

The quest for solidarity in a failed prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism: African travel narratives and duality of cross-cultural encounters

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Abstract

The theme of travel has occupied a central position in African literature, as it serves as a conduit for exploring the complexities of cross-cultural interactions and the pursuit of solidarity. Travel narratives have highlighted aspirations for north-south solidarity, where the mirage of Western life represents self-fulfilment. Cross-community travel is also seen as a vital opportunity for cultural learning and social solidarity, embodying prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. However, within colonial and early post-colonial novels, authors also began portraying many challenges of physical and introspective journeys as reflections of failed solidarity. In this vein, travel narratives in African literature began to challenge the notion of solidarity as an idealistic aspiration and instead reflected the harsh realities faced by individuals in their quest for self-fulfilment and a sense of belonging. This paper explores and analyses the representation of solidarity in African literature, focusing on the duality of cross-cultural encounters and their implications for failed prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Using Historical and Cultural Context method with references to Reader-Response Theory, this study sheds light on the complexities and consequences of failed solidarity encounters. The findings reveal that cosmopolitan ideals, whether prescriptive or aspirational, cannot bridge the gaps caused by social, economic, and political disparities without acknowledging and addressing power imbalances and structural inequalities between nations and communities. By critically examining the representations of different encounters of failed solidarity, this study contributes to offering insights into alternative pathways to genuine and transformative solidarity, ultimately contributing to a pragmatic understanding of borderless cosmopolitan ideals.

Keywords: African literature, prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism, cross-cultural encounters, narrative enquiry, solidarity, travel narratives.

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1. Introduction

The concept of solidarity has long been regarded as a fundamental element in understanding and interpreting cosmopolitanism (Derpmann, 2009). Solidarity, whether expressed through moral obligations or legal instruments, serves as a foundational factor that promotes the benefits of a borderless world, where the freedom to move and interact contributes to and nurtures existential tolerance (Ossewaarde, 2007; Pensky, 2007; Shaw, 2017). Treaties between nations and communities have been established to enable individuals to pursue their cosmopolitan dreams and ambitions through the principles of free movement. In the realm of literature, the quest for solidarity has often been portrayed through the narratives of travel. In the context of African literature, the theme of travel plays a crucial role in highlighting the aspirations for north-south solidarity, where the mirage of living in the West becomes a symbol of self-fulfilment. Moreover, cross-community travel has been associated with an invaluable opportunity for cultural learning and social solidarity, forming a significant aspect of prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. However, amidst the colonial and early post-colonial novels that presented travel as a potential bridge for north-south solidarity, some authors began to depict voyages as reflections of failed solidarity. Through a narrative enquiry on lived experiences by protagonists, this paper aims to explore and analyse the representations of solidarity through African literature, shedding light on the duality of cross-cultural encounters, and their implications for a broader understanding and impact of failed cosmopolitan ideals.

2. Contextualising the north-south solidarity narrative

Many researchers have discussed the interaction and correlative relationships between solidarity, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism (Loy, 1996; Roudometof, 2005; Sivaraksa, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Beck and Sznaider, 2006; Linklater, 2009; Schick, 2009; Ellison, 2021). During colonisation and early post-colonisation era, literary representations of north-south relations portray Africa as a continent subjected to exploitation, political oppression, educational subjugation and cultural alienation by colonial powers. The perceptions of north-south solidarity in African literature reflects the historical and socio-political context of colonialism and post-colonialism (Eze, 2005). Hence, the discourse of north-south solidarity holds literary significance, particularly in relation to travel and migration narratives. Such narratives revolve around the aspirations of individuals from the Global South, particularly

African countries, who envision a better life and opportunities in the developed countries of the Global North (Canzler, Kaufmann and Kesselring, 2008; Amit and Barber, 2015). This historical backdrop plays a crucial role in shaping dreams of key characters in African narratives. The desire to escape the limitations and constraints of their immediate surroundings and experience the perceived freedom and opportunities of the West becomes a central theme. The mirage of the West, often portrayed as a symbol of self-fulfilment, economic prosperity, and personal growth, becomes a driving force for many African protagonists seeking a brighter future.

