**Presentation proposal for Island Dynamics conference**

**1) Name of conference:** Darkness

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**5) Title of the presentation:**

The Poetics of Zombified Mobilities: Darkness and Death in Literary Representations of African Clandestine Travel

**6) Abstract:**

During the so-called migrant crisis, African clandestine migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees have frequently been represented as invaders trying to enter Europe in order to destroy its cultural, social, political, and economic integrity. As several scholars have observed, the figure of the clandestine migrant shares similarities with that of the zombie: a figure of darkness that represents a feared and contagious alterity and that should be excluded from the community. This paper analyses J. R. Essomba’s *Le paradis du nord* (1996) and Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore* (2003) – novels representing Afroeuropean journeys of clandestine migrants – through the zombie metaphor. My reading draws attention to the texts’ gloomy imagery revolving around darkness, death, hiding, and loss of identity and emotion, and argues that these elements form their poetics of zombified migrant mobility. Essomba’s and Phillips’s literary portrayals of this fragmented and vulnerable form of travel suggest that the roots of zombified mobilities lie in the travellers’ unlivable lives in their failed postcolonial nation-states. The fact that the Europe that the zombified travellers pursue is unable to imagine itself a cosmopolitan future makes it a destination of non-arrival unable to save the travellers from zombification – a dark continent, that is.

**7) Biographical note:**

Dr. Anna-Leena Toivanen is a Marie Skɫodowska-Curie Fellow (MSCA-IF) at CEREP (*Centre d’Enseignement et de Recherche en Etudes Postcoloniales*), University of Liège, Belgium. Her research focuses on mobilities and cosmopolitanisms in contemporary Franco- and Anglophone diasporic African literatures. Her recent work has been published in *Studies in Travel Writing*, *English Studies in Africa*, *Research in African Literatures*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, and *Matatu*. Her chapter on mobility and labour in contemporary African diasporic fiction features in *The Routledge Handbook of African Literature* (forthcoming in 2018).