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Clandestine migrant mobility, European peripheries, and practical cosmopolitanism in Fabienne Kanor's *Faire l'aventure*

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The present article focuses on the representation of clandestine migrant mobilities in the novel *Faire l'aventure* by the Franco-Caribbean author Fabienne Kanor. The analysis has two lines of inquiry. Firstly, it focuses on the protagonist's clandestine travels from Senegal to European peripheral insular locations, which are portrayed as unsatisfactory substitutes for the 'real' Europe that the protagonist pursues. In so doing, *Faire l'aventure* associates peripheral European spaces with the melancholic loss of an unreachable dream – in this case, Central Europe. Secondly, I analyse the novel's conceptualizations of popular cosmopolitanism, which I refer to as 'débrouillardise cosmopolitanism' in order to highlight its qualities as a practical survival strategy of a clandestine African traveller. By analysing the manifestations of practical cosmopolitanism in Kanor's novel, this article pays attention to the limits that the concept faces in the context of clandestine Afro-European migrant mobility.

Keywords: Africa, cosmopolitanism, Europe, clandestine migration, Fabienne Kanor, mobility, periphery, travel

Le présent article porte sur la thématique de la mobilité migratoire clandestine dans le roman *Faire l'aventure* par l'auteure Franco-Caribéenne Fabienne Kanor. L'analyse comporte deux axes d'enquête. En premier lieu, je me concentre sur la représentation des voyages clandestins du protagoniste du Sénégal vers des régions insulaires en périphérie d'Europe qui sont vues comme des substituts insatisfaisants de la « vraie » Europe que le protagoniste poursuit. Ainsi, *Faire l'aventure* associe les espaces périphériques européens à la perte mélancolique d'un rêve inaccessible, notamment l'Europe centrale. Deuxièmement, j'analyse la façon dont le récit conceptualise un cosmopolitisme populaire auquel je me réfère comme « cosmopolitisme débrouillard » et qui est essentiellement une stratégie de survie pratique adoptée par des voyageurs clandestins africains. En examinant les manifestations du cosmopolitisme pratique dans le roman de Kanor, cet article attire l'attention sur les limites que rencontre ce concept dans le contexte afro-européen de la mobilité migratoire clandestine.

Mots clefs: Afrique, cosmopolitisme, Europe, Fabienne Kanor, migration clandestine, mobilité, périphérie, voyage

Mobility between Africa and Europe has been a recurrent theme in francophone African literatures since the mid-twentieth century. What characterizes this literary paradigm is that such Afro-European¹ mobilities in these texts are most frequently taking place between francophone African countries and the former colonial centre, France.² More specifically, Paris as a (post) colonial metropolis holds a central place in the francophone African literary imaginary. However, due to the diversification of mobilities in the globalized present, France and Paris are no longer the axiomatic centres for representing mobilities between the two continents. The shift away from France- and Paris-centredness is particularly pronounced in narratives of clandestine migrant mobility: the focus on the Canary Islands in Abasse Ndione's *Mbëkë mi: à l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique*, on the Spanish enclaves in Marie NDiaye's *Trois femmes puissantes*, and on Sicily in Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *Silence du cœur* illustrate this trend.³ The transition from the historic (post)colonial centre towards more peripheral – culturally and geographically, but also in terms of postcoloniality⁴ – European loci attests to the proliferation and the strengthening of borders⁵ that have turned Europe into a fortress. The destinations of migrant mobilities change as traditional postcolonial metropolitan centres become harder to reach.

This article analyses the representation of clandestine migrant mobilities in Fabienne Kanor's novel *Faire l'aventure*.⁶ The novel sets Europe

1 The term 'Afro-European' is well adapted for analysing mobilities between Africa and Europe because it captures the continents' historical and present entanglements. See Sabrina Brancato, 'Afro-European literatures: A new discursive category?', *Research in African Literatures*, 39 (2008), 1–13 (p. 2).

2 Representations of intracontinental African migrant mobilities have received much less critical attention than their extracontinental counterparts. See Sydoine Moudouma, 'Intra- and inter-continental migrations and diaspora in contemporary African fiction', PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University (2013), p. 1. While acknowledging this imbalance, I argue that the study of Afro-European migrant mobilities is also important as it helps Europe to understand its postcolonial present.

3 Abassane Ndione, *Mbëkë mi: à l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008); Marie NDiaye, *Trois femmes puissantes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009); Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, *Silence du cœur* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2017).

4 According to Schulze-Engler, Europe is erased from the postcolonial map. Frank Schulze-Engler, 'Irritating Europe', in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 669–91. One could add that when the continent is understood as being affected by postcolonial concerns, the focus is on (post) colonial centres such as the UK and France; European countries with less explicit or no direct colonial histories remain in the margins of postcolonial studies.

5 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labour* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 62; Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe, 'Cultural production and negotiation of borders: Introduction to the dossier', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 25 (2010), 38–49 (p. 40); Dominic Thomas, 'Fortress Europe: Identity, race, and surveillance', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 17 (2014), 445–68.