These narratives often portray young protagonists who embark on arduous journeys, whether legally or illegally, in pursuit of a better life (Chambers, 2008). They navigate various challenges, including dangerous migration routes, cultural shocks, and encounters with prejudice and discrimination (Cheah, 2006). Horrifying journeys of characters in novels serve as a metaphorical quest for solidarity leading to and pernicious effects, as they seek to transcend borders and connect with a global community that promises equality, prosperity, and personal growth.

However, the recent arduous journeys of African young migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea have connected fictional narratives with real experiences. They starkly exposed the shortcomings of north-south solidarity and the failures of prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. These perilous journeys undertaken by individuals in search of a better life in Europe have shed light on the vast disparities and inequalities that persist between the Global North and the Global South (Gebrewold and Bloom, 2016; Shringarpure and Bronner, 2018; Vega-Duran, 2018). They have undermined the ideals of solidarity and revealed the effects of inadequacies of existing systems.

Firstly, the dangerous and often deadly crossings of the Mediterranean Sea undertaken by African migrants highlight the stark contrast between the rhetoric of solidarity and the harsh reality of limited support and protection that legal instruments and moral principles should provide. While the principle of freedom of movement and the notion of global citizenship are espoused in cosmopolitan ideals, the response of many countries in the Global North has been marked by a lack of empathy and a focus on restrictive immigration policies. Migrants are met with a range of challenges, including insufficient search and rescue operations, detention centres, and a hostile political climate that perpetuates xenophobia and discrimination. These

circumstances demonstrate a glaring gap between the professed ideals of solidarity and the actual treatment of migrants, reflecting a failure of north-south solidarity.

Secondly, the journeys across the Mediterranean Sea expose the inherent inequalities and structural barriers that hinder the realisation of prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Many African migrants embark on these perilous journeys due to limited economic opportunities, political instability, and conflict in their home countries. They seek the promised benefits of the Global North, where access to education, healthcare, and employment is perceived to be more attainable. However, the reality often falls short of these expectations, as migrants face different forms of exploitation, precarious living conditions, and limited opportunities for social integration. This stark contrast between aspirations and reality undermines the vision of prescriptive cosmopolitanism, where the movement of individuals would lead to shared prosperity and cultural exchange.

Moreover, the journeys across the Mediterranean Sea also expose the underlying power imbalances and inequalities that perpetuate the failures of north-south solidarity. Migrants from African countries, primarily from regions experiencing economic hardships and political instabilities, are often subjected to systemic racism and discrimination throughout their journey and upon arrival in Europe. They encounter hostile immigration policies, racial profiling, and limited access to legal rights and protections. These experiences highlight the structural barriers that prevent genuine solidarity and hinder the integration of migrants into the social fabric of host communities.

The failed north-south solidarity and the shortcomings of prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism are further underscored by the inadequate response from the international community. While the challenges faced by African migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea have been well-documented, concrete actions and coordinated efforts to address the root causes of migration, provide safe and legal pathways, and promote equitable development in countries of origin have been lacking. This lack of collective action and genuine commitment to solidarity highlights the gap between rhetoric and action.

In this regard, if early African writers, influenced by the socio-political backdrop of colonialism and post-colonialism, portrayed travel and migration as pathways to knowledge discovery and self-fulfilment, the representation of young African protagonists yearning for a better life in the West is still viewing migration as a pathway to personal growth, economic prosperity, and freedom from the constraints of their immediate surroundings. The dreams and ambitions

associated with such journeys are still fuelled by a belief in the possibilities of solidarity, as individuals sought to find their place in a world where borders were less restrictive. Nevertheless, African authors of fictional narratives whose focus is on the arduous journeys of African young migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea underscore the failures of north-south solidarity and the limitations of prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism. They use these journeys to highlight how addressing the shortcomings of north-south solidarity quest requires a collective effort to dismantle systemic inequalities, promote equitable development that transcends borders and upholds cosmopolitan ideals (Cheah and Robbins, 1998; Delanty, 2006). These narratives provide a counter-narrative to the idealised image of the West, showing the inherent challenges and contradictions in the pursuit of north-south solidarity.

3. Literature review

The theme of travel and migration from Africa to the West has been a prominent topic in both anglophone and francophone literatures, particularly within the context of north-south solidarity narratives. These narratives explore the experiences of African migrants as they navigate the challenges and aspirations associated with their journey.

