (177) that release them from the patriarchal understanding of (Black) masculinity.

In *Biskaya*, the third and last novel Ekobe analyses, the author SchwarzRund imagines Germany in the near future. Closely interwoven with this Germany is the history of Biskaya, a fictional African island and home to the protagonist's family. In its first edition, SchwarzRund subtitled the novel "*Afropolitaner Berlin-Roman*" ("Afropolitan Berlin Novel"), later changing it to "*Afroqueerer Roman*" ("Afroqueer Novel"),

indicating two of the most prevalent themes of the text: transnational and queer identity. In his study, Ekobe analyses how the author (re-)imagines transnational identity by reconstructing Germany's national history in its (post-)colonial context. For example, he reads the visual fragmentation of the novel, which consists of different types of text (song lyrics, letters, newspaper clippings), as the simultaneous existence of diverse perspectives and experiences. He also draws on the concept of Afropolitanism and investigates how the plot serves to reconstruct the personal and historical connections between Biskaya and Germany. According to Ekobe, however, the depiction of Afropolitanism in *Biskaya* neither fits Achille Mbembe's nor Taiye Selasi's definition. Both approaches highlight the importance of openness towards other people and cultures, and the need to distance oneself from racist essentialism. While Mbembe's Afropolitans live in Africa, those described by Selasi in her essay *Bye-Bye Barbar* are more cosmopolitan and live elsewhere, mostly in a "G8 city" (Selasi 2013). They speak several languages, have attended university and adopted a glamorous multicultural lifestyle, but are still tied to at least one place on the African continent. Ekobe argues that while the novel's protagonist lives a life reminiscent of the Afropolitans in Selasi's essay (she is a musician and lives in Berlin in a multi-ethnic social environment), SchwarzRund's Afropolitanism also emphasises the importance of the dimension of "race" in daily interactions and critiques the illusion of happy multiculturalism and "colourblindness". Furthermore, the African female body as a place of negotiation (of identity, cultural adaptation/assimilation) is discussed, particularly the motifs of hair and beauty ideals that exclude some phenotypes. The novel shows how such exclusions result in an alienation from one's own body, and how the embracing of Black bodily identity often leads to fetishisation and exoticisation.

Ekobe notes that, in *Biskaya*, heteronormativity and the monogamous nuclear family are subverted, and their legitimacy questioned. However, with regard to the queer topics, this chapter in Ekobe's book is somewhat lacking in accuracy. For example, a conflict between two characters is framed as the protagonist's double powerlessness in the face of a "white man" (198), although the aggressor character in question is deliberately not defined by the author in terms of gender, indicating a possible non-binary character. Elsewhere, the protagonist's sexuality is described as

“fluid” (229), although the novel never indicates any sexual interests other than lesbian. In his analysis, Ekobe notes that SchwarzRund tries to be inclusive and neutral about gender identity in her language. He could have further added how she also imagines a socially conscious language that follows ideas like Susan Arndt’s plea to talk about racism without reproducing it. SchwarzRund indicates racist terminology and misgenderings of characters (e.g. by initialisms), but she never reproduces problematic terms, thus offering an alternative to the hegemonic and patriarchal structures embedded in the German language.

These minor weaknesses aside, Ekobe presents the reader with a compelling comparative analysis of three diverse narratives of Afropean identities. He has chosen his novels well as they give him the opportunity to explore similar topics comparatively: the use of language, the portrayal of gender identities and politics, and the narrative reconstruction of (post-)colonial histories. Based on the three novels, he demonstrates the strategic use of aesthetic devices such as abrogation, allusion, disruption, and metonymy, which can also be found in other works of Afropean fiction. He further identifies a tendency among the writers towards subversion – in a way that continues the tradition of “writing back” (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1989), but also goes beyond it through the appropriation of language and the interweaving of narratives.

Ekobe often reminds the reader that his book offers literary analyses of fictionalised plots and aesthetic devices, and that he does not compare the realities of the novels with true events and social states. Nevertheless, he sometimes comments in the footnotes on portrayals of society that differ from reality if they are greatly exaggerated, or he signals divergences by adding “in the novel” in brackets to a statement. The methodology focuses on what the aesthetic devices communicate in the context of the postcolonial and feminist theories that have been used. However, the book does not offer an analysis from these points of view per se but gives the reader the tools to recognise these aesthetic devices in other works and to interpret them in accordance with a variety of theories.