6 Fabienne Kanor, *Faire l'aventure* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2014). Fabienne Kanor is a French author

as its context instead of limiting itself to specific national settings. In so doing, it articulates an Afro-European approach which ‘tak[es] the very idea of nationality out of the equation’, as Christopher Hogarth formulates it.⁷ This article has two lines of inquiry. Firstly, it focuses on the protagonist’s clandestine travels from Senegal to European insular locations that are peripheral from a Central European perspective: the Canary Islands and another widely mediatized ‘gateway’ to Europe, Lampedusa. I am particularly interested in the text’s portrayal of the insular settings as unsatisfactory substitutes for the ‘real’ Europe that the protagonist keeps striving for. In so doing, the novel associates peripheral European insular spaces with the melancholic loss of an unreachable dream – in this case, Central Europe. Secondly, I analyse the novel’s conceptualizations of popular cosmopolitanism, what I call ‘*débrouillardise* cosmopolitanism’, in order to highlight its qualities as a practical survival strategy of an ‘illegalized traveller’⁸ or an ‘adventurer’.⁹ Mobility is frequently perceived as the ‘essence of cosmopolitanism’¹⁰ as it exposes people to transcultural encounters. Yet mobility alone does not automatically generate cosmopolitan aspirations. By analysing the manifestations of practical cosmopolitanism in Kanor’s novel, this article explores the limits that the concept faces in the context of clandestine Afro-European migrant mobility.¹¹ Popular cosmopolitanisms

of Martinican origin, and therefore not an ‘African writer’ per se. However, because of her affiliation to the Caribbean, she is a writer of the historical African diaspora. Besides the author’s background, the historical Afro-Caribbean connections are emphasized by the narrative through its allusions to transatlantic slavery. The protagonist of *Faire l’aventure* is a Senegalese man and the novel’s events take place between Senegal and different European loci. As such, the text contributes to the literary imaginary of clandestine Afro-European travel.

- 7 Hogarth discusses the concept of the Afropean, but the idea of shifting the focus from the nation to a wider continental view also characterizes the concept of the Afro-European. I use the term ‘Afro-European’ instead of ‘Afropean’ because I see the latter more as the (identity) position of authors whose background is shaped by their multiple affiliations. See Christopher Hogarth, ‘Francophone and post-migratory Afropeans within and beyond France today’, in *Post-Migratory Cultures in Postcolonial France*, ed. by Kathryn Kleppinger and Laura Reeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 60–76 (p. 60). See also Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas, ‘Introduction: Francophone Afropeans’, in *Francophone Afropean Literatures*, ed. by Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 1–14.
- 8 Leanne Weber and Sharon Pickering, *Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.
- 9 The notion of *aventure* and the figure of *l’aventurier*, which feature in francophone African literary texts on clandestine migration, refer to the idea of migratory journeys as attempts to ‘try one’s luck’ elsewhere. See Catherine Mazaauric, *Mobilités d’Afrique en Europe: récits et figures de l’aventure* (Paris: Karthala, 2016), pp. 50–51.
- 10 Mimi Sheller, ‘Cosmopolitanism and mobilities’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 349–65 (p. 349).
- 11 The limits of cosmopolitanism in the Afro-European context have been addressed in earlier

are survival strategies and therefore remain inevitably imperfect manifestations of cosmopolitan ideals.

Peripheries and the dream of 'la grosse Europe'

Kanor's novel is divided into four parts named after the places in which the events take place: Mbour in Senegal, and then Tenerife, Rome, and Lampedusa in Europe. All the parts, except for 'Rome', focus on the Senegalese protagonist's journeys between Africa and Europe.¹² In the first part, set in the coastal town of Mbour, the narrative repeatedly alludes to the Atlantic Ocean. The presence of the sea embodies the idea of a world beyond the local milieu. The protagonist Biram, aged 17, observes the Atlantic from the balcony of an ancient slave house, feeling 'comme si le monde entier [...] était pour [lui]'.¹³ In line with this omnipotent feeling, he imagines his life somewhere beyond the horizon, dancing in a fancy nightclub, surrounded by women, with his pockets full of money and an expensive German vehicle waiting outside to take him to his loft in a skyscraper. Already at this point, then, Senegal is represented as a place that has no prospects to offer; dreams of a better future are associated with an elsewhere. This imagined elsewhere is accessible through mobility, either by leaving Senegal or by getting in touch with Europeans visiting the country, as suggested by this sarcastic, slogan-like sentence alluding to the famous transnational rally: '*Paris-Dakar, un rêve pour ceux qui restent*'.¹⁴ Tourists symbolize the carefree, privileged aspects of Western life and make Europe seem like a destination worth pursuing. Aspiring migrants' ideas about Europe are also shaped by returnees' stories, although it should be stated that unlike what happens in Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*¹⁵ or Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu-blanc-rouge*,¹⁶ Kanor's returnee-adventurers do not promote the image of Europe as an Eldorado to

francophone African novels such as Ousmane Socé Diop's *Mirages de Paris* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1965 [1937]) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris: Juillard, 1961). Kanor's novel belongs to this literary tradition while revising it with its focus on clandestine migrant mobilities and its deviation from Paris-centredness.