During the colonial period, European writers often depicted African migration to the West in a manner that reinforced imperialist ideologies. These portrayals tended to represent alterity through an exotic otherness by which stereotypes, and racial hierarchies underpinning intercultural communication encounters. One such example is Joseph Conrad's 1899 *Heart of Darkness* (1994), which portrays Africa as a dark and savage continent while depicting African characters as primitive and uncivilised. In this narrative, the African migrants are objects of curiosity and fascination for the European colonisers, reflecting the discursive power imbalances and unequal relationships between the North and the South.

Post-colonial literature challenged the dominant colonial narratives and provided a platform for African writers to reclaim their agency and voice. The theme of migration and travel became a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of post-colonial African identity and the quest for self-determination. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) are examples of post-colonial novels that highlight the impact of migration on African societies and individuals.

While these narratives emphasise the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of African migrants as they negotiate their place in the West, in the novel *L'Aventure ambiguë*, the theme of travel is particularly depicted as a journey of self-discovery and cultural conflict. The novel explores the experiences of Samba Diallo, a Senegalese young man who leaves his traditional village and travels to Paris for his education. His journey to Paris represents his quest for knowledge and enlightenment, which he believes can only be attained through Western education. The physical travel from Senegal to France mirrors the metaphorical journey of cultural and intellectual exploration since Samba Diallo is torn between his Islamic upbringing and the allure of Western ideals represented by the French educational system.

While in Paris, Samba Diallo undergoes a transformation as he encounters the realities of the Western world and grapples with the conflicts between his African identity and the influences of Western civilisation. Hence, *L'Aventure ambiguë* serves as a critique of the cultural and ideological imposition of the West on Africa. The novel raises questions about the price of cultural assimilation and the loss of African identity in the pursuit of Western education. Although Kane presents travel as a transformative experience that exposes the complexities of cultural identity and the clash between African traditions and Western influences, his novel explores the challenges faced by African individuals navigating the intersection of their heritage and the dominant Western culture. It ultimately prompts readers to critically examine the power imbalances, cultural clashes, and structural barriers that hinder genuine connections between different communities in the face of the quest for north-south global solidarity in a cosmopolitan context.

There are also many authors who have continued to write novels on the themes of travel and migratory movements of young Africans to Europe. In the novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2005), Fatou Diome explores the aspirations of young Senegalese to migrate to Europe and the difficulties they face once they arrive. In his novel *Black Bazar* (2009), Alain Mabanckou describes the experiences of African migrants living in Paris and examines the intercultural tensions, integration challenges and harsh economic realities they face. In his novel *Aux États-Unis d'Amérique* (2006) Abdourahman A. Waberi explores the dreams and aspirations of young Africans to leave the continent to find a better life. In his book *Partir* (2006) Tahar Ben Jelloun tells the story of a young Moroccan who tries to illegally migrate to Europe. Léonora Miano explores the theme of migration in several of her novels, including *Contours du jour qui vient* (2006) and *Ces âmes chagrines* (2011). Her novels address the motivations of

migrants, the difficulties encountered during the journey and the challenges of integration in Europe.

These authors represent only a sample of those who have written on the themes of travel and migratory movements of young Africans towards Europe. There are many other African writers whose novels address these migration topics extensively as they seek to give a voice to migrants, to explore the complex reasons for their departure, to analyse the consequences of these movements and to stimulate reflection on the realities of the social, cultural and political issues associated with it.

In contemporary African literature, there has been a shift towards transnational perspectives in literature that depict migration as a global phenomenon, transcending the North-South binary. Writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Taiye Selasi, and NoViolet Bulawayo have explored the experiences of African migrants in the West through a more nuanced lens, highlighting the complexities of identity, cultural hybridity, and the connections between different parts of the world. Some writers have also sought to reframe the north-south solidarity narrative by shifting the focus from African migration to the West to the interconnectedness of global migrations and the shared experiences of migrants from various regions. This approach challenges the notion of a unidirectional flow from the Global South to the Global North and encourages a more inclusive and diverse understanding of migration. Writers like Warsan Shire, Mohsin Hamid, and Leila Aboulela explore these themes in their works, emphasising the commonalities among migrants regardless of their geographical origins.

