

**Convivial Worlds: Writing Relation from Africa.**

Tina Steiner.

London: Routledge, 2021. 156 pp.

ISBN 9780367535735.

In *Convivial Worlds: Writing Relation from Africa* (2021), Tina Steiner approaches the study of literary cultures from the global South through the lens of convivial relations while shedding light on social injustices that have ravaged the African continent. Steiner meticulously presents a collection of various African authors' narratives of conviviality which she uses to explore the conditions of the possibility of conviviality in everyday interactions and ways to sustain them. Honouring African perspectives, this book foregrounds some prominent African authors like D. D. T. Jabavu, Sophia Mustafa, Jamal Mahjoub and Abdulrazak Gurnah. It locates them within global literary cultures, thus giving African perspectives more currency in North-South scholarship overflowing with intellectual superiority complexes. The book is well researched with carefully organised ideas that lead the reader to a more profound understanding of literary cultures of the global South while prioritising human experiences and relations.

The first chapter sets the tone through a thorough discussion of mundane tasks that reveal conviviality.

This captures the book's essence as it highlights that these everyday tasks birthed a rich African literary culture and indicates how conviviality can function as a form of agency. Each chapter of the book takes the reader through the various dimensions of conviviality and how these should not be viewed as utopian tropes or examples of naïve optimism. The different chapters do not shy away from facing the conditions that come with conviviality and the possibility of conviviality breeding hostility. Although some of the chapters are about literary fiction, the inclusion of the genealogies of convivial scholarship was crucial to this book because it provides the reader with a deep historical narrative that stems from archival work, thus reconnecting real life to archives and cementing the idea that the past informs the present and the future. The other important factor in the unfolding events of this book is the flexible representation of the various ways that African literary outputs open unusual encounters in time and space. Excavating the archives assisted in underlining the interconnectedness of science, language, history, and travel.

More pertinently, Steiner highlights the importance of non-universalising black and brown lived experiences by situating the literary outputs of each individual in each chapter within the socio-political contexts in which they occurred, which dilutes the over-representation of hard politics. While reconciling the possibility of agency and spontaneous relation across differences, the author brings an added layer of African scholarship that does not focus only on unequal power relations but rather on intrinsic human experiences that represent far more than just face-value interactions. Steiner explores the various contours of African literature, laying bare debates around apartheid, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and xenophobia using both fiction and non-fictional experiences and interpretations of ordinary moments in everyday life.

The second chapter transitions to D. D. T. Jabavu's travelogue, highlighting Africans' ability to form relations beyond social hierarchies. This chapter highlights the sharing of politically motivated journeys infused with intimate aspects of humanity, blurring the private versus public dichotomy. Steiner contributes to the understanding of the multiplicity of African literature by citing diverse African scholars and writers whose narratives show how African literary cultures transcend race, culture, languages, gender and borders. Steiner highlights how simple acts of recognising people as humans shape their social experiences and literary traditions. Furthermore, by using Jabavu's

travelogue, Steiner highlights how everyone has a different perspective informing their interpretation of events, which can be attributed to the uniqueness and diversity of African cultures. Moreover, the chapter on Jabavu highlights how conviviality born out of ordinary gestures may have an influence on political approaches and how those at the margins are always the ones who are more inclined to intervene, perhaps motivated by shared vulnerability, thus connecting the overlap of politics and conviviality. This is ironic, because politics is not a friendly game.

Using Sophia Mustafa's endeavour toward national liberation, the third chapter advances the deliberate breakdown of barriers based on gender, language, and citizenship and forceful participation in 'big man' politics by a South Asian-born Tanzanian woman. This brings the reader to the stark realisation that convivial inclusivity is not always possible, especially when fighting against odds that have been institutionalised. Steiner indirectly speaks to the intersectionality of Mustafa's identity, which opens another layer to understanding her experiences of conviviality. The following chapter, on Jamal Mahjoub, details the continuous circular movement of African literary cultures while advocating for the interdependence of scholarship that has been silenced, erased, and marginalised.

Despite dealing with serious and sensitive narratives, the chapter on Abdulrazak Gurnah uses wit and humour to underpin the fact that humour can break social hierarchies. Still, the author also cautions that these literary tools represent merely a superficial break. Steiner unpacks the dark side of convivial wit with academic precision, bringing a compelling new perspective to narratives of exclusion. This chapter locates conviviality beyond politics and victimhood and provides a front-row witness to authentic experiences. To a certain extent, Steiner mimics the various authors' writing styles, which nicely merges the chapters. Reading the chapters makes the reader feel that they have read the work first-hand. Each chapter is crafted to connect the reader to the subjects' work. Each page is filled with fascinating insights.

In *Convivial Worlds*, the ocean is written about as a whirlwind of breeding interconnectedness. Perhaps drawing on the historical significance of the sea to African history (and scholarship on this topic) may have helped the reader to understand why emphasis was placed on the role of the oceanic space. The maritime space holds continuous importance throughout the book and affirms that the personal is international, representing a medium of fluidity. After reading this

book, the importance of prioritising the growth of South-South scholarly relations rather than assimilating to the North-South intellectual superiority complex becomes clearer. Through this book, Steiner advances South-South scholarship by detailing its roots and the rational and intrinsic value of seeing each person as a human. Steiner makes clear that forcing North-South collaborations may, at times, be futile because the circulation of ideas transgresses boundaries. This book highlights the richness, meticulousness and refreshing nature of African scholarship. It is a vital narrative of African literary cultures that centres on diverse individuals to oppose the universalisation of literary cultures of the global South.

**Khanya Burns-Ncamashe**

**khanyaburns@gmail.com**

**Rhodes University**

**Makhanda, South Africa**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1225-3019>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/tl.v59i2.14232>