12 In the third part, the spotlight is on Marème, a Senegalese woman whom Biram met in Mbour before leaving for Europe, and who works as a prostitute in Rome. The fact that the majority of the novel's parts are narrated from Biram's perspective makes him the protagonist. The part focusing on Marème is also considerably shorter than the others. While the figure of Marème can be interpreted as a female version of the 'adventurer', my focus here is on Biram as the narrative depicts his Afro-European journeys in more depth.

13 Kanor, p. 31.

14 Ibid., p. 86; emphasis original.

15 Fatou Diome, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* (Paris: Anne Carrière, 2003).

16 Alain Mabanckou, *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1998).

impress their community but highlight the interrupted, deadly character of the journey instead. Despite the returnees' discouraging stories, Biram sees the Atlantic as a gateway to a better life – just like most of the men in Mbour – for, as Biram claims, 'Les gens de chez moi rêvent beaucoup'.¹⁷ However, the idea of the sea as a gateway to an Eldorado is overshadowed by the allusion to the transatlantic slave trade. This history is evoked by a beachside *esclaverie* which has resisted time for over three centuries. The fact that the building is still there, 'persistante et sauvage',¹⁸ establishes a parallel between contemporary clandestine sea crossings and the journeys on slave ships.¹⁹ Later in the novel, the narrative compares Biram to a zombie, which further underlines the parallel.²⁰ The contrast between the slavery parallel (through the slave house and the zombie figure) and the idea of the Atlantic as a promise of a better elsewhere (through naïve consumerist imagery) informs the novel's complex representation of Afro-European clandestine migrant mobility.

In the second part, Biram has been living in Tenerife for three years. His earlier, flagrantly unrealistic dreams of a life in Europe are totally incongruent with reality. Biram works as a street vendor, and although he wants to be seen as 'le maître des lieux'²¹ in the eyes of Senegalese newcomers, he is not satisfied with his current location. 'Dans ce village au sud de Tenerife, la grosse Europe était encore loin', the narrator states, adding, 'On continuait d'en rêver'.²² Tenerife is conceived as not entirely Europe; it is an unsatisfactory substitute for what the adventurers consider 'la grosse Europe'. For Biram, the island is a 'bled'²³ or a village; it is the 'cul de l'Europe'²⁴ in which he does not wish to 'croupir'.²⁵ As a teenager, he dreamed of the United States, and considered Spain 'un pays de pauvres' where they speak 'un dialecte de cul-terreux'.²⁶ In the present, he teaches Spanish to Senegalese newcomers and even dreams in Spanish, which shows how his teenage dreams about the US have failed him. What further adds to the irony here

17 Kanor, pp. 221–22.

18 Ibid., p. 13.

19 On the slavery parallel, see Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Ghosts of memories, spirits of ancestors: Slavery, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic', in *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections*, ed. by Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 162–180.

20 See Toivanen, 'Zombified mobilities: Clandestine Afro-European journeys in J.R. Essomba's *Le paradis du nord* and Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31 (2019), 120–34.

21 Kanor, p. 125.

22 Ibid., p. 126.

23 Ibid., p. 128.

24 Ibid., p. 217.

25 Ibid., p. 217.

26 Ibid., p. 138.

is that the protagonist's ideas about Spain resonate with his experiences of Senegal as a place of stagnation he wants to escape.

For Biram, the most frustrating aspect of his confinement to the periphery is being surrounded by 'cette mer qui, en théorie seulement, menait à l'Espagne continentale'.²⁷ The island is perceived as a postcard-like background image of a computer screen – a metaphor that conveys the idea of Tenerife as not very 'genuine' or dynamic, which is how peripheries are frequently perceived.²⁸ The idea of the postcard also points to the touristic character of the island. That the Canary Islands are simultaneously a popular touristic resort and a destination for Senegalese boat people makes it a space that embodies the contradictions typical of 'today's conspicuously uneven global culture'²⁹ in which different mobile positions coexist. That the protagonist flees from one tourist destination (Mbour) only to reach another (the Canary Islands) underlines the complexity of such sites as spaces of dreams and leisure on the one hand, and of exploitation and inequality on the other. The narrative also attests to the relativity of the meaning of the periphery:³⁰ while for the tourists, it is a place to escape one's everyday life, for the clandestine migrants, it is nothing more than a potential means of access to the centre. The position of the underprivileged African native/traveller is the same in both African and European tourist destinations: they can only ever live in the shadows of tourism.

The narrative keeps underlining the contrast between tourists' and clandestine migrants' mobilities. Tourists take photographs of *aventuriers* who arrive in the port in pirogues and are annoyed that the border guards have not prevented the boat people from coming ashore, thus disturbing the carefree tourist experience. The protagonist's Atlantic and Mediterranean crossings are addressed as short flashbacks, which conveys their traumatizing character. The carefree nature of tourists' mobilities, by contrast, culminates in the following seemingly innocent words through which the narrative voice expresses the desires and actions of a French tourist: 'Mais un matin, elle avait voulu voir la mer et s'était offert un aller-retour pour Tenerife'.³¹ The quotation captures the easy mobility of those who circulate

27 Ibid., p. 130.

28 Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, and Astrid Van Weyenberg, 'Introduction: Peripheral visions in the globalizing present', in *Peripheral Visions in the Globalizing Present: Space, Mobility, and Aesthetics*, ed. by Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, and Astrid Van Weyenberg (Leiden: Brill 2016), pp. 1–29 (p. 4).

