

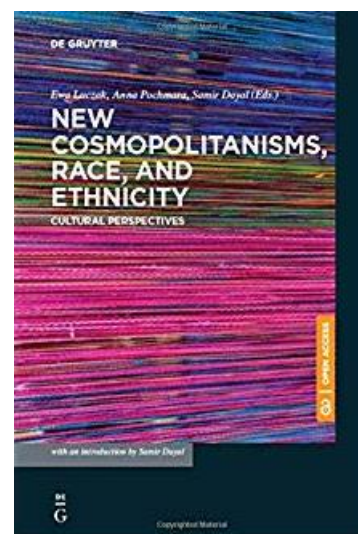
Ewa Barbara Luczak, Anna Pochmara,
Samir Dayal, eds.

New Cosmopolitanisms, Race, and Ethnicity

Cultural Perspectives

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Review by Grazia Micheli



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New Cosmopolitanisms, Race, and Ethnicity: Cultural Perspectives is a collection of essays that “seeks to reorient our thinking about cosmopolitanism” (1) in the light of today’s transnational migratory flows, by engaging with race and ethnicity in relation to contemporary cosmopolitan discourses and instances. The collection therefore rejects elitist and universalist formulations of cosmopolitanism and emphasizes plural cosmopolitanisms, particularly in relation to the local or microcosmic level and to “the minoritarian”—the latter understood as “minor literatures, minority cultures, the [...] marginalized” (3)—which is in turn conceived as plural. *New Cosmopolitanisms* especially adopts the notion of cosmopolitics as theorized by Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers: in their work, cosmopolitics “is distinguished [...] from the homogenizing and teleological tendencies of Kantian cosmopolitanism, which conceives of cosmopolitanism as a single, universal [...] world” (8). In addition, according to the editor and contributor Samir Dayal, “cosmopolitics can bring into sharper focus the ethicopolitical implications of contemporary global flows and particularly the resulting contact among people of different races or ethnicities” (3). Such a contact is explored in most essays through an analysis of contemporary cultural texts, including novels, poems, artworks, films and songs while other essays are more sociologically oriented. Besides theories on cosmopolitanism, the contributors refer to other theoretical frameworks, such as transnationalism, postcolonial studies, cultural studies and feminist studies. *New Cosmopolitanisms* is divided into five sections, each of them comprising four chapters.

Section I is called “Rootedness and the New Cosmopolitanism: Sovereignty, Hosts, Guests and Hospitality.” The contributors of this section explore the relationship between cosmopolitanism and rootedness, borrowing Mitchell Cohen’s and Anthony Kwame Appiah’s concept of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” Homi Bhabha’s notion of “minoritarian cosmopolitanism” and Rosi Braidotti’s theory of “nomadic becoming-world.” All these ideas describe a transnational unity or solidarity among people—marginalized ones in the case of minoritarian cosmopolitanism—that however preserves and accommodates ethnic particularity or difference. The contributors provide examples of rooted and nomadic cosmopolitanisms through a reading of the novel *Of One Blood* (1902-1903) by the African American writer Pauline Hopkins (Pochmara) and of the collection of poems *The Emperor of Water Clocks* (2015) by the African American poet Yusef Komunyakaa (Werbanowska). Solidarity and cosmopolitanism fail, however, with regard to Europe’s hostility toward African immigrants, as exemplified by the social crisis caused by the “Calais Jungle” (Djebali), and to the experience of unprivileged immigrants whose marginalization and oppression problematize affirmative notions of pluralism, as shown in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by the South Asian American author Kiran Desai (Nanda). Section II, which is called “Minority Bodies,” focuses on minority formulations of cosmopolitanism that involve subaltern, marginalized people. Building on Susan Koshy’s definition of “minority cosmopolitanism” and on theories of “cosmopolitanism from below,” Dayal introduces the concepts of “microcosmic cosmopolitanism” and of “normative materialist cosmopolitanism,” examples of which can be found in the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by the Indian writer Arundhati Roy. Raphaël Lambert compares the experience of Africans of the Middle Passage with today’s migrants while Ewa Barbara Luczak investigates the limits of cosmopolitan friendship through a study of the novel *Infants of the Spring* (1932) by the African American author Wallace Thurman. In the last chapter, Joanna Ziarkowska reads the story narrated in the novel *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) by the Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko as an example of “indigenous cosmopolitanisms” (Forte), a form of minoritarian or vernacular cosmopolitanism that flourishes also through travels—thus invalidating preconceptions about indigeneity as being characterized by rootedness as opposed to mobility.