Nevertheless, in more recent years, the phenomenon of migrants' Mediterranean Sea crossing has provided writers with a renewed platform for the representation African migration to the West in complex and dehumanising perspectives on north-south solidarity. In Bernard N'Kaloulou's *Le pousse-pousse de Makélékélé : Une jeunesse au Congo* (2021) [The Makélékélé hand-pulled rickshaw: Being young in Congo], the narrative of unidirectional and unmerciful journeys from Africa to Europe is resurfacing. It highlights disconnections between the cosmopolitan ideals and north-south aspirational solidarity, recreating a fateful duality within cross-cultural encounters.

4. Methodology

Historical and Cultural Context method will be used to analyse the interconnection between fiction and reality. When analysing a theme in a novel, there are various methodologies that can be referred to, even though the choice of methodology depends on the specific theme to be analysed and the novel itself. A *Close Reading* approach facilitates a careful examination of the text, paying close attention to specific passages, instances or narratological encounters that relate to the theme. David Greenham's work on *Close Reading: The Basics* (2018) advocates for the close reading method for a thematic analysis.

Other theorists suggest the *Character Analysis* as good method to study characters in the novel and their roles in relation to the theme. It allows to look for character traits, behaviours, and relationships that exemplify or challenge the theme. Although character analysis is a widely used approach in literary criticism, it does not have a single theorist associated with it. However, there are some influential theorists and critics who have contributed to the understanding and development of character analysis in literary studies. These include Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtine, 1987) whose concept of the *dialogic* nature of literature, has influenced character analysis. By emphasising on the interplay of multiple voices and perspectives within a text, his approach provides insights into the development and interaction of characters in a novel.

However, given the fictional and historical nature of the novel, the most appropriate method is *Historical and Cultural Context*. This method considers the historical, social, or cultural context in which the novel is set or written. It explores how the theme is influenced by or reflects these contexts. This involves establishing the correlation between the time period, social and political contexts, or other significant events that may impact the thematic elements of the novel.

Although the historical and cultural context approach in literary analysis does not have a single theorist associated with it, it nevertheless draws upon the broader field of cultural studies and various theoretical frameworks that emphasise the significance of historical and cultural contexts in understanding literature. It can be associated with Postcolonial Theory (Moore-Gilbert, 1997), with theorists like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha (Chakrabarti, 2011) who have examined the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and cultural hegemony on literature. They explore how historical and cultural contexts shape the representation of identity, power, and resistance in postcolonial literature. It can also be associated with Marxist theory, associated with Karl Marx (Xiaoping, 2022), whose approach

allows to analyse literature in relation to socioeconomic conditions and class struggle. Marxist critics examine how historical and cultural contexts contribute to the representation of social inequality, exploitation, and resistance in literature. Given the contemporaneity of the novel, this Historical and Cultural Context method will relate to Reader-Response Theory by Stanley Fish (Fish, 1989) and Wolfgang Iser (Thomas, 1982), who emphasise the role of readers and their cultural backgrounds in interpreting and making meaning of a text. They argue that readers bring their own historical and cultural contexts to the reading process, shaping their understanding of the literary work.

5. Findings and analysis

The story of this novel revolves around six young Congolese Nino, Sukisa, Jean-Serge, Célio, Côme and Pandy. They all attended university in Brazzaville, which they left after the authorities closed this unique institution in charge of training the national elite following strikes by students and trade unionists. These young people go through harsh life challenges in search for building their future in Congo or elsewhere. Their expectations relating to human solidarity, both nationally and internationally, are not met. If the narrative adventures revolve around all those young Congolese, the particular interest of this study is focused on Célio Sangana's dangerous journey to reach Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. After stopping his postgraduate studies in chemistry following the closure of the university, he finds himself as binman in Cape Town (South Africa) before his rough journey which takes him to France, passing through Durban, Maputo, Harare, Lusaka, Djibouti, Yemen, Qatar and Turkey.

Decisions and actions by characters reveal the dynamics and complexities of factors that trigger migration movements. Analysing how characters relate to the solidarity quest provides insights into the emotional and psychological impact of migration on individuals and their behaviours.

5. 1. *Le pousse-pousse de Makélékélé : Une jeunesse au Congo* (2021) by Bernard N'Kaloulou: a pernicious odyssey by young Africans.