29 Graham Huggan, *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/Writing in an Age of Globalization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 3.

30 Peeren, Stuit, and Van Weyenberg, p. 3.

31 Kanor, p. 195.

freely across the globe, and the words gain their full meaning when juxtaposed with clandestine migrants' life-threatening journeys.

In the last part of the novel, Biram has been 'adventuring' for ten years. He is condemned to a limbo between Africa and Europe, as conveyed in his itinerary represented in the form of a laconic list of place names: 'Tenerife, Kita, Bamako, Naples, Almería, Madrid, Tripoli, Gao, Djamet, Kidal, Niamey, Tinzaouatine'.³² He has just escaped a detention centre on Lampedusa in order to be smuggled into Sicily, with the goal of getting closer to continental Italy. His reason for leaving Lampedusa is to avoid the risk of repatriation, but also his obsession with 'la grosse Europe': 'Il n'y était toujours pas, dans la grosse Europe. Il se trouvait encore trop près de l'Afrique'.³³ Despite Lampedusa's inevitably peripheral character, Biram thinks that the isle has 'du charme' and that it is 'Une cité de bord de mer où la vie semblait sûre et simple'.³⁴ Again, the narrative ironically juxtaposes clandestine migrants' journeys and tourism by adopting stereotypical touristic imagery that alludes to the 'charms' of a 'simple seaside life'. As Biram runs away from the detention centre, it is clear that this ease is not reserved for travellers of his kind: the tree roots and sharp stones that hurt his feet suggest that the island is a hostile territory for an adventurer. The sea, too, is an unwelcoming 'amas d'eau sombre'³⁵ failing to deliver its promises of a better elsewhere. It is noteworthy that as an adventurer confined to the maritime limbo between Africa and European insular peripheries, the protagonist cannot escape the seemingly hostile watery element. Indeed, the persistent presence of the sea throughout the narrative symbolizes Biram's failure to reach continental Europe and also functions as a trope that reminds the reader of the parallel between historical and contemporary sea crossings. The sea has turned into an insurmountable border, and Biram is ill at ease with the idea of its proximity.

From Lampedusa, Biram's journey continues to Sicily, where he works as a tomato picker with other Senegalese migrants. While his salary and working conditions are bad, he wants to stay on the plantation because he feels at home in the company of other Senegalese people. Soon, however, his wanderlust motivated by the desire for 'la grosse Europe' takes hold of him, and he leaves the rural region for Palermo. He goes to see an old Senegalese acquaintance, and in order to impress him and to come across as a 'real' adventurer, he lies about his itinerary: 'Après Tenerife, il prétendait d'être

32 Ibid., p. 284.

33 Ibid., p. 287.

34 Ibid., p. 289.

35 Ibid., p. 285.

allé chez les Anglais, Français, Allemands, Hollandais. La grosse Europe'.³⁶ The fact that he lies about his travels reveals the extent to which he is obsessed with the idea of 'la grosse Europe'. The lies also draw attention to how the protagonist's pursuit is characterized by the unreachability of this dream destination. Indeed, Biram's tragedy is that he never manages to reach the centre – conceived by the narrative as the UK, France, Germany, or the Netherlands – that has obsessed him for so long, and that he remains relegated to the periphery instead. While geographical peripheral settings in Europe and elsewhere in the world are increasingly turning into sites of 'containment of [...] unwanted migrants',³⁷ Kanor's novel points out that these peripheries are equally unwanted destinations for the unwanted migrants themselves.

From the perspective of the unreachable dream that the protagonist pursues, it is noteworthy that the narrative keeps referring to melancholia, which is represented as the adventurers' occupational disease. The adventurers who have managed to reach Europe only to realize that there is no Eldorado for them suffer from 'ce truc visqueux et vénéneux [...] que les gens éduqués appellent *mélancholie*'.³⁸ From a Freudian perspective, melancholia refers to a pathological condition whereby the subject refuses to let go of a lost loved object by making it an integral part of the self.³⁹ For Biram, the lost object which he has integrated into his self is the idea of adventure in 'la grosse Europe'. Having spent ten years drifting between Africa and European peripheral locations, it has become clear to him that the Europe of his dreams is beyond his reach. This realization paralyzes Biram, who no longer wants to get out of bed; he is unable even to think about work, stays indoors for several days and compares himself to a zombie, a figure that features in Caribbean writing as well.⁴⁰ Another allusion to the zombie figure features as Biram asks himself 's'il n'était pas sur le point de se transformer, à son tour, en zombi'.⁴¹ Here, the figure of the zombie captures the melancholic lethargy that the unending journeys generates. The zombie has become a metaphor for unwanted migrants trying to reach Europe in order to 'devour' the continent's cultural, social,

36 Ibid., p. 309.

37 Peeren, Stuit, and Van Weyenberg, p. 3.

38 Kanor, p. 135; emphasis original.

39 See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. xvi, trans. and ed. by James Trachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

40 See Lucy Swanson, 'Blackness, alienation, and the zombie in recent francophone fiction', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 17 (2014), 177–97.

