

Urban (Im)mobilities and Borderland Narratives

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Keynote speakers



Anna-Leena Toivanen is Academy Research Fellow and docent in postcolonial literary studies at the **University of Eastern Finland**, and a former Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellow at the University of Liège. She has published widely in the field of African literary studies and is particularly interested in enhancing dialogue between postcolonial literary studies and mobilities research. Her current research project, funded by the Academy of Finland (2020–2025), focuses on the representation and poetics of mobility in Francophone African literatures. She is the co-editor

of a special issue on European peripheries in postcolonial literatures (*Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, forthcoming in 2021), and the author of *Mobilities and Cosmopolitanisms in African and Afrodiasporic Literatures* (Brill 2021, forthcoming).

Title of her plenary talk: “Mobilities and the City in Francophone African Literatures: Peripheral Perspectives”

In postcolonial studies, the meaning of ‘mobility’ tends to be reduced to migration (Toivanen 2021, 1–2) in a way that highlights the *outcomes* of mobility instead of the act of movement itself (Aguilar et al. 2019, 19). Contributing to the humanities turn in the new mobilities paradigm, this keynote is motivated by the idea of taking “the actual fact of movement seriously” (Cresswell 2010, 18) and “in a highly literal sense” (Greenblatt 2010, 250) with a thematical and formal analysis of Francophone African literary portrayals of mobility in the urban space. Starting from the idea that mobility produces the identities of both people and places (Cresswell & Merriman 2013, 7–10) and that “mobile people are never simply *people*” but

are defined by the contexts in which their mobile subjectivities are generated (Cresswell 2010, 4), the keynote concentrates on the urban mobilities of two typically postcolonial mobile subjects that recur frequently in Francophone African fiction: the newcomer and the diasporic returnee. Whereas narratives featuring the figure of the newcomer are most often set in Paris and attest to the exclusion of (former) colonial subjects from the metropolitan centre and its 'modernity', diasporic returnees are on the move in their former African home cities where they no longer belong. The texts I discuss convey the notion of peripherality in diverse ways: 1) by foregrounding the perspective of mobile subjects who are outsiders in the urban space; 2) through the representation of Global South cities; and 3) with portrayals of modes of transport that allow for 'peripheral' views of the city – such as aeromobility and travelling in the metro. Descriptions of mobility practices and modes of transport not only play a key role in the construction of the (post/colonial) city and the figures of the newcomer and the returnee but also have specific formal and narrative functions in the texts.

Johan Schimanski is Professor of

Comparative Literature at the **University of Oslo**.

He has published widely in border poetics and border aesthetics; other research interests include Arctic discourses and literary museums. He has led or been co-coordinator of major research projects in these areas, and also led a work package in the large-scale interdisciplinary EU FP7 project

EUBORDERSCAPES. He has held visiting professorships in border studies and cultural

encounters at the Universities of Glamorgan and of Eastern Finland, and at in Autumn 2021 he will be guest professor at the UniGr Center for Border Studies at the Universities of Saarbrücken and Luxembourg. Recent publications include the co-edited volumes *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (2017, with Stephen F. Wolfe) and *Border Images, Border Narratives: The Political Aesthetics of Boundaries and Crossings* (2021, with Jopi Nyman). An edited selection of his writings on border poetics has been published in German translation: *Grenzung: Versuche zu einer Poetik der Grenze* (2020).



Title of his plenary talk: “Space, Borders and Cognition in Urban Diasporic Fiction”

Literature involves characters living in spaces and events ‘taking place’, but also the spatial existence of authors, texts and readers. But can one discuss literary spaces without addressing the boundaries and relationships that constitute them? How may border poetics serve, supplement or challenge spatial poetics? How do readers cross the borders into literary spaces?

Narrative relies on characters crossing boundaries between symbolic spaces (e.g. families, classes, cultures, life stages) – boundaries often manifested as topographical borders on different scales. One needs only think of the many novels about characters who move in and out of houses, who move between rural and urban spaces, or who move across the borders of nations. In this paper I will be examining a corpus of urban diasporic fictions set in the city of Oslo. While much contemporary migration literature in Norwegian focuses on crossings across Norway’s national borders, this paper examines novels focusing on the topographical borderlands of city suburbs and the symbolic borders between cultures. Zeshan Shakar’s *Tante Ulrikkes vei* (‘Aunt Ulrikke’s Street’ 2017) and Maria Navarro Skaranger’s *Alle utlendinger har lukka gardiner* (‘All Foreigners have their Curtains Closed’ 2015), have attracted much recent attention. They follow on previous examples such as Mala Naveen’s *Desiland* (2010) and the ‘father’ of contemporary Norwegian diasporic literature, Khalid Hussain’s *Pakkis* (1986) – as well as relating to a wider international corpus.