This novel presents various situations in which young people in Congo-Brazzaville are confronted with multiple challenges related to the lack of equal opportunities in their country. Social, political, and economic mismanagement of the country contributes to the disillusionment of the youth, which drives Célio Sangana into exile in South Africa. Relying

on African solidarity, he dreams of finding a job that matches his level of education and qualifications. In South Africa, he meets Zambian James Tembo, who accompanies him on this migratory adventure, doing jobs that South-African nationals do not want to do.

« L'après-midi est réservée au nettoyage des rues et des toilettes publiques, toujours dans le cadre de leur boulot. Pour Célio, l'existence suit son cours, inchangée depuis presque six mois. Il ne gagne pas des masses, mais reçoit une rémunération qui lui permet de subvenir à ses besoins essentiels : se nourrir, se vêtir, payer son loyer, etc » (p.163).

[The afternoon is dedicated to cleaning streets and public toilets as part of their job. For Célio, life goes on without any changed for almost six months. He does not earn a lot but at least he gets paid enough to meet essential needs: food, clothing, rent, etc].

At a time when the two young men believed it was time to plan a settlement in the host country, South Africa experiences new waves of insecurity. One day, as Célio and James are getting ready to go to work, all national media outlets display headlines such as: "New surge of xenophobic violence in South Africa"; "Widespread xenophobic violence in the southern part of the country"; "Since Sunday, xenophobic violence has shaken Cape Town"; "South Africa is witnessing a new wave of xenophobic violence and looting" (p.164)

« Dans la ville du Cap, les ressortissants étrangers établis en Afrique du Sud ont essuyé plusieurs vagues de violences xénophobes et vivent dans la peur constante d'être pris pour cible uniquement parce qu'ils ne sont pas sud-africains » (p.164).

[In the city of Cape Town, foreign nationals established in South Africa have endured multiple waves of xenophobic violence and live in constant fear of being targeted solely for not being South Africans].

In less than a week, South Africa, one of the leading economic and political powers of the continent, plunges into a spiral of violence, and with phenomenal speed. Both local and international media rightfully make headlines of "widespread xenophobic violence" in South Africa (p.167).

Given this climate of violence, just six months after Célio's arrival in the Republic of South Africa, many immigrants can no longer tolerate this lack of human solidarity. As the country descends into a manhunt targeting all non-native South Africans, where Asians and Indians are also targeted (p.161), Célio feels shaken by a sense of incomprehension and despair, as he wonders: « Trois vagues de violence xénophobe en si peu de temps, c'est énorme. Mais pourquoi donc? » (p.164) [Three waves of xenophobic violence in such a short time, it is too much. But why?].

Célio and his Zambian best friend James Tembo have no choice but to pack their bags and leave Cape Town for Lusaka, passing through Durban, Maputo, and Harare. This long journey poses multiple security challenges as it is a period of turmoil and passing through Johannesburg may carry the risk of being trapped there « si d'aventure cette métropole sud-africaine est à son tour contaminée par le virus xénophobe » (p.168) [in case this South African metropolis is also infected by the xenophobic virus].

From Lusaka, Célio and James decide to continue their journey to Europe, despite the risks associated with this kind of trip. After all,

« Qui ne risque rien n'a rien. Et puis : Plutôt mourir en Méditerranée que de mourir en Afrique avec unique cause du décès : l'indigence » (p.174).

[He who risks nothing has nothing. And then: Rather die in the Mediterranean than die in Africa with the only cause of death: poverty].

The opinion that no one should

« se laisser mourir au pays sans rien faire est aujourd'hui très répandue et partagée par des millions et des millions des jeunes Africains. Elle résonne comme la nouvelle devise d'une jeunesse africaine sacrifiée, complètement déboussolée, mais qui refuse que la mort vienne la faucher sur place sans coup férir. A ce jour, son continent s'est détourné d'elle, ne lui assurant plus ni protection ni perspective d'avenir » (p.174)

[let oneself die in the country without doing anything is today very widespread and shared by millions and millions of young Africans. It resonates well like the new motto of a sacrificed African youths, completely disoriented, and yet resist against death coming to take them down without firing a shot. To date, their continent has turned away from them, no longer providing them with either protection or prospects for a better future].