41 Kanor, p. 320.

and economic integrity.⁴² The parallel that Kanor's novel draws with clandestine travellers and the zombie figure, however, is not in line with the idea of the zombie as a monster with an insatiable appetite for destruction. Instead, the novel represents the zombie as a creature that desires nothing at all, not even to be alive. Here, it is important to underline the difference between the original zombie figure and its contemporary popular culture counterpart. While the latter is a flesh-eating monster seeking to destroy 'innocent' communities, the Haitian zombie was itself a tragic victim unable to escape slavery even in death.⁴³ Being narrated from the perspective of a clandestine traveller, the novel's conception of the zombie figure relies on the Caribbean zombie as a victim, not as a perpetrator. This is captured in the narrator's words: 'Il avait rêvé d'être un homme, mais l'Europe mangeait les hommes. Elle les transformait en bâtards et en pantins'.⁴⁴ It is then Europe that turns the clandestine travellers into zombies, not the clandestine travellers who devour Europe. The novel's ending points at a potential rupture in Biram's hopeless pursuit of 'la grosse Europe' as he decides to return to Senegal. What is problematic in his decision, however, is that this time, he turns Senegal into a dream destination capable of offering the adventurer luxurious houses and nice jobs. Biram starts to cherish dreams of return as he meets Marème, a girl he knew in Mbour, in Italy. He wants to return to Senegal with her:

Alors il lui raconta la vie qu'ils mèneraient dès qu'ils [...] seraient de retour au Sénégal, la robe de mariée et le château qu'il lui offrirait, le poste délégué qu'il décrocherait en un clin d'œil vu la somme des métiers qu'il avait dans la main.⁴⁵

As the narrator states, 'C'était un autre pays qu'il évoquait, un Sénégal remis à neuf'.⁴⁶ In this way, the narrative suggests that Biram's ideas of return are nothing more than a continuation in the search of a non-existent Eldorado.

42 Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Wog zombie: The de- and re-humanisation of migrants, from mad dogs to cyborgs', *Cultural Studies Review*, 15 (2009), 147–78; John Stratton, 'Zombie trouble: Zombie texts, bare life and displaced people', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (2011), 265–81; Kaiama L. Glover, "'Flesh Like One's Own": Benign denials of legitimate complaint', *Public Culture*, 29 (2017), 235–60.

43 Glover, p. 251.

44 Kanor, p. 146.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 359.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 359.

Débrouillardise cosmopolitanism and its limits

Clandestine migrant mobilities are risky and time-consuming. These mobile pursuits demand resourcefulness to cross not only topographical, but also symbolic and cultural, borders⁴⁷ in order to survive in a new environment. What interests me here is to explore this resourcefulness as a pragmatic, popular form of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism has traditionally been understood as world citizenship. This idea of ‘being at home in the world’ implies elitism, which makes the concept seem like a ‘luxuriously free-floating view from above’,⁴⁸ embodied in the figure of the ‘cosmopolitan’ world traveller who transgresses national and cultural boundaries with ease thanks to their ‘badge of privilege’.⁴⁹ The elitism of the concept of cosmopolitanism has become subject to criticism.⁵⁰ There has been an explicit ‘effort to distance the concept from its former narrow identification with “rootless” elites’, which has resulted in democratized understandings of cosmopolitanism.⁵¹ Some theorists have even claimed that ‘cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of the [...] comforts and customs of national belonging’.⁵²

47 On conceptualizations of the border, see Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, ‘Introduction’, in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, ed. by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), pp. 1–42 (p. 14).

48 Bruce Robbins, ‘Introduction Part I: Actually existing cosmopolitanism’, in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. by Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1–19 (p. 1).

49 Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, ‘Introduction’, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. by Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 1–17 (p. 3).

50 In the African cultural studies context, the concept of Afropolitanism has been subject to similar criticism. Coined by the diasporic Ghanaian author Taiye Selasi (‘Bye-bye Babar’, *The Lip*, 3 March 2005, <<http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>> [accessed 29 August 2019]), Afropolitanism is a criticized, allegedly ‘Africanized’ reformulation of cosmopolitanism. See, for example, Grace Musila, ‘Part-time Africans, Euroropolitans and “Africa lite”’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28 (2016), 109–13. Besides its elitism, one of its main problems is that by reducing cosmopolitanism to an identity position of the mobile African elite, Afropolitanism loses sight of the ethical aspects that are important in the concept of cosmopolitanism. See Anna-Leena Toivanen, ‘Cosmopolitanism’s new clothes? The limits of the concept of Afropolitanism’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 21 (2017), 189–205 (pp. 192–93). Afropolitanism has also been discussed by Achille Mbembe, who uses the concept to refer to the ways in which different forms of mobility have contributed to the processes of transculturation in Africa. See Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), pp. 221–29. Here, I am not interested in transculturation or the figure of the cosmopolitan/Afropolitan, but understand cosmopolitanism as an active ethical engagement with the world, the self, and the other.