In conclusion, Ekobe’s book makes an important contribution to the discussion of Afropean identities and the transnational turn in European literature. While these topics are more widely discussed in

some languages and scholarly communities (especially Francophone and Anglophone literary studies), they have received little attention in the German context and in German (comparative) literary studies. This makes Ekobe's book one of the few scholarly German-language monographs dealing with the concept of Afropeans.

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Noémie NDIAYE, *Scripts of Blackness. Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. 376 p. ISBN: 978-1-51282-263-2.

From antiquity to the advent of cinema, theatre was the major form of large-scale popular entertainment. It was often stratified along social lines, and archival records are certainly not evenly distributed. But to the extent that it is accessible, the theatre of the past offers a wealth of material from which common notions and ideas of a given society may be reconstructed. Having read Noémie Ndiaye, one will be quick to point out that theatre also contributed to and popularised these notions and ideas in the larger discourse.

While Geraldine Heng, in her 2018 monograph, placed the *Invention of Race* as a common concept in the Middle Ages, Ndiaye in *Scripts of Blackness* sets out to describe the “circulation” (14) of racialised thinking in Europe – the *Making of Race* – in the Early Modern period via the theatrical archive. This means that her main sources are plays from Early Modern England, Spain, and France. But she also studies how theatrical practice – what she terms “racecraft” – in playtexts and performances

reflects and contributes to common notions about Blackness, often across national borders.

Ndiaye's book is arranged in several superimposed levels that allow her to point out common themes but also, as is often necessary, to differentiate between various sociohistorical contexts (time periods, regions, and languages, but also audiences, for instance with courtly and commercial plays). The book's three major parts posit three central "performance techniques" (23), namely *Black-up*, *Blackspeak*, and *Black Moves* (also termed "cosmetic, acoustic, [and] kinetic blackness"; 18). As these have different material and sociological contexts for England, France, and Spain, the chapters are generally subdivided by this logic, and at times also along gender lines (the discussion of *Black-up* is spread across two major chapters focussing on male and female conventions). In addition, Ndiaye distinguishes between several *scripts*, i.e. complex patterns of meaning that arise from texts and their performances. These *scripts* tie the different fields of analysis together: the performance techniques are ubiquitous, but they *mean* different things depending on the *scripts* they employ. In this sense, there is, e.g. a "*diabolical script of blackness*", an "*animalizing script of blackness*", or a "*commodifying script of blackness*", and they all "do different ideological work" (79).

On its own, the theoretical framework of the volume is enlightening about the historical developments and the way ideas operate within works of literature. Ndiaye engages on various levels with current thinking in Critical Race Studies, not least the question of the extent to which any of the performance techniques warrant talk of subversion, resistance, or Black agency. This question is closely tied to concepts like authenticity, which Ndiaye thinks is impossible to assess accurately due to "the white gaze that filtered black dances" (but also, to a lesser degree, *Blackspeak*) "into the archives" (191). Her argument specifically counters the ideas of Nicholas R. Jones (in *Staging Habla de Negros*, 2019) who argued that to a degree, authentic voices may be reconstructed from the historical record. Ndiaye generally foregrounds the contrast between the social realities of Afro-diasporic populations and theatrical practice. However, there are also moments when she centres agency. In a performance of Simón Aguado's *Los negros*, "real Afro-Spaniards are given a chance to dance". According to Ndiaye, they "take ownership of the site of production" by performing a "saraband, whose contested origins" represent the fact that

“Andalusia [...] was always already African”. (205) The dancers would thus resist the expected theatrical conventions. In addition, Ndiaye also asks if the intended “ideological work” of the *scripts of Blackness* might not, in fact, depend exactly on the exaggerated artificiality of theatrical representation (148). In this vein, the work of other scholars generally serves as a basis for dialogue and for furthering insight. Ndiaye wants to make ambiguities visible, and she is just as circumspect in her endeavours to fill gaps in the historical record.

