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Aedín Ní Loingsigh, *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009. x + 216 pp. notes, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-84631-049-2.

Reviewed by Mildred Mortimer, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Aedín Ní Loingsigh's critical study delves into a rarely studied form of writing, travel literature written by Sub-Saharan Africans. This text, a careful examination of several francophone African texts that chart an African's journey to Europe and the United States is part of a series published by Liverpool University Press, edited by Edmund Smyth and Charles Forsdick. Loingsigh's contribution to this series is an exploration of a group of texts that turns the tables on the genre of travel writing by placing the African in the position of observer and the Westerner as the observed. In this regard, the critic notes a serious neglect in Europe and North America of representations of travel by African writers, as well as a failure on the part of Western scholars to develop a theoretical framework within which to analyze them. Western critics, she explains, tend to acknowledge this literature for its historical value (slave narratives), its contribution to the development of literary and cultural movements (Negritude), and sociological importance (literature of immigration) but not for its value as travel literature (p. 2). Loingsigh's objective is to right this wrong in several ways: first, by joining ranks with critics who recognize the "agency of non-Western subjects and the ways in which they participate in, and reconfigure, Eurocentric modes of traveling, seeing and narrating" (p. 2); second, by bringing "African textualizations of travel within important contemporary theoretical configurations, particularly postcolonial theory" (pp. 2-3); third, by presenting a critical perspective that "prompts a reappraisal of the division within the literature of travel between the categories of fiction and non-fiction by highlighting how each can infiltrate the other" (p. 20).

In her study, Loingsigh reveals her extensive knowledge of travel writing and critical studies of the genre as she situates her own work in relation to scholars of the discipline such as Mary Louise Pratt and Charles Forsdick. She follows Forsdick's lead in choosing the term "travel literature" rather than "travel writing" to bring into focus a wide-ranging corpus of texts, encourage greater flexibility, and bridge the gap between works of fiction and non-fiction. In the introductory chapter, the critic also reminds his readers of the arrogance of Western travelers of the mid-nineteenth century, those who granted themselves the authority to describe and interpret Africa for the Europeans back home. This position of authority, she notes, was articulated by women travelers, such as Mary Kingsley, who traveled extensively throughout Africa, as well as by male European explorers, including Richard Burton and John Speke (p. 5).

The chapters that follow are devoted to six francophone African writers: Ousmane Socé Diop, Aké Loba, Bernard Dadié, Lamine Diakhaté, Tété-Michel Kpomassie, and Calixthe Beyala. The corpus of texts includes works that have been translated into English: Dadié's, *Un Nègre à Paris* (1951), Kpomassie's *L'Africain de Groenland* (1981) and Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992), as well as others such as Diakhaté's *Chalys d'Harlem* (1978) which are not available in English. Since the various texts span several decades, the critic has arranged the book chapters chronologically, beginning with Socé's *Mirages de Paris* (1937), and ending with Beyala's novels, *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992) and *Maman a un amant*

(1993). The chronological span shows clearly that the number of voyagers, the means of transportation, and the reasons for displacement have differed greatly from one era to another.

One of the most significant aspects of Loingshig's analysis is her thesis that African travel literature confirms the complex nature of African societies themselves as the African travelers negotiate their place within the wider world. In other words, the African traveler tells his reader as much about his world as he does about the places he discovers. In this regard, the critic recalls how Socé Diop's protagonist, Fara, the colonized subject visiting Paris at the time of the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, is filled with self-doubt and a sense of cultural inferiority. In contrast, texts published in the late 1950s and 1960s (an era during which African nations were deeply engaged in the process of decolonization) reveal a sense of optimism and growing self-confidence in themselves and their societies. In this vein, Dadié, Diakhaté, and Kpomassie engage in critical examinations of Western culture in their texts, a view she finds missing in Socé's novel and only beginning to emerge in Lobe's text. Thus, the journeys depicted in postcolonial texts are "as much epistemic as physical" (p. 173) and point to a postcolonial Africa that is beginning to take its place in the world "as an equal amongst others" (p. 173). Beyala's novels of the 1990s, however, are somber and pessimistic in their portrayal of the material and psychological struggles of African immigrant families in France. Yet, they emphasize immigrant mobility and show female travelers gaining self-confidence in a changing world.

In my view, the chapter devoted to Kpomassie's *L'Africain du Groenland: An African in Greenland* is the most compelling. This travel narrative of a young Togolese voyager who takes eight years to reach the Danish colony of Greenland is a salient example of the 'inverted' pattern of travel that distinguishes African travel literature from its European counterpart. Instead of traveling from the African periphery to the European center, Kpomassie travels from one peripheral space to another, from colonized Africa to colonized Greenland. Moreover, as Africa and Greenland converge in the traveler's set of experiences, Kpomassie becomes a producer of "autoethnography" (p. 129), a visitor to Greenland who reflects upon his own cultural background as he encounters the Inuit culture. It is interesting to note that towards the end of his stay, Kpomassie is faced with the choice of remaining in Greenland, where he now feels quite at home, or returning to Togo. He chooses to return home in order to share the knowledge of this distant land with his Togolese compatriots. He will do so, however, not with the arrogance of many a nineteenth-century European traveler but with understanding and compassion since he, like the Inuit, has had first-hand experience with the colonial domination of an indigenous culture.

Although Loingshig's study is an engaging one that argues persuasively that African travel literature opens new perspectives on a genre that was once the exclusive realm of wealthy European male voyagers, it could use further development in one specific area, the way in which African oral tradition emphasizes the importance of travel, as well as the expectation that the traveler will return home, enriched by the experience. In this regard, Birago Diop's tale, "L'Héritage," a folktale that appears in *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* emphasizes the rewards of the journey with its refrain in wolof, "*Kou yague dème, yague guisse*" ("Whoever travels a long time, sees a lot") (p. 166).^[1] Similarly, the Sundjata epic of the Mande people not only recounts the life and exploits of the founder of the Empire of Mali but reveals the importance of his travels and sojourn in foreign lands in preparing him to rule his kingdom. Furthermore, the Mande concept of *fadenya* ("father-centered") involves the departure of the individual from the community, sending the youth into a world of adventure.^[2]

In conclusion, Africans are on the move in our contemporary world, as migrants, tourists, residents, and informants. Their reflections drawn from their new mobility deserve greater attention. Loingshig's study provides an important theoretical framework and an interesting selection of texts for appreciating these compelling textualizations of travel.

NOTES

[1] Birago Diop, *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961) pp. 163-172.

[2] For a discussion of the dichotomy between *badenya* (mother-childness) and *fadenya* (father-childness), see Charles Bird and Martha B. Kendall "The Mande Hero," in Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird ed., *Explorations in African Systems of Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980) pp. 13-26.

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