51 Vered Amit and Pauline Gardiner Barber, ‘Mobility and cosmopolitanism: Complicating the interaction between aspiration and practice’, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 22 (2015), 543–50 (p. 544).

52 Sheldon Pollock et al., ‘Cosmopolitanisms’, in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenbridge et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 1–14 (p. 6).

Yet elitism is not the only problem with the conception of cosmopolitanism as an identity position of those on the move. David Hansen posits that ‘a cosmopolitan sensibility is not a possession, badge, or settled accomplishment. It is an orientation that depends fundamentally upon the ongoing quality of one’s interactions with others, with the world, and with one’s own self’.⁵³ Hansen’s words challenge the understanding of cosmopolitanism as an identity position, and instead see it as an orientation towards the world. Such an understanding avoids ‘too readily made’ associations of ‘mobility and cosmopolitanism or of subaltern positioning and cosmopolitanism’.⁵⁴ In other words, if cosmopolitanism is above all ‘a process of creative engagement between peoples and cultures in developing an openness to forms of alterity and the negotiation of a more interdependent world’, as Kristian Shaw formulates it, it is necessary to undo the taken-for-granted link between mobility and cosmopolitanism: because of its ethical engagement with the world, the self, and the other, the concept of cosmopolitanism is ‘so much more than a condition of transnational mobility’.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Galin Tihanov argues against the tendency of liberal cosmopolitanisms to romanticize exile and equate mobility with cosmopolitanism. Tihanov posits that the difficult material realities of exiles only rarely enable them to ‘develop the toolkit of a cosmopolitan’ and to become ‘reliably enriched, unfailingly energized and dependably cultivated and tolerant citizens’.⁵⁶ Tihanov’s words of warning are of particular relevance in the case of underprivileged, illegalized migrant mobilities: their cosmopolitanism is above all a strategy of survival.

The key element in Kanor’s protagonist’s grass-root cosmopolitanism is *débrouillardise*. *Débrouillardise* refers to resourcefulness required to survive in a situation that poses limits to one’s agency. The concept is frequently used in the context of informal economies in francophone West Africa. In his discussion on Ghanaian urban informal economies, Ato Quayson writes about the *kòbòlò* figure. The *kòbòlò*, ‘a good-for-nothing

53 David Hansen, ‘Education viewed through a cosmopolitan prism’, in *Philosophy of Education 2008*, ed. by Ron Glass (Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 2009), pp. 206–14 (p. 213).

54 Andrew Irving and Nina Glick Schiller, ‘Introduction: What’s in a word? What’s in a question?’, in *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities, and Discontents*, ed. by Andrew Irving and Nina Glick Schiller (New York: Berghahn, 2015), pp. 1–22 (p. 3).

55 Kristian Shaw, *Cosmopolitanism in Twenty-First Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 7, 8.

56 Galin Tihanov, ‘Narratives of exile: Cosmopolitanism beyond the liberal imagination’, in *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*, ed. by Andrew Irving and Nina Glick Schiller (New York: Berghahn, 2015), pp. 141–59 (pp. 154, 142).

street loiterer and potential criminal’, is an embodiment of ‘dislocated urban life in an uncertain economic world’ whose ‘wanderings are driven by [his] desire toward self-improvement, and his engagement with the urban is a conduit for augmenting the skills required to “make it” or die trying’.⁵⁷ The *débrouillard*,⁵⁸ as embodied in Kanor’s adventurer, can be seen as an Afro-European variation of the *kòbòlò* figure. *Débrouillardise* cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, captures the idea of crossing cultural boundaries in order to survive in a new environment, and it also entails the idea of being willing ‘to be transformed by an experience of the foreign’.⁵⁹

The notion of *débrouillardise* is present in the idea of *aventure* that features in the novel’s title. This strategy highlights agency instead of victimhood, although the narrative also draws attention to the limits of agency in the context of clandestine migrant mobility. Indeed, the narrative states that to be an adventurer is to ‘quitter son pays en héros et mourir comme un chien’.⁶⁰ In Tenerife, Biram comes across as *débrouillard* in the eyes of an enthusiastic Senegalese newcomer, who exclaims, ‘Tu es à l’aise ici’.⁶¹ Biram, a street vendor who sells gadgets to tourists, operates in a multicultural milieu: there are local people, European tourists, fellow Senegalese in the ‘Little Africa’ neighbourhood, and people from various ethnic backgrounds operating in the shadows of global tourism. This is an environment that could be a fertile ground for cosmopolitan aspirations, as it seems to be prone to exposing people to transcultural encounters and hence promotes openness towards alterity. Indeed, Biram has learned several languages, and knows quite a lot about tourists’ home countries. Thanks to these skills, he can claim that ‘Il saurait se débrouiller n’importe où’.⁶² He is even considered as a ‘citoyen du monde’⁶³ by fellow Africans. In many senses, Biram comes across as what Achille Mbembe refers to as ‘petit migrant’, a concept that alludes to migrants who end up producing non-elitist, practical forms of cosmopolitanism in clandestine spaces.⁶⁴ Kanor’s novel, however,

57 Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 199, 202.

58 The notion features in literature already in the 1960s in N.G.M. Faye’s novel *Le Débrouillard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), which narrates the travels of a young Senegalese man trying to make a living.