Many of Ndiaye’s arguments, however, are based on close readings of the plays. She examines textual details rather than using them as mere illustrations of her points. Passages on well-known works, like William Shakespeare’s *Otello* and *Titus Andronicus*, Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness*, and Molière’s *Le malade imaginaire*, alternate with many more on plays that are much less familiar or hardly known at all (René Bordier’s *Grand bal de la douairière de Billebabaub*; Lope de Vega’s *Servir a señor discreto*). In each case, Ndiaye’s analysis is perceptive and adds something new to the discussion. The scope of her reading is most apparent from an appendix that lists a “Selection of Early Modern Plays Featuring Black Characters”. In total, this selection comprises more than 330 titles (with a few, likely erroneous, doubles). Not all of these plays are extant, and the titles are taken from earlier compilations and bibliographies, but in any case, Ndiaye references at least 90 of the plays in her text. And that is not all. Careful to weigh the evidence, Ndiaye also draws on additional material – ballads, novels, novellas, operas, eyewitness accounts, illustrations, paintings, travel accounts, and all kinds of treatises, from the technical to the medical. Latin, Portuguese, Italian, and German sources are touched upon, as are plays that do not feature Black characters but illustrate common principles, for instance Turkish characters’ stage accents and “gibberish” (181). Ndiaye is very adept at succinctly contextualising Early Modern ideas, by adducing convincing source materials in several languages. She explains the relation of Black-up to the Petrarchist notion of the “slave to love” (88; 94); tracks the changes from the novellas of Matteo Bandello and François de Belleforest to the anonymous *Tragédie françoise d’un More cruel*; points out the implications of the tradition of Black saints (72-73); sketches the history of the *mulata* stock character pioneered by Lope de Vega; situates the whole of theatre within different colonialist discourses;

and also discusses a variety of material techniques, for instance ways of performing *Black-up*, from gauze masks to cosmetics, including contemporary recipes.

These explanations usually work as glosses to lexical details in the plays; a specific formula for mixing *Black-up*, for example, is an extended commentary on a reference to walnuts in John Webster's *The White Devil*. Accordingly, Ndiaye regularly draws upon contemporary dictionaries in order to elucidate the semantics of certain words and images. This is done in English, French, and Spanish, and Ndiaye carefully scrutinises all translations and adaptations, paying attention to the lexicon, but also finding, for example, Spanish stock characters that only crop up in English adaptations of Spanish originals (232). In Ndiaye's own translations, key terms are generally left standing and instances of grammatical and phonetic distortions in *Blackspeak* are not imitated, but rather indicated by asterisks and hash marks. The original passages are always fully quoted in the endnotes. There, Ndiaye also mentions her own archival research, in particular in Seville.

Unsurprisingly, such a rounded approach shows on every page, especially in the quality of the details, but it also amounts to a volume that will be eminently useful for many different areas of Early Modern theatre studies. Its only weakness might be that the writing itself is at times characterised by a density of language that – while it fulfils all possible academic requirements and pays homage to various schools of thought (we encounter “theatregrams”, “glocality”, “self-fashioning”) – sometimes borders on jargon, making it harder than necessary to follow certain arguments. There are also very rare instances when parallelisms miss the mark, at least linguistically, as is the case when the tradition of *Stage Irish* is (for good reason) added into the mix, but inexplicably called “Irishspeak” (164). The structural complexity is also not helped by a sometimes excessive amount of chapter outlines: there are introductions to every chapter that lay out the plan for the following 50 pages or so, in addition to an introductory chapter for the whole book.

While it is clear that Ndiaye is generally painstaking with her comparisons, there is a surprise reveal of what she calls a “subdued but persistent ecological poetics of transnational racecraft” (236), first pointed out in the “Post/Script”. She refers here to a number of nature metaphors (trees, icebergs, fungi) which are indeed scattered here and

there within her text but are otherwise rather inconspicuous. To open this new issue on the last two pages of an already dense volume feels like aiming at one thing too many. However, it would certainly be of interest if Ndiaye expanded on this as well as on other aspects only briefly touched upon in *Scripts of Blackness*. For other researchers, the same holds true. As mentioned above, a good number of the plays in the appendix have not yet been studied in-depth by the author, and it is certainly promising to approach other theatrical cultures of Early Modern Europe through the lens of *Scripts of Blackness*: those of Italy, certainly, and also those of Germany and the multilingual Holy Roman Empire, to name but a few. As it stands, *Scripts of Blackness* is without a doubt a very important contribution to Early Modern Studies.

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Juan MENESES, *Resisting Dialogue. Modern Fiction and the Future of Dissent*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. 312 p. ISBN 978-1-51790-676-4.