In approaching some of the above texts the paper expands on Anne-Maria Sturm’s work (2020) on combining the narratology of space with border poetics in the study of migration literature. However, in line with recent proposals within the interdisciplinary field of border studies, focusing specifically on urban borders (Scott 2020), the paper suggests that cognitive approaches may also be key to understanding the function of borders and cultural encounters between people, characters, readers and texts. Using elements of 4E (Embedded, Embodied, Extended, Enacted) theories of cognition already applied within literary studies (e.g. Kukkonen 2019), it sees the novels concerned as using the formal techniques at their disposal to help readers think through what it is to live on urban and diasporic boundaries.

Tania Rossetto is Associate Professor of Cultural Geography at the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World of the **University of Padova**. She is a convenor of the MoHu Centre (Centre for advanced studies in Mobility and the Humanities) and teaches about urban landscapes and cultures. Her research interests include the relationship between map studies and visual studies, the embodiment of maps, the ethnography of mapping practices, cartography and racial/ethnic otherness. She has also worked on the linkage between cartographic theory and literary studies. Her recent book, titled *Object-Oriented Cartography: Maps as Things* (Routledge, 2019), establishes a dialogue between the field of map studies and object-oriented philosophy. She is currently working on Covid-19 cartographic visualities and on urban repeat photography as an experience of moving spacetimes.



Title of her plenary talk: “From the Cartographic Fringes: Map Mobilizations and the Urban”

From an experiential perspective, maps have always been involved in movement in several ways. Yet, critical and humanist readings have often complained of the ontological fixity expressed by maps, mostly considered the quintessence of immobility, or, more extremely, referring to cartographic visuals as ‘lifeless media’ (Dodge, 2014). More recently, maps have been theoretically recognized as ‘interventions for liveliness’ and the figure of the ‘map that moves’ (Wilson, 2019) has become a theoretical device for endorsing a non-representational view of cartographic interventions beyond informational effectiveness.

By adopting the perspective of ‘the fringe’, this keynote will address three Italian case studies based on diverse movements, or mobilizations, of maps to suggest the multiple ways in which the cartographic humanities are now approaching the sensual and political life of map-like things within urban material and imaginary geographies.

The three studies will include: 1. The online circulation of a map of local resistance to anti-immigration national law (the so called Salvini decree) to suggest the possibilities for a cartographic academic public engagement; 2. The sharing of private creative pandemic cartographies to show the vibrancy of alternative mapping practices and narratives within Covid-19 urban cultures; 3. The fictional auto-narration of a mosaic Europe map in Padua to express the thing powers of neglected cartographic objects living between us in the city.



Jean-Philippe Imbert (Dublin City University). He lectures, researches and publishes on literary, artistic and aesthetic representations of Mexican, Irish and French 20th and 21st centuries, focusing on the relationship between sexuality, gender and the literary, artistic and aesthetic treatments of evil, trauma, angst or perversion, from a queer perspective and with an interest on the urban. He has been

president of the ADEFFI (Association des Études Françaises et Francophones) and of the Irish Association of Mexican Studies. He was Research and Education Officer for IASSCS (The International Association for the Studies of Sexuality, Culture and Society) and also curated international art exhibitions (photography) in Delhi, Dublin or Mexico.

Title of his plenary talk: “Once upon a Queer: Sexual Monstrosity, Sexual Misery and the Metropolis”

Based upon literary and visual material, this presentation will look at the relationship between the monstrous, the queer and the urban, placing itself at the interaction of sexuality, migration and curatorial studies. We will not turn towards specific cities but towards their fringes in order to apprehend the way art discusses queer, queerness and im/mobility in those urban spaces. The role of activism and its relationship to art will be addressed. We will look at cities from the Arab and the South Asian worlds mainly.