59 Paulo Lemos Horta, ‘Cosmopolitan prejudice’, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. by Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 153–68 (p. 153).

60 Kanor, p. 222.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 173–74.

64 Achille Mbembe, ‘The new Africans: Between nativism and cosmopolitanism’, *Reading Modernity in Africa*, ed. by Pierre Geschiere, Birgit Meyer, and Peter Pels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 107–11 (p. 109).

refuses to portray Biram as an idealized, underprivileged mobile subject who would somehow automatically engage in the cosmopolitan ideal of openness to otherness, as is suggested by his rigid conceptions of identity and tendency to reduce people to stereotypes. Indeed, his practical cosmopolitanism is imposed by circumstances and constantly shadowed by the fragility of his irregular condition. As the narrator posits, an illegal migrant remains an illegal migrant no matter how long he has stayed in Europe. In such a situation, the notion of world citizenship seems somewhat displaced. In effect, to be called a ‘world citizen’ is not even a compliment in Biram’s milieu; it suggests that one is no longer a ‘real’ African and has become a ‘black-à-Blancs’⁶⁵ detached from one’s cultural values and community. The fact that Biram despises what he considers ‘Europeanized’ Africans – or ‘diaspos’⁶⁶ or Bounty bars⁶⁷ – and is afraid of turning into one, shows that his ideas about ‘authentic’ identity are rigid. While this contradicts cosmopolitan ideals to which border-crossing and anti-essentialism are central, Biram’s way of maintaining a notion of an ‘authentic’ sense of self can be seen as a survival strategy in the context of clandestine travel.

There is also a feature in the narrative voice itself which resists uncritical interpretations suggesting that operating ‘successfully’ in a multicultural environment would lead to cosmopolitan attitudes. This feature is the narrative’s cynical tone. The cynicism is manifest throughout the novel, but it is accentuated in passages exposing tourists’ unawareness of their privilege and lack of empathy. Representing tourists in this way highlights the discrepancy between their world and that of the *clandestins*: both are on the move and share the same environment without engaging in a dialogue. The following passage captures the narrative’s cynicism and the shallowness of the alleged transcultural encounters between European tourists and clandestine African migrants:

C’est dingue tout ce qu’il avait appris sur tous ces étrangers en si peu de temps. Il connaissait le nom de leurs présidents et les marques de leurs voitures. Il savait ce qu’ils consommaient au petit déjeuner. Il était capable de dire dans leur langue *Je t’aime. Bonjour, comment ça va? Cadeau. Ristourne. Mode. Il fait chaud. Vous venez d’arriver? Vous partez quand? Hôtel. Très joli. Se faire plaisir. Merde. Bon marché. Adresse email. Demain. À quelle heure?*⁶⁸

65 Kanor, p. 145.

66 Ibid., p. 47.

67 Ibid., p. 186.

68 Ibid., pp. 137–38.

This banal lexicon⁶⁹ and the even more banal dialogues one imagines in which it is used draw attention to the fact that while Biram has certainly ‘learned a lot’ about tourists from different national and cultural backgrounds, he sees them in an extremely stereotypical manner. Indeed, the whole multicultural milieu in which he operates consists of stereotypes. Senegalese are referred to as ‘moudou-moudous’ or ‘fatou-fatous’;⁷⁰ Biram’s Chinese supplier calls all African street vendors ‘les Jackson’⁷¹ as in the African-American pop group the Jackson 5, and is himself in turn referred to as Jackie Chan by the African street vendors themselves. Further, if clandestine migrants are perceived as anonymous masses of sullen faces or reduced to their national affiliations as ‘Tunisie, Algérie et Éthiopie’,⁷² tourists are not much different from the viewpoint of the street vendors, who see them as ‘corps roses sur draps de bain en couleur face à la mer’.⁷³ In short, despite being immersed in a multicultural environment, everyone holds on to their stereotypical conceptions about members of different national, ethnic, and cultural communities. Indeed, stereotyping seems to be an element of the *débrouillard* survival strategy. This is one of the ways in which popular cosmopolitanisms deviate from cosmopolitan ideals and why the former may be seen as imperfect – if not failing – manifestations of the latter.

If openness to alterity forms the core of cosmopolitan ethics, then it is Biram’s interactions with a middle-aged French tourist called Héléne that come closest to articulating this ideal. This is the only relation that invites Biram to challenge his cynical, stereotypical judgements. Biram first sees Héléne on a beach, and classifies her as a ‘vieille salope’,⁷⁴ a middle-aged white tourist who uses her economic power to establish sexual relationships with young, underprivileged African migrants.⁷⁵ Obviously, these sexual relations are deeply rooted in the imbalanced power structures of class and race.⁷⁶ Instead of being willing to adopt the gendered, sexualized, and

69 Such simple language enables interaction in the context of informal economies, and therefore generates agency. However, the quotation also alludes to the exploitative qualities of the interactions between the street vendors and tourists which, in turn, undermine the formers’ agency.