After overcoming unimaginable security challenges, Célio and James find themselves in Djibouti, hoping to be able to benefit from African solidarity which could be more humanistic than the ordeal experienced in South Africa. Unfortunately, they quickly realise that « L'être humain n'a pas de plus implacable ennemi que son semblable » (p.179) [Human beings have no more implacable enemy than their fellow humans]. The adage by Latinists that *Homo homini lupus* [Man is wolf to man] does translate in their eyes. In Djibouti, they live hell on earth :

« Ils l'ont côtoyé sur le littoral djiboutien et au Yémen, avec des passeurs brutaux, violents tels un gardien de prison en mal de pouvoir donnant des coups de fouet aux détenus pour se prouver sa propre importance » (p. 179)

[They rubbed shoulders with hell on the Djibouti coast and in Yemen, with brutal and violent smugglers acting like a prison guard exhibiting his power by whipping prisoners to prove how important he is]

Their short stay in Djibouti taught them that death lurks everywhere, whether in Djibouti or in Yemen. Migrants are victims of abuse, brutality, humiliation of all kinds. In Djibouti, smugglers rule the roost: confiscating phones, searching pocket content and getting food from migrants. In Yemen, it is common for migrants to be abducted, detained, tortured by traffickers before selling them as slaves if the exchange for ransoms is not possible.

Unable to reach their quest for cosmopolitan solidarity either in Djibouti or in Yemen, the young adventurers set off for Qatar where they work for a few months « dans le bâtiment, plus précisément dans la construction des stades et autres équipements pour la coupe du Monde du football de 2022 » (p.179) [in construction, more precisely in building stadiums and other infrastructures for the Football World Cup 2022]. It is the remuneration for this work that allowed them to finance their Mediterranean crossing to arrive in France via Turkey.

During this journey in searching human solidarity, character interactions have played a significant role in the migrants' identity formation. One can appreciate how interactions can prompt characters to reflect on their own identities and use them to negotiate new relationships and adapt to new social environments. Using dialogues and exchanges assess risks and identify opportunities, self and social awareness provide opportunities the negotiation of personal and cultural identities.

The reading of migrants' journey reveals that true interactions, characters share their experiences, perspectives, and personal aspirations that can facilitate solidarity. These exchanges allow readers to develop a deeper understanding of the varied reasons, motivations, and experiences of migrants. Interactional communicative encounters foster empathy. The quest for solidarity in African literature, as depicted through travel narratives, is a complex and multifaceted exploration of the opportunities and challenges presented by cross-cultural encounters. Readers can uncover the social, emotional, and psychological dimensions of the theme of journey and migration.

During this journey, interactions between Célio and James demonstrate and highlight acts of support, solidarity, and empathy among migrants when facing discrimination by the host communities. Solidarity between migrants illustrate the importance of human connections, empathy, and the potential for positive relationships in the face of the difficulties encountered during the journey or in the new social and cultural contexts.

This novel offers a representation of young Africans who undertake the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea in the hope of finding human solidarity. The author seeks to reflect historical and social reality through these characters. The protagonists of the novel are a realistic representation of young African migrants who, faced with a future without prospects, choose exile in search of opportunities offered by the ideals of cosmopolitanism, whether socially or professionally.

However, the migration experience of these young Africans does not correspond to the expectations they had in terms of solidarity and social justice. Their journey is far from their aspirations, as they face many obstacles and dangers along the way. They endure precarious living conditions, abuse and exploitation of all kinds.

5.2. Prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism

Prescriptive and aspirational cosmopolitanism for young Africans in relation to social solidarity focuses on promoting a sense of unity, cooperation, and support within African societies and communities. It encourages young Africans to actively engage in social issues, address inequalities, and work towards building inclusive and cohesive societies.

One of the initiatives that young Africans aspire to is the support to actively participate in community engagements and activities that aim to improve social conditions. Promoting inclusivity and embracing diversity within African societies can challenge discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices based on factors such as ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. It is about fostering environments that value and celebrate the contributions of all individuals. Empowering young Africans to be agents of change in their communities requires providing them with the tools, resources, and knowledge to address social injustices, advocate for equal rights, and create opportunities for marginalised groups. Emphasising the importance of and supporting education can be the best way of promoting social solidarity by providing opportunities for young Africans to learn about social issues, human rights, and social justice to cultivate a deeper understanding of societal challenges and inspire informed and engaged citizenship.