Meneses's book title is, at first sight, befuddling, for how can one resist dialogue in "the Age of Dialogue" (4), as the author himself declares, in which it represents a crucial instrument for establishing consensus and fostering social, cultural, historical and political relations? The answer, which actually represents the core of Meneses's argument, is the postpolitical, emancipatory discourse of dissent through which the unprivileged – thought of in terms of power, class, gender, race, social justice or environmental violence – should effect change by becoming

engaged in civic and political action. Furthermore, “reading dangerously” (vii), the title of the Prologue, is the author’s method of enquiry whereby he aims to bring to the fore “alternative, dissensual modes of thinking that can be mobilized to debunk directly and decisively the idea of the end of politics” (xiii). To achieve this goal, Meneses draws on the tradition of “postpolitics” inconsistently developed by Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Žižek so as to demonstrate that political activism has been neutralised and even devoid of meaning, sliding into “mere forms of management, policy making and policing” (vii). Consensus is a crucial notion in a postpolitical context which tries to impede alternative political discourses, and Meneses has recourse to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to explain how a community’s traditional codes become the dominant logic, or the “*pensée unique*” (ix) that governs the silent mass of individuals. Interestingly and originally, Meneses interprets dialogue, the guarantor of consensus, “as a (post)political problem and not simply as a solution”, since the unacknowledged masses of individuals must be entitled “to articulate an effective disagreement that intervenes in the consensus that governs them” (x). Such forms of dissent or disagreement pass for what Meneses terms as “illusory dialogue” (4) whereby a minority has a chance to speak up and voice their disagreement within the dominant group. However, argues Meneses, this is nothing but “a spectacle of tolerance controlled by the dominant voice and is designed precisely to prevent any meaningful change from occurring when authoritarian, antidialogic, or simply oppressive practices are either unfeasible or no longer tolerated” (4).

Addressing the extremely topical issue of dialogue as a mechanism of ensuring a healthy democracy and upholding “an egalitarian politics” (xv) in an age when the political function of dialogue has visibly and threateningly deteriorated, the book approaches the problem in an interdisciplinary way and, most significantly, turns literature into an actor able to intervene in postpolitical operations and practices. It is mainly postcolonial studies and ecocriticism that allow Meneses to explore the relationship between literature and politics in order to see how literature can make us better grasp the meaning of postpolitics, and also how certain texts “have an intrinsic radical power that works in concrete ways to dismantle its governing consensual precepts” (xi). More specifically, Meneses’s thesis focuses on the power of the literary

imagination to represent nonconsensual political agency and, concurrently, on the capacity of literary critics to stand up against the ability of post-politics to incorporate the language of resistance into its own. In doing so, the author explores, in five chapters, modernist, postmodernist and contemporary Anglophone novels in tandem with other disciplines, such as economics, history, political philosophy and visual studies with a view to offering the reader a few “illusory dialogues”, or forms of problematic political resistance, related to the end of empire, neoliberalism, the fight against terrorism and the Anthropocene.

The Introduction broadens the discussion initiated in the Prologue and underlines the importance of dialogue as a means of revitalising politically amicable communication. Meneses starts with the celebration of 2001 as the symbolic Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and continues to theorise the notion of dialogue as a problem and, implicitly, dialogism by taking issue with the canonical model established by Mikhail Bakhtin. The author claims that Bakhtin did not write about dialogue, but about the novel as a demotic genre able to compensate for “the political and discursive limitations of the classic literary genres preceding it” (7). Nevertheless, Meneses admits that the Bakhtinian model was employed by Anglo-American critics in the 1980s to foreground the social injustices foisted upon the underrepresented or the disenfranchised subjected to marginalisation and exclusion. At this point, the discussion turns towards “illusory dialogue” devoid of political function and unable to encourage dissent or to grant political agency to “minor voices” (20). Last but not least, the author expounds on the future of the modern Anglophone novel, insisting that close reading can unravel the “counterdialogic politics” (25), which in the literary texts under scrutiny takes multiple forms, such as failure, oversight, impasse or deflection. Importantly enough, Meneses’s aim is not to link these works to the historical period in which they were produced but “to understand their political value for us today” (26).

Chapter 1 focuses on E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* with the purpose of identifying counterdialogic strategies that are a form of radical cosmopolitanism which revivifies the protagonists’ political agency. Chapter 2 is devoted to Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, a postmodern novel that questions the official history of a village in East Anglia, in which the main protagonist’s anecdotal narrative

poses as an alternative history that runs counter to his relatives' hegemonic discourse. Chapter 3 zooms in on state politics in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*. More specifically, Meneses dwells on the rise of neoliberalism during the Margaret Thatcher regime, which rejects dissent under the guise of democratic collaboration. Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is analysed in Chapter 4, where Hamid provides an insight into the geopolitical state of affairs during the 9/11 attacks in New York, insisting, at the same time, on the processes that have transformed the dialogue on international terrorism and the US government's response to it into an inefficient one. Finally, Chapter 5 examines alternative representations of environmental violence in the Anthropocene, with particular application to India, as unravelled by Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Nigeria, as portrayed by Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*.

