

Delphine Fongang, ed. *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit: Migration, Borders, and Subjectivity in Contemporary African Diaspora Literature*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). pp. 176.

Fouad Mami

Delphine Fongang's edited volume incorporates ten chapters mapping the field of border crossing in recent African diaspora fiction. The book resonates with an ongoing scholarly interest regarding the role of (im)migration in discussing challenges beyond classical preoccupations, such as colonialism and nation-building. Researchers here offer critical assessments of the ways in which fiction and non-fiction authors read the impact of Structural Adjustment programs that proliferated by the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s in fragilizing welfare policies. Thus, significant numbers of postcolonial Africans have started seeking opportunities for a better life outside the continent. The present review singles out three chapters: the seventh, ninth and tenth; mainly because, more than others, they entice readers to read the books they are discussing if they have not done so already, or to re-read them with the critical lenses proffered in the essays. Indeed, the three essays—each in its own way—capture the movement of African subjectivity outside Africa in historical perspective. Differently put, the transition becomes less a narcissist undertaking for opportunity in the neoliberal sense, and more a logical translation of the imperialistic pressures fueled by capital's constant need for expansion. To put it concisely, the three chapters dare to question the meaning of decolonization and the prospects of Africans' emergence less as actors and more as atomized selves on the world stage.

Samuel Kamara's essay, "Mirror and Sexuality: Double Oppression of African Female Diasporic Subjects in Hannah Khoury's *So Pretty an African*," underlines how conditions of living in diaspora put Sierra Leonean women under pressure they would rarely have to face were they not coerced to leave home. Patriarchal norms and expectations take an unprecedented toll when these women move out of Africa and experience emotional abuse from their own men. Kamara notes the deployment of the mirror as a trope by the three African women protagonists in the novel. The capitalistic mode of social production

spells how diaspora women's sense of worth has been significantly reversed, since now they become obliged to compete in an unfair sex market. African women have to vie with white women for their men's attention, hence their complex and often electrified relationship with the mirror. Kamara brilliantly notes that body reflections reify the women's sexuality, pushing them to adopt multiple survival strategies, while they know such strategies render them superficial and cheap. Another tactic for counterattack is to manipulate men to win favors; reversing coercion and gaining agency by calling on the body as a commodity. It becomes apparent by the end of Kamara's contribution that diaspora obliges African women not only to live in the shadows of their reflections but to constantly shield their now infantilized men from the damaging influence of the market.

"Arrivals, Geographies, and 'The Usual Reply' in Emily Raboteau's *Searching for Zion*," by Nicole Stamant, examines the existential condition of being simultaneously at home and not at home. Here is a situation where the cliché of "home" is challenged to register how home can be unhomey. Interestingly, the chapter accelerates the reader's sedimented ideas of nation and citizenship against the experience of race to which African-Americans have been subjected. It convincingly concludes that concepts taken for granted have to be revised. The instance where race equates with nation-as-home antagonizes one's phenomenological engagement with home. Nevertheless, Stamant makes sure that Raboteau's romanticized hunt for the physical geography of a Zion stays illusive. The quote from Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) crystalizes readers' understanding that Raboteau's final reconciliation with her past transcends the stigmatizing relation with home by placing the stigma in its correct historical perspective. In short, the loss of self, as illustrated in Raboteau's pathologically driven escapes, her move from New Jersey to Jerusalem to Jamaica to Ethiopia to Ghana and back to the American South, has a de-anesthetizing effect. It underlines the unusual "usual reply" in the essay's clever title: the Hegelian *in-itself* gathering speed toward radical consciousness, subverting apathy and servitude.

Grace Ogunyankin's "Dislocation, Mimicry, and the Geography of Home in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference*" traces the trajectory of three protagonists (two women and one man) in the novel and the ways in which they negotiate reunion with home.

British corporate tastes suffocate Africans by rendering them invisible. Nevertheless, the essay draws a convincing argument that not everybody can afford—like Deola—to turn one’s back on a secure position in London and return to Lagos uncertain if he or she can land a job at all. Likewise, the unlikely rebounding with home galvanizes Subu to invent a parallel geography of home. What matters is that the joy of home, even when consciously recreated with other members of the diaspora, should not be overlooked. This synthesis stays valid with Bandele too, who, in lacking the joy of home, continues to be miserable. He keeps getting out of his skin until he learns his lesson the hard way. As he is certain he can never be admitted to bourgeois society, regardless how much of an achiever he can be, he starts renegotiating home. The chapter contrasts the politics of home with ontological death, since, in the host country, the “best” immigrants are often those who stay invisible.

Overall, if *The Postcolonial Subject in Transit* deems peoples of African descent worthy of attention, it is because of critical readings that engage with texts in inventive ways. Flat re-articulations of certain preoccupations in the novels under study cannot generate novel or translucent understanding of the African subject in diaspora. Only essays like the ones emphasized here, and not others, surpass the stories they discuss. They facilitate what Fongang duly observes in the conclusion: the need for a historicist assessment of contemporary African experiences, regardless of how they challenge or parody the ideals put forth at decolonization.