In section III, “Minoritarian Mobilities,” the central theme is mobility as experienced by minority—although not always unprivileged—people, including African women who migrate to Spain and whose route across the African continent and “the Black Mediterranean” further exposes their sexual vulnerability as shown by the Spanish filmmaker Gerardo Olivares in his film *14 Kilómetros* (2007) (Frías); cosmopolitan writers like the African American William

Demby, whose travels across the United States, Italy and Japan generated inter-racial solidarities (Sherazi); and Afropolitan writers “lost in transnation” like Taiye Selasi, a U.S. writer of African origin born in Britain (Wallinger). Kudzayi Ngara focuses in the last chapter on the construction of Afropolitan and post-apartheid identities traversing the postcolonial space of Johannesburg as recounted in the novel *The Exploded View* (2004) by the South African writer of Croatian origin Ivan Vladislavić.

Section IV, called “Spaces and Vectors: Migration, Hybridity, Creolization,” offers examples of hybrid cosmopolitanisms, which involve different concepts: (a) art, such as artworks by diasporic Cuban artists that reflect these artists’ rooted cosmopolitanism (Herrera) and poems by Natasha Trethewey, a U.S. poet born to an African American mother and a Canadian father, who articulates a mixed race, Black and minority cosmopolitanism (Pereira); (b) families, exemplified by Polish American cosmopolitan, “world families” (Jasinska); (c) cities, particularly represented by New York where a “cosmopolitanism of metropolises” can be distinguished from a “cosmopolitanism of neighborhoods” as observed within the Polish American community (Sosnowska).

Finally, section V, “The Powers and Perils of Cultural Expression,” deals with the subversive, anti-essentialist power of hybrid cultural expressions such as music by the second-generation African Italian singer Karima 2G—who employs a form of pidgin English (Black English) that constitutes a cosmopolitan language (Taronna)—or by Manu Chao, Café Tacvba, Los Lobos, Nortec Collective, a music that reveals interconnectedness across borders (Vaquera-Vásquez). As a “creole-cosmopolitan figure,” the albino in the novel *Sally Hemings* (1979) by the African American visual artist and writer Barbara Chase-Riboud also offers a powerful critique of race and of myths of racial purity (Garrant). Yet hybridized linguistic forms can also represent a limit to cosmopolitan hospitality as demonstrated by the so-called “accent test,” a practice used internationally in asylum procedures and based on essentialist definitions of nation, language and identity that ignore the gaps between language and citizenship in the face of migratory processes (Hui).

The essays in *New Cosmopolitanisms* establish a fruitful dialogue with both early and more recent scholars of cosmopolitanism: besides Appiah, Bhabha, Braidotti, Cohen, Maximilian C. Forte, Kant, Koshy, Latour and Stengers, they draw from Ulrich Beck, Pheng Cheah, Jacques Derrida, Stuart Hall and Bruce Robbins. The collection therefore proposes a version of cosmopolitanism that is based on Latour’s concept of “pluriversality,” thus “resist[ing] a hierarchization of cultural world-views and practices [...] while holding open the promise of transcultural solidarisms and cross-cultural exchange and learning” (7). The national,

geographical and cultural positioning of the contributors—who provide in “A Postscript” to the book an account of their own cosmopolitan experiences—as well as of the objects of their study certainly confirm this view. Yet the collection over-represents Afropolitanism to the detriment, for instance, of Native American, Chicano/a, Asian North and South American or Asian European cosmopolitanisms—which are little or not at all represented. Furthermore, the collection heavily relies on cultural texts in the English language, thus perpetuating the very homogenization that it seeks to challenge and overlooking the centrality of translingualism in many cosmopolitan experiences. Nevertheless, *New Cosmopolitanisms* contributes to the revision of elitist, universalist notions of cosmopolitanism as it highlights the existence of multiple cosmopolitanisms that value rootedness as well as hybridity and that develop at the local level, involving marginalized and/or minority people of different races and ethnicities located all around the world.

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