Bringing forth an innovative perspective, *Resisting Dialogue* is admirably written and is an excellent read meant to inspire further research not only on modern Anglophone literature but also on dialogue "as a problem" (x), since, as Meneses contends, "engaging in dialogue to right a wrong sometimes opens up further questions about silence and the limits of discursive agency" (5). It is precisely this idea of dialogue "as a problem" that, tackled in conjunction with postcolonialism and ecocriticism, enables literary imagination to find potential answers to what politics as such fails to do in troubling contemporary times. However, despite the plethora of "illusory dialogues" and "counter-dialogic politics" disclosed by the novels in question, I doubt that the contribution of literary critics, and of literature in general, to today's ever-growing non-consensual (post)political landscape will allow the voice of the disenfranchised to be fully heard in order for long promised or much needed changes to be implemented.

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Beata WALIGORSKA-OLEJNICZAK, *Literackie konstelacje (w) twórczości Andrieja Zwiagnicewa (Les constellations littéraires dans l'œuvre d'Andreï Zviaguintsev)*. Poznań : Éditions de l'Université d'Adam Mickiewicz, 2022. 275 p. ISBN : 978-8-32324-086-0. ISBN (pdf) : 978-8-32324-087-7.

Dans son livre *Literackie konstelacje (w) twórczości Andrieja Zwiagnicewa (Les constellations littéraires dans l'œuvre d'Andreï Zviaguintsev)*, Beata Waligorska-Olejniczak rapproche les différents films d'Andreï Zviaguintsev des œuvres littéraires russes. Grâce à une méthode comparative, l'auteure identifie, à travers l'analyse des phénomènes intertextuels présents dans les films de Zviaguintsev, des traces de la mémoire culturelle, en s'appuyant sur des théories d'Astrid Erll et Renate Lachmann. Les films du réalisateur russe se composent de différentes constellations que l'auteure examine dans huit chapitres. Chaque chapitre est une étude de cas d'un film associé à un livre du canon littéraire russe. De plus, les notions de constellations et de mémoire culturelle lui permettent de découvrir un dialogue interculturel entre les films de Zviaguintsev et ceux d'autres cinéastes.

Le premier chapitre compare les trois épisodes (*Bushido, Obscure, Le choix*) réalisés en 2000 par Zviaguintsev pour la série *La chambre noire* avec *Les carnets du sous-sol* (1864) de Fiodor Dostoïevski. La métaphore du sous-sol empruntée à ce dernier est un liant entre les quatre œuvres. Les personnes du sous-sol aspirent à la liberté sans contraintes morale, idéologique ou psychologique. Comme dans *Les carnets du sous-sol*, les catégories du double et du miroir, que l'auteure nomme *inter alia*, apparaissent dans les épisodes réalisés par Zviaguintsev comme les manifestations du sous-sol.

La comparaison entre le premier long-métrage de Zviaguintsev, *Le retour* (2003), et la nouvelle *Le retour* d'Andreï Platonov fait l'objet du deuxième chapitre. Les deux œuvres sont consacrées aux gens ordinaires. Les héros masculins vivent des traumatismes psychologiques qui fonctionnent

en même temps comme des stimuli pour se construire une nouvelle identité. Le chemin symbolise le passage initiatique vers la vie adulte et l'évolution de l'esprit de révolution. L'auteure propose une approche existentialiste qui la conduit vers une piste analytique autour de la notion de mémoire collective. Les solutions esthétiques empruntées à Bergman qui s'expriment dans la manière de filmer le visage saisissent l'état intérieur des personnages.

Le bannissement (2007) de Zviaguintsev est étudié par l'auteure dans le troisième chapitre à travers l'œuvre de Léon Tolstoï, *Anna Karénine* (1877). Waligorska-Olejniczak remarque de nombreuses similarités esthétiques, thématiques et formelles entre les deux œuvres. Elle analyse les éléments de la culture russe, permettant le dialogue entre le film et le livre. Le diagnostic de la crise de la famille traditionnelle russe constitue l'un des résultats de cet échange intertextuel. Enfin, l'auteure propose de voir *Le bannissement* comme une archive portant des éléments liés à la mémoire à la fois collective et individuelle.

Dans le quatrième chapitre, Waligorska-Olejniczak étudie les similarités entre le court-métrage *Apocryphe* (2009) de Zviaguintsev et l'œuvre et la vie de Joseph Brodsky. L'auteure associe l'esthétique aux températures froides, le rythme lent du court métrage, la symbolique aquatique présente dans les deux œuvres à la réflexivité existentielle. L'appareil photographique apparaît comme une métaphore de la mémoire, du temps qui passe, qui préserve les changements dans la culture et dans la vie. Il prolonge également la vision, en rappelant sa fonction de témoin, comme dans *Blow-up* d'Antonioni.