70 Kanor, p. 140.

71 Ibid., p. 139.

72 Ibid., p. 282.

73 Ibid., p. 140.

74 Ibid., p. 152.

75 The novel draws attention to sex tourism as a feature of global mobility (Mbour, Tenerife). Through the figures of Biram and Marème, the narrative shows how sex tourism characterizes the mobilities of both male and female *débrouillards*, although in a slightly different way.

76 By addressing the stereotyping that characterizes the unbalanced sexual relationships between white women and black men, Kanor’s novel is linked to novels such as Dany Laferrière’s *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (Paris: Serpent à Plumes, 1985).

racialized role of the young African gigolo *vis-à-vis* a 'vieille salope', Biram resents this pattern and expresses his resistance to it in his urge to humiliate Héléne even before getting to know her: 'Trouver quelque chose, une insulte, un geste (bras d'honneur, crachat) qui la rabaisserait'.⁷⁷ The need to demean a stranger conveys not only Biram's disdain for the exploitative relations between mature white female tourists and young African men, but also the way in which he is used to pigeonholing people. The stereotypical concepts of the Other reinforced by imbalanced power relations affect the encounter between Héléne and Biram. The text also shows how these two become aware of these structures and prejudice, even if they do not go very far in challenging them. When Biram meets Héléne, she asks him to help her carry a stranded fish back to the sea. Reluctant, Biram agrees, and once the task is accomplished, he tells the woman in an aggressive tone that he only approached her to sell her a mobile phone. As they negotiate the price, the narrative highlights how Héléne 'se sentait brusquement vieille, riche et blanche'.⁷⁸ This suggests that Héléne, despite her apparently innocent openness, is well aware of the imbalanced power relations between her and Biram. These words also reflect her acknowledgement of the image Biram has already formed of her.

It is not without irony that, in an unavoidable turn of the plot, Biram and Héléne end up having sex. Waking up in the woman's bed after a party, Biram is overwhelmed with hatred: '*La vieille salope avait fini par l'avoir*'.⁷⁹ It seems there is no way out of the clichéd pattern of the sexually oriented, financially motivated relation between Biram and Héléne, who end up validating the stereotypical roles of the African gigolo and the 'vieille salope' that the context of their encounter imposes on them. Yet the narrative suggests that something in their relationship simultaneously resists this stereotypical pattern. While being quick to pigeonhole Héléne, Biram also admits that she does not quite match 'le profil de la *vieille salope*'.⁸⁰ Héléne in turn considers Biram 'un drôle de garçon',⁸¹ which suggests that he does not correspond to her preconceptions either. After the sex episode, the two do not meet for a while, and when Biram finally comes back to Héléne, she asks him why, as she has come to the conclusion that the young man is interested neither in sex nor in money, which are the founding elements of the African gigolo-*vieille salope* pattern. In short, their relation involves a fragile potential for an open,

77 Kanor, pp. 155–56.

78 Ibid., p. 159.

79 Ibid., p. 197; emphasis original.

80 Ibid., p. 156.

81 Ibid., p. 194.

ethical encounter with alterity. In the end, this potential is weaker than their mutual prejudice. Hélène's immediate reaction to Biram's request to help him leave Tenerife is to fall back on prejudiced stereotypes: 'Elle aurait dû s'y attendre. *Ils finissent toujours par demander cela*'.⁸² Furthermore, when they have sex for a second time, Biram is unable to control his anger towards Hélène. In his eyes, she embodies privileged white Europe not acknowledging its role in promoting global inequality, and he attempts to strangle Hélène. Their relationship continues after they leave Tenerife together, but it does not last. While the narrative does not tell Hélène's side of the story, according to Biram's account of the situation, the reason behind their separation was Hélène having 'son nègre dans sa tête'.⁸³ In short, while there are elements in their relationship that may be promising in terms of such cosmopolitan ideals as openness to otherness, the constraints of the situation and the power structures in which their encounter takes place are such that an unprejudiced dialogue is doomed to failure.

Conclusion

Faire l'aventure portrays Afro-European clandestine migrant mobilities in a way that highlights the increasing importance of peripheral European locations in the francophone Afrodiasporic literary imaginary. For clandestine travellers, peripheral insular locations are unsatisfactory substitutes for Central Europe, which, due to the current stratification and multiplication of borders,⁸⁴ is becoming a practically unreachable destination. By associating peripheral European locations with the melancholic loss of the dream of 'real Europe', the narrative attests to the perpetual pull of traditional postcolonial centres. *Faire l'aventure* challenges equations between mobility and cosmopolitanism and problematizes romanticized ideas of underprivileged mobile subjects as non-elite cosmopolitans. By drawing attention to the harsh conditions of clandestine migrant mobilities, the superficial qualities of transcultural encounters, and people's tendencies to reduce others to stereotypes in a multicultural environment, Kanor's novel exposes the limits of *débrouillardise* cosmopolitanism. Practical cosmopolitanism in the novel is a survival strategy lacking ethical content, which makes it an unavoidably imperfect realization of the ideal of cosmopolitanism.

82 Ibid., p. 222; emphasis original.

83 Ibid., p. 350.

84 For the mechanisms of exclusion on the EU scale, see Thomas, 'Fortress Europe: Identity, race and surveillance'.