However, instead of being supported to actively engage in policy advocacy and social entrepreneurship to address systemic issues and bring about sustainable change, young Africans are not even encouraged to recognise and appreciate the inherent dignity and worth

of every human being, regardless of their background, nationality, or ethnicity. In their quest for social solidarity, they realise that social values, such as empathy and compassion towards others are words with empty promises. Pan-African solidarity, which should foster a sense of unity and collaboration among Africans by transcending national boundaries and working together to address common issues and achieve shared goals, is an ideal without any social resonance in real life.

Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel raises a central question: how could Congo-Brazzaville, despite its vast oil reserves, have fallen into such extreme poverty? The author wonders how a country which is rich in natural resources came to be unable to fund the education of its own citizens. This considerably limits access to education and the chances of success for young Congolese. He stresses that Congo belongs to all Congolese, and that the country's resources should be used for the well-being of its people.

Characters in the novel seek to understand the deep reasons for this persistent poverty despite the oil wealth of Congo-Brazzaville. The novel explores the political, economic and social issues that led to this dire situation. It questions the management of the country's resources, suggesting that corruption and poor governance are largely responsible for the current lethargic situation in which the country finds itself. The novel also highlights the huge wealth gaps that exist in Congo-Brazzaville. Although the country is rich in oil, the benefits of this wealth are not evenly distributed among the population. A small elite gets richer while most of the population continue to live in poverty. This inequality fuels frustration and discontent among citizens, creating growing social tensions.

« Comment a-ton pu en arriver là ? » ; « Où est passé notre pétrole ? » ;
« Pas de pensions, pas de salaires et pas de bourses pour s'en mettre
plein les poches » [...]. « Le Congo nous appartient à tous et il est
possible de nous le partager » (p-p128).

[How did we come to this?; Where did our oil go? » ; No pensions, no wages and no scholarships to fill spending gaps. ... Congo belongs to all of us and it is possible to share what it offers].

In Congo-Brazzaville, young people's aspirations are not fulfilled due to lack of social solidarity and unclear educational vision. Unambitious educational strategies do not match curricula with employability markets. Graduates with university degrees do low paid jobs which are socially disrespected and professionally discredited when they have no networks sponsoring favouritism.

Without any sign of societal solidarity, they feel socially despised and lose sense of belonging.

« Tu auras raté ta vie en exerçant un métier socialement déconsidéré.
À cela s'ajoute le mépris social dont nous autres sommes victimes.
Pour les gens, nous ne comptons pas : ils nous regardent de haut »
(p.33)

[By exercising a socially discredited profession, you will have a failed life. Added to this is the social contempt of which the rest of us are victims. In the public eyes, we do not exist; we are simply wealthless].

Overall, this novel offers a gripping insight into the socio-economic reality of Congo-Brazzaville. It exposes the glaring inequalities that persist despite the country's abundant resources. By underlining the difficulties encountered by young Congolese in their quest for education and opportunities, the author unveils the urgency of action aimed at improving the situation. The novel invites deep reflection on the causes of poverty and on the means to create a better future for all Congolese. It invites readers to reflect on the responsibilities of African governments, business and civil society in transforming their countries.

Beyond lack of opportunities for young people in Congo-Brazzaville, the novel depicts the effects of Xenophobia in South Africa, which is a contradiction of solidarity. It explores the unsettling reality that South Africa, a nation once mired in the oppressive system of apartheid against its black population, now grapples with the paradox of perpetrating xenophobic violence against other black Africans seeking refuge within its borders. Despite its historical struggle for liberation and supposed commitment to a united Africa, cases of xenophobia continue to escalate, challenging the country's aspiration to be a welcoming environment for fellow Africans: “En tout cas, dans cette Afrique-du-Sud post-Mandela, les violences xénophobes ne sont autres que le corolaire de la mauvaise gouvernance économique et politique actuelle » (p.166) [In any case, in this post-Mandela South Africa, xenophobic violence is none other than the corollary of the current poor economic and political governance].

The novel delves into South Africa's painful past, highlighting the enduring effects of apartheid on its society. For decades, black South Africans endured systemic discrimination and segregation, resulting in deep-seated trauma and a sense of marginalization. The nation's successful overthrow of apartheid was celebrated as a triumph of unity and progress. However, this initial sense of solidarity is now being tested as new challenges emerge.