L'auteure continue à développer son idée de la fonction mémorielle de la photographie dans le chapitre cinq. Son étude de cas consiste à examiner un court métrage de Zviaguintsev, *Le secret* (2011), en l'associant à la nouvelle d'Ivan Bounine *L'insolation* (1927). Dans le film, la photographie contient des traces de la mémoire individuelle, tandis que, dans *L'insolation*, elle révèle la mémoire collective qui construit le passé historique. Les images de l'objectif dans *Le secret* et dans la prose de Bounine symbolisent l'importance de la culture (littérature, cinéma) dans la transmission de la mémoire.

La comparaison entre le film *Elena* (2011) de Zviaguintsev et les drames d'Anton Tchekhov (*La Mouette*, *Les Trois sœurs* et *La Cerisaie*) permet à l'auteure d'analyser, dans son sixième chapitre, les relations

familiales et les conditions de vie dans le contexte de la culture russe. La notion du double, les miroirs réapparaissent comme des outils pour instaurer un dialogue intime avec le spectateur. L'auteure repère des indices esthétiques, notamment la symbolique des couleurs et des espaces qui soulignent les traits de caractère des personnages et leurs intentions. De nombreuses références religieuses associées aux actes de l'héroïne tracent un questionnement sur la nature du mal.

Le chapitre sept est consacré à l'analyse du film *Léviathan* (2014) depuis la perspective du roman *Les Golovlev* (1880) de Mikhaïl Saltykov-Chtchedrine. À travers l'analyse des coutumes autour des repas, l'auteure identifie les éléments stylistiques et structurels similaires dans les deux œuvres. Ces éléments, associés aux références bibliques et à *Léviathan* de Thomas Hobbes, donnent au film de Zviaguintsev une dimension socio-politique. L'auteure perçoit même le film comme une caricature de *Léviathan* de Hobbes où le pouvoir au lieu de le protéger écrase l'individu. Il est représenté par la putridité des objets et de la nourriture, et par les personnes haut-placées animées par leurs propres intérêts. La société humaine, dans *Léviathan* et dans *Les Golovlev*, face à la puissance de la nature semble instable et fragile.

Dans le chapitre huit, Waligorska-Olejniczak interprète le long-métrage de Zviaguintsev *Faute d'amour* (2017) à travers la nouvelle de Mikhaïl Boulgakov *Cœur de chien* (1925). L'auteure identifie les analogies entre ces deux œuvres dans leurs questionnements critiques envers l'autoritarisme, le pouvoir de la technologie et des médias. La famille en subit les conséquences. Les deux œuvres sont narrées sur un ton satirique à travers des représentations d'une société russe dysfonctionnelle du point de vue politique, sociétal et éthique. Cette image se grave et se reproduit dans le patrimoine culturel russe. L'hiver symbolise un cœur gelé, un homme égoïste, conditionné par les privilèges et manipulable par la technologie.

Selon Beata Waligorska-Olejniczak, les films de Zviaguintsev, comparés aux œuvres de la littérature russe, fonctionnent comme des constellations, qui dévoilent les éléments de la mémoire collective russe, à travers sa culture. L'intertextualité et de nombreuses citations de films (de Bresson, Bergman, Antonioni et Tarkovski, en particulier) aident à saisir le rôle de la photographie, du cadre, dans cette transmission culturelle. L'inscription des films de Zviaguintsev dans

le néo-modernisme cinématographique, dans le slow-cinéma, accentue sa fonction réflexive et critique envers les idéologies responsables de la corruption de la société et de l'individu.

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Aurélie BARJONET, Karl ZIEGER (dir.), *Zola derrière le rideau de fer*, Villeneuve d'Ascq : Les Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2022. 205 p. ISBN : 978-2-75743-555-7.

La vision que propose cet ouvrage est le résultat du travail d'une équipe internationale, extrêmement attentive à saisir autant les points communs que les différences entre les diverses réceptions de l'œuvre d'Émile Zola dans les pays de « démocratie populaire ». L'introduction, réalisée par Aurélie Barjonet et Karl Zieger, réalise une présentation synthétique des contributions des spécialistes qui se sont penchés sur ce même thème d'histoire culturelle associée à la littérature comparée et à l'histoire de la réception, à savoir pourquoi et comment Émile Zola a été lu, traduit et perçu dans ces pays.

