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Fatma Akçay. *Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship.* Routledge, 2027. Pp. 248. ISBN: 9781041328896.

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Fatma Akçay's *Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship*, by exploring narratives of African migrants, delves into how the identities of characters are negotiated through their cultural, communitarian and relational realities. Published by Routledge in 2026 as part of the *Routledge Studies in Comparative Literature* series, Akçay's work focuses on four major literary works: J. M. Coetzee's *Youth* and Zoë Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*—to explore South African migrants in the United Kingdom; and Teju Cole's *Open City* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*—to look at Nigerians experiences in various cities, including countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Belgium. The central concern of this monograph is to elucidate how these novels explore belonging and hospitality through said narratives of migration. Akçay showcases how the protagonists move through new host cities and cultures while still psychologically and affectively connected to their places of origin.

The author's analysis highlights how the different geographical settings function as spaces in which identity is tested, negotiated, imposed and/or transformed through the lenses of hospitality, community and affect theory (through ideas of friendship). The arguments and analysis of the book are built around much well-established research throughout various fields. First, Luc Nancy's operative and inoperative communities, along with Ferdinand Tönnies and Zygmunt Bauman's conceptualisations of isolation and economic inequality constitute one of the pillars of Akçay's work: a critical understanding of the idea of community. She notes how it is not an inherently positive idea: while it can provide solidarity, recognition and emotional support, at the same time, it can impose boundaries and conformity. Adding to it, this work also draws on Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality and the ethical encounter with the stranger,

which complicates the phenomenon as not always being as positive as it might appear to be. Such framework is employed in Akçay's work to explore how the systems of inclusion and exclusion can be sustained through valuable interpersonal relations, utilizing the selected novels to elucidate what lies behind the failure or success of such relationships.

One of the book's most important additions to the field is its understanding of transnational African identity as relational rather than merely geographical. Migration studies frequently deal with issues of family, kinship, ethnicity, diaspora and national identity. This work moves into a more specific territory by focusing specifically on friendship and community more prominently. Unlike identities based on nationality or ethnicity, friendship can emerge through relationships of our choice and be based on common believes, ethics and/or tastes. And, to further this idea, the study also relies on Kristeva's work to look at the characters estrangement from their own cultural identity and community.

Following an introduction and theoretical-methodological chapter, Akçay devotes individual chapters to each of the case studies. Chapter 3 focuses on J. M. Coetzee's *Youth*. This novel deals with the only case throughout the present work that deals with a white character migratory experience and that is located in the 1960s' (as opposed to the other novels set in the 21st century). The protagonist in this fictionalized memoir is incapable of maintaining friendships or reciprocating hospitality, which isolates him. The author argues how, in his quest to develop his artistic career, John finds his pervasive South African background as "an oppressive and suffocating force" (76). The analysis shows that despite trying to distance himself from a culturally particular community, which the protagonist perceives as a provincial attitude, he never manages to do so. This novel presents the least hopeful example among the corpus regarding the possibility of community creation and hospitality.

Chapter 4 presents an exploration of Zoë Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*, expanding the exploration of the interconnectedness between South Africa and Scotland. Since the collection includes twelve stories that showcase multiple specific experiences and directionality between the cities of Cape Town and Glasgow, Akçay chooses to focus on five stories that deal with Capetonians experiences in the aforementioned Scottish city. Ideas of provincialism appear in this chapter, with the author highlighting the impact of Wicomb's "redefinition of cosmopolitanism" (102) as more than simply a form of contesting nationalism. What this

particular case study elucidates, thanks to Akçay's insights, is the dislocation of identity that is caused by a sense of alienation in hostile urban environments that trump the establishment of communities as well as communication. The author notes how Wicomb rejects an essentialist view of identity as well as community, providing a useful vision of how the disorientation felt by experiencing confusion in an unfamiliar city, mixed with how the colonial past defines how the colonized are perceived.

The monograph's next chapter shifts to the Nigerian experience with Teju Cole's *Open City*, whose protagonist, Julius, defines the novel's perspective through his distrust of community "formed around aspects of identity such as race, skin colour, ethnicity, place of origin and ideology" (135) due to their exclusionary nature. The guest cities (New York and Brussels) are represented as global, inhabited by people from different backgrounds. However, Akçay notes that this does not frame them as fully welcoming spaces, and analyses their representation by emphasizing how the urban spaces for migrants are shaped by persistent power dynamics. As shown through a close reading of various passages, Julius' point of departure in terms of community is also contrary to traditional formations of communitarian relations in his home country. Even though he manages to find self-constructed bonds with others, "his relationships, based primarily on intellectual interest, do not last long enough to provide him with meaningful support or shield him from his profound isolation." Thus, Akçay argues, Derrida's notion of unconditional hospitality "remains unattainable" (149). This section continues with two detailed subsections delving on each of the cities.

In Chapter 6, which examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Akçay explores Ifemelu's experiences foregrounding race, gender, class, love, language and privilege-centred power. The author notes how the novel serves as an example of the way in which society is structured "creating social boundaries that keep certain groups in specific spaces while marginalizing others" (175). Ifemelu's relationship with both Nigeria and the United States complicates any straightforward account of diaspora. Beyond the protagonists, Adichie's narrative also enables Akçay to examine how identity changes across cities and social contexts. The chapter also delves into the pressures of assimilation and the effects of internalized racism, particularly through language (how it is spoken), hair (which the protagonist straightens) and social customs (for example, her behaviour in the classroom). Akçay highlights these markers of identity as

playing a key role in Adichie's work, revealing the dynamics of racial division and, therefore, act as motivators for inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, the transnational experience disrupts "rigid conceptions of race and racial characteristics" (179), opening space for a more fluid understanding of identity that resonates with Chielozona Eze's concept of "Afropolitan identity." The book also notes how the character of Obinze offers a different perspective and experience, with his narrative "[resisting the] exclusionary logic" (186). The author delves into how the narrative here pays attention to the urban environment and to the established friendships and romantic relationships of the character, albeit in less detail than Ifemelu's.

Akçay's achievement through this publication is to shift attention from a simplistic understanding of the migratory experience and identity as being "between" two nations (or more) toward a questioning of who migrants inhabit the cities "with," who welcomes them and how those relationships are the basis of their belonging. Ultimately, this model of inclusion through community provides alternatives to understanding cultural identities as merely based on race, ethnicity and nationality. The book's greatest strength is its theoretical and argumentative coherence, despite focus on two distinct experiences (South African in the UK and Nigerian in the US), and analysing four novels, which might at first seem like too broad of an enterprise. In Akçay's work the frameworks of community, hospitality and friendship are not three unrelated concepts placed beside one another but rather, they form a progression: community asks how people belong together, hospitality asks how communities respond to outsiders and, finally, friendship serve to delve into what kinds of voluntary relationships can emerge between people who do not n

Transnational African Identities in Contemporary Urban Fiction: Community, Hospitality and Friendship is a substantial and intellectually ambitious study that makes an original contribution to contemporary African literary criticism. This is undoubtedly an illuminating work for scholars of African literature, migration and diaspora studies, comparative literature, urban cultural studies and critical theory, and definitely a timely contribution given current sociopolitical trends and outlooks on immigrations throughout the world and specially in the US. Akçay demonstrates that the most revealing question posed by transnational fiction may not be where migrants (can) belong, but how they (can) relate to those around them.

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