

# Anthropology Book Forum

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**Ulf Hannerz, 2022, *Afropolitan Horizons: Essays toward a Literary Anthropology of Nigeria*, New York: Berghahn Books, 226 pp., ISBN 978-1-80073-250-6**

Ulf Hannerz's *Afropolitan Horizons* is a beautifully written book that convincingly displays *how to do* literary anthropology. Starting with a cosmopolitan city roughly located at the center of Nigeria, Kafanchan, Hannerz meticulously presents to the readers his personal but insightful and analytical essays on various settings and themes in Nigerian writings. The autoethnography style of writing adopted by him is highly accessible to anyone, also to those without the technical knowledge of the discipline. *Afropolitan Horizons* is written in lucid and simple language, yet it offers a rigorous anthropological analytical perspective on the themes, events and locations that shape the trajectory of Nigerian creative writings. Within it, one can easily deduce the sociocultural trajectory of Nigeria and how her citizens shape the urban cultures of their cities and their borderless reach within the globalized world. Reading the book is an entertaining and introductory experience to the literary anthropology of Nigeria, especially the inter-cultural contexts that birthed numerous novels, from the groundbreaking Amos Tutuola's 1952 *Palm Wine Drinkard* to contemporary Afropolitan novels like Chigozie Ogioma's 2019 *An Orchestra of Minorities*. Hanner's reader-friendly tone is a synthesis of fieldwork narratives, the history of Nigeria, and an analysis of his selected novels.

Hannerz's analysis is conceptually framed by *here and there*, a phrase which appeared 16 times in the 226-page book. *Here and there* is the metaphor that Hannerz uses to capture the essence of fictional writings on Nigeria. In my view, Hannerz has used this metaphor as an indexical sign to capture numerous meanings, some of which could be only accounted for by the anthropological eye. For instance, it could refer to authors (Nigerians, non-Nigerians (e.g., British colonial workers, European anthropologists like Hannerz), diaspora Nigerians), or cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Kaduna, Nsukka, Enugu, Abuja, or Kafanchan which was the anthropological site that attracted the author to Nigeria in the first place. It

could also mean any location in Europe or the USA like Oyotunji village in South Carolina where anyone with a Nigerian affinity enacts their Nigerianess through creativity. *Here and there* covers cities touched by anyone with a Nigerian connection. It includes the ever-changing temporospatial realities of Nigeria, which started during the transatlantic slave trade era, and continued in the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. It bestows a unique experience on Nigerians and creates another one for non-Nigerians, like Hannerz, that interact with the country and her peoples. It is therefore not surprising that Hannerz's anthology of literary anthropology essays is entangled with themes like globalization, hybridity, Pan-Africanism, cultural crossover or fusion, all of which are concepts encoded into Afropolitanism. In choosing *Afropolitan Horizons* as the title, the author implied that, in time and space, the Nigerian literary landscape is shaped by the involvements of the West African nation with the global community. Thus, Nigerian literature has never remained within national boundaries but has been delineated by "the real homeland of imagination" that is continuously being "stretched out along" the "transcontinental cultural continuum" (p.7).

It is the cultural continuum with Nigeria at its center that Hannerz captures in his 19 chapters. He begins with Tutuola's writings in the first chapter, whose idiosyncrasy of style belittles what other Nigerian writers would achieve in a non-native language like English, especially if the *Palm Wine Drinkard* is compared with the writings of Achebe and Soyinka. In chapter two, Hannerz switches to a Brazilian writer, Antonio Olinto who wrote about even earlier times in the country- the return of freed slaves to their roots. Readers are therefore introduced to how Hannerz analyzed Nigerian writing through an Afropolitan eye as different authors, cities and characters traversing fluid identities keep popping up across the whole work. This way, the author showed that Nigeria is not only microscopic of global cultural diversity but also shapes it, as the country's horizon is habitually stretched beyond local cities, national borders or indigenous people to include expatriates, other countries and foreign cities where Nigerians are making a living. So, for instance, we see Hannerz discussing Nigerian engagements with America (chapters 16, 17 and 19). Nevertheless, we can divide these chapters along the lines of Nigerians in Nigeria writing about their country, Europeans in Nigeria reporting their experiences about Nigeria, Diaspora Nigerians writing on Nigerian life and experiences, and, Nigerians writing about Europe and America. But because Hannerz's anthropological approach is defined by *here and there*, his analyses are not bounded by these dimensions, rather they are intertwined in a multicolored manner that one is

easily transposed from one shade to another without knowing it. One can easily see that the cities that make up Nigeria and where the stories are set are imagined communities with boundaries not limited to their physical locations, but are defined by how much the people and stories created in them shape their margins.

Hannerz covered an extensive range of texts in his essays on Nigerian literature. The array of Nigerian writings he analyzed bespeaks a comprehensive knowledge of Nigerian fictional writings. From the leading internationalized writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole and Ben Okri to the globally less-known writers of the Macmillan Pacesetters series, Hannerz offers a “view of Nigerian life and Nigerian imagination” (p. 12). Because he moved *here and there*, he also included “certain writings by expatriate colonial officials, journalists, and fiction writers with their long-term bases elsewhere, as well as anthropologists” (p. 13). Furthermore, by drawing on “a border-crossing combination of insider and outsider writings” (p. 12-13), Hannerz practicalizes the need for anthropologists “to study sideways: taking an interest in other groups of people involved in knowledge production” (p. 13). *Afropolitan Horizons* appears to be a valid approach to studying Nigerian writings sideways, because journalistic writings from foreign newsmen and colonial notes on Nigeria by white colonial administrators do not constitute Nigerian literary writings. However, their inclusion in Hannerz’s work contradicts the arguments against studying down. Although they are fictitious, they are not authentic Nigerian writing in the same way that Tutuola’s, Achebe’s or Adichie’s writings are. Although this limitation is well-buried in the convincing enthusiastic tone of Hannerz, it might mislead his targeted audiences in the West who are not familiar with Nigerian authors and their works. Nevertheless, Hannerz has provided readers with a captivating introduction to an anthropology of Nigerian writings. *Afropolitan Horizons* is strongly recommended for all students and scholars of literature and anthropology, and anyone who is interested in knowing about the cultures or history of the most populous African nation, Nigeria.

Works cited:

Tutuola, Amos. *The palm-wine drinkard*. London: Faber and Faber, 1952.

Obioma, Chigozie. *An orchestra of minorities*. New York: Little, Brown, 2019.

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