La première contribution appartient à Galyna Dranenko (Université nationale de Tchernivtsi) et nous présente les particularités de la réception de Zola en URSS : « Union soviétique : le naturaliste naturalisé ». Le premier élément qui la singularise est l'héritage de la période tsariste, quand Émile Zola avait déjà été complètement traduit en russe, preuve absolue de sa notoriété, plus grande en Russie que dans son propre pays. Mais c'est notamment après la Seconde Guerre que ses œuvres deviennent une partie essentielle de l'héritage culturel, pour « la grande masse des

lecteurs soviétiques », en bonne mesure parce que les grands critiques littéraires de l'époque, Anatoli Lounatcharski en tête, sont tous plus ou moins zoliens. On apprend que Lénine et même Staline appréciaient aussi Zola. Des éditions (et des rééditions) des *Œuvres complètes* de Zola sont présentées avec maints détails. Une place à part est réservée par l'auteure aux traductions et à la réception ukrainienne. Nous apprenons ainsi l'existence de traductions dans d'autres langues des républiques soviétiques (y compris en moldave).

Anna Kaczmarek-Wiśniewska (Université d'Opole) nous offre un tableau synthétique de la fortune polonaise de l'œuvre de Zola chez eux, sous le titre : « Pologne : une réception attendue », présentant surtout la période 1945-1989 (avec un bref regard en arrière), quand l'édition et la critique polonaises étaient dominées par l'idéologie dite socialiste et soumises à la censure. Elle cite à ce propos les opinions d'Alain Pagès concernant la critique universitaire active dans ce pays et présente quelques noms de zoliens remarquables, parmi lesquels Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, professeure aussi bien à Varsovie qu'à Moscou après la Seconde Guerre, mais aussi Halina Suwała, militante active dans la *Solidarność*, collaboratrice d'Henri Mitterrand, réfugiée en France et devenue professeure associée à l'université de Montpellier après 1982. Très intéressante est aussi la partie concernant le modèle zolien dans la littérature polonaise du xx^e siècle (le nom de Władysław Reymont mérite une mention spéciale).

En ce qui concerne l'Allemagne de l'Est, les particularités de la réception de Zola sont analysées par Aurélie Barjonet (Université de Versailles St-Quentin Paris-Saclay), spécialiste en réceptions germanophones de Zola, dans « RDA : une réception personnifiée ». Les éditions de Zola en *Œuvres choisies* dès 1952, devenues *Œuvres complètes* à partir de 1956 (achevée vingt ans plus tard), sont dirigées par Rita Schober, titulaire de la chaire de romanistique à l'Université Humboldt (Berlin Est) et inséparablement liée à la réception de Zola de l'autre côté du mur de Berlin. C'est autour d'elle que se construit cette contribution aux notes personnelles (sans omettre les lignes du tableau général de l'époque et de la place de Zola dans les publications de cette période). Une éloquente comparaison entre le Zola admiré à l'Est et le Zola négligé à l'Ouest vient enrichir le panorama, où les chiffres de ventes énormes viennent compléter l'image de ce succès.

Pour ce qui est de la Tchécoslovaquie et de sa « double réception » de Zola, selon Kateřina Drsková (Université de Bohême du Sud à České Budějovice), l'étude qui lui est consacrée débute par la soviétisation du pays et de sa culture, tout en récupérant les éléments préexistants dans le climat culturel, marqué par une forte relation avec la France, aussi bien pour les Tchèques que pour les Slovaques. Mais la rupture imposée par l'État d'avec les modèles occidentaux fut un moment compliqué. Les nouveaux points de repère devinrent Lénine, Jdanov, le théoricien bulgare Todor Pavlov et le philosophe hongrois György Lukács. Rejeté en un premier temps, de son vivant, Zola finit par être accepté, voire admiré, mais plutôt par les Tchèques que par les Slovaques, ce qui influença le nombre des traductions dans les deux langues : « Entre 1949 et 1989, la majorité des romans du cycle furent publiés au moins une fois soit en version tchèque soit en version slovaque, sauf *La Conquête de Plassans*, *Le Rêve* et *Le Docteur Pascal* qui ne parurent point ». Un bref aperçu sur les contributions critiques et sur la continuation de cette activité après 1989 vient clore cette contribution.

