

Zero Fucks Given About Mobile and Precarious Work and Socialities

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Abstract

In her chapter “Sociality on the Move”, Leopoldina Fortunati emphasizes that sociality is closely interconnected with communication, labour, and mobility (2021, 75)—three elements featured prominently in the 2021 film *Zero Fucks Given* (*Rien à foutre*, Emmanuel Marre and Julie Lecoustre), which follows a young Belgian woman based in Lanzarote who works as a flight attendant for a low-cost airline. The film provides a compelling case study for examining the filmic representation of mobile professional women through the lens of mobile socialities by exploring the interplay of mobility, labour and communication in the portrayal of a quintessential emblem of women’s professional mobility: the flight attendant.

Historically, flight service work is one of the earliest and commonest mobile occupations among women since it is in line with the service and care work traditionally done by and stereotypically considered as suitable for women. Consequently, the flight attendant is one of the first mobile professional woman figures to appear in film. In the early decades of commercial air travel, this figure was perceived as “an icon of non-threatening female independence” (Negra 2009, 109). In popular culture, the flight attendant is commonly associated with glamour and adventure. *Zero Fucks Given* subverts the nostalgic and idealised iconography of flight attendants, underscoring the precarity behind low-cost air travel.

The film depicts the flight attendant’s working life as repetitive, disorienting, and emotionally destructive by alternating flights, where she is constantly monitored for performance and pushed to sell as many products as possible, with periods of profound ennui in which she gets drunk and kills time on dating apps. Her mobility, while seemingly offering freedom and opportunity, ultimately conceals instability and disillusionment. The protagonist’s life is in a state of “impasse”, as described by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*, travelling constantly but going nowhere as a way to deal with trauma (199). *Zero Fucks Given* can be identified as part of a European cinema of precarity, a phenomenon explored in works such as *Precarity in European Film* by Elisa Cuter, Guido Kirsten and Hanna Prenzel, which reflects on the depictions and discourses of the objective and subjective aspects of precarity as translated into filmic forms (2022, x).

Moreover, *Zero Fucks Given* explores the concept of “mobile socialities” through the protagonist’s use of mobile communications, social media, and dating apps. These platforms facilitate connections but also contribute to the protagonist’s sense of isolation and emotional detachment. Her social media presence, filled with images that glorify her life as a member of the hypermobile class, contrasts starkly with her precarious and dull existence. Her use of dating apps illustrates the commodification of intimacy under neoliberalism. Her on-the-move lifestyle as a flight attendant is mirrored in her approach to dating; she uses dating apps to seek casual sex and temporary companionship, “advertising” herself as yet another

“duty-free” product. Thus, this paper will analyse the cinematic portrayal not only of precarious mobile labour, but also of precarious mobile socialities.

Keywords: mobilities in film, the flight attendant, precarity, mobile sociality.

References

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