Pour la Hongrie, Sándor Kálai (Université de Debrecen) s'interroge si la réception de Zola à l'époque qui nous intéresse s'effectua « sous le signe de Lukács », philosophe dont la renommée dépassa largement les frontières du pays. Pourtant, il semblerait que son point de vue n'était « qu'un élément parmi d'autres ». Cette pluralité des perspectives au sein de la culture hongroise est, selon lui, une particularité de la société hongroise au sein du bloc communiste. Les années 50 mises à part (et sans oublier le bain de sang de 1956), le régime hongrois manifesta un certain libéralisme. Avec la grande édition des œuvres complètes de Zola parue à Budapest de 1929 à 1932, sous les soins de Zoltán Ambrus, l'auteur nous montre combien fut grande l'influence zolienne chez les grands romanciers hongrois. Lukács lui-même change de perspective après la Seconde Guerre, en jugeant Zola plutôt « d'après sa valeur critique que selon sa valeur esthétique » (Tivadar Gorilovics). Néanmoins, la critique hongroise ne tardera point à rendre justice au grand romancier et au naturalisme. La présence de nouvelles traductions et, plus révélatrices encore, les adaptations cinématographiques franco-hongroises n'ont pu que mieux faire connaître le nom de Zola en Hongrie.

Pour Ioana Galleron (Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle), Zola en Roumanie a connu « une réception en trois temps ». Elle décèle un

intérêt plutôt réduit avant 1947, des traductions assez nombreuses dans les politiques éditoriales jusqu'en 1989, mais sans programme précis de réalisation d'éditions des œuvres complètes ou choisies par une même maison d'édition ou un même traducteur ou spécialiste (sauf, peut-être, Theodosia Ioachimescu). Ce constat semble avoir été le noyau des préoccupations d'Ioana Galleron, dans la mesure où une étude sur la réception de Zola en Roumanie lui semble manquer encore des outils bibliographiques nécessaires (pourtant, son tableau synthétique est très bien réalisé). Plus significative nous semble sa présentation des études roumaines dédiées au naturalisme et à Zola en particulier, bien résumée par la formule du sous-titre « du compagnon de lutte à l'esthète » et complétée par une analyse des traductions en roumain et de leur évolution au fil des années.

Marie Vrinat-Nikolov (Inalco / CREE, Paris) nous offre une image de Zola en Bulgarie sous le titre : « une réception à l'arrêt pendant douze ans », qui englobe toute la période 1880-2009 et qui le place, curieusement, derrière Maupassant mais devant Balzac. La première réception de Zola, avant 1949, est « précoce et relativement continue ». L'article continue par un panorama des « lectures et traductions en Bulgarie communiste », les deux périodes étant bien illustrées par des exemples concrets, parmi lesquels Todor Pavlov, connu pour sa contribution concernant « le réalisme socialiste ». Les traductions et rééditions en bulgare ne commencent qu'à partir de 1960, malgré son succès auprès des idéologues du communisme, mais alors elles sont en grand nombre, quoique sans ordre logique ou programme, tout comme en Roumanie.

Tomorr Plangarica (Inalco, Paris) clôt la série des présentations par « Albanie : une réception communiste aux antipodes », en nous montrant un pays à la recherche de modèles littéraires à son entrée dans la modernité et pour qui la France devient un exemple à suivre. Dans ce contexte, dès 1927, Zola fait son apparition en albanais. Sa réception, son influence se manifeste dans l'évolution de la prose albanaise, par le biais de la presse avide de faits divers sur sa personnalité et moins à travers les traductions (cinq *Rougon-Macquart*), notamment après la Seconde guerre mondiale (1945-1990). La critique marxiste et une nouvelle critique plus libre et plus cultivée s'affrontent et se complètent, le naturalisme n'étant pas toujours accepté par les idéologues du nouveau régime et du réalisme socialiste.

Le volume s'achève par une postface d'Yves Chevrel (professeur émérite, Université de Paris-Sorbonne), intitulée « Zola : une œuvre résiliente ». En revenant tout d'abord sur les significations du rideau de fer, il s'arrête sur l'heureuse formule d'Ioana Galleron, qui avait défini Zola comme « incontournable et inconfortable ». Effectivement, dans les pays restés non pas protégés mais coupés du reste du monde par ce fameux rideau de Churchill, on reconnaîtra à Zola « des qualités de critique d'une société considérée comme bourgeoise pour faire de lui, sinon un anachronique 'compagnon de route', du moins un auxiliaire utilisable, avec précaution, dans la lutte idéologique ». Lecteur attentif et avisé de toutes les contributions qui composent ce livre, Yves Chevrel nous offre une synthèse qui éclaire les zones d'ombre pour mieux en définir les points lumineux.

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