With the dismantling of apartheid, South Africa emerged as a beacon of hope for the rest of the continent. It positioned itself as a leader in the fight for African unity, extending a hand of welcome to its fellow African brothers and sisters who sought refuge from conflict and poverty in their home countries. This promise of unity and brotherhood seemed to indicate a bright future for a continent coming together for mutual growth and support. However, despite the grand promises of unity, the novel highlights the alarming rise in xenophobic incidents directed at African immigrants in South Africa. Tragically, many black Africans who sought a better life within the country's borders now find themselves facing hostility and violence from their supposed allies.

The novel sheds light on the underlying causes of xenophobia in South Africa. The influx of immigrants seeking economic opportunities and safety triggers a sense of competition for limited resources among the local population. Economic hardships, unemployment, and poverty fuel resentment and scapegoating of foreign nationals as the supposed cause of domestic struggles.

Furthermore, the novel delves into the responses of the South African government and civil society to the rising tide of xenophobia. Civil society organisations have been at the forefront of condemning xenophobia and providing support to victims of violence, but their efforts are often met with challenges and limitations. While some politicians have made efforts to address the issue, others have been criticised for their lack of decisive action:

« Les pouvoirs publics peuvent entretenir un climat de défiance vis-à-vis des étrangers, comme ils peuvent afficher une attitude d'indifférence face aux actions xénophobes, voire leur déni et leur approbation tacite. Parfois, le Gouvernement va jusqu'à entraver le travail des autorités chargées de l'application des lois. En tout cas, dans cette Afrique-du-Sud post-Mandela, les violences xénophobes ne sont autres que le corollaire de la mauvaise gouvernance économique et politique actuelle » (p.166)

[The public authorities can maintain a climate of mistrust towards foreigners, just as they can display attitudes of indifference towards xenophobic cases that they can dismiss and even approve tacitly. Sometimes the Government goes as far as to obstruct the work of law enforcement agencies. In any case, in this post-Mandela South Africa, xenophobic violence is none other than the corollary of the current poor economic and political governance].

The novel underscores how the prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa undermines the vision of African solidarity and unity. It exposes a stark contradiction between countries' historical struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism and apartheid. The lack of cohesion

within the African continent weakens solidarity and efforts to address common challenges, such as poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment. Faced with multiple frustrations triggered by inequalities and lack of self-development opportunities, young Africans take the path of exile outside the continent, in search of a more cosmopolitan humanism.

5.3. The duality of discordance between ideals of cosmopolitanism and north-south solidarity

The first challenge discussed in Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel is the presence of stark inequalities within African nations. These inequalities encompass disparities in income, education, and access to basic amenities. Such disparities create societal divisions, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and limiting the opportunities for many young people in a society where meritocracy has little meaning. In many African countries where equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among their citizens are inexistent, young people undertake risky journeys outside their countries. However, Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel exposes the severity of entry restrictions enforced by African countries on their neighbours while expressing concerns about the lack of adequate action against violence directed at foreigners, especially black Africans. Consequently, many young Africans, who uphold the ideals of Western cosmopolitan solidarity, see migration to countries beyond the continent as the only path to achieving their aspirations.

The text suggests that a significant number of young Africans subscribe to the ideals of Western cosmopolitan solidarity. They view migration to countries outside the continent as the only means to fulfil their aspirations. By seeking opportunities abroad, they hope to find environments that align more closely with their values of inclusivity, tolerance, and cooperation.

« Les migrations vers le lointain ont considérablement pris de l'ampleur, ces dernières années. Et, devenues très juteuses, elles suscitent beaucoup d'appétit et génèrent des nombreuses filières mafieuses» (p.176)

[Migrations to countries outside Africa have increased considerably in recent years. And, having become very lucrative activities, they attract and lead to mafia networks].

The lack of prospects for the future in their country of origin, often marked by unemployment, poverty and corruption, pushes young Africans to seek a better life elsewhere. They harbour the hope of finding a supportive community that will welcome them and support them in their quest for social justice. However, the novel denounces the restrictive migration policies that contribute to this disappointing reality. Young African migrants face closed borders, harsh immigration policies and inhumane treatment from authorities. These institutional barriers reinforce social injustice and prevent young migrants from realising their aspirations. The author highlights the challenges they face, both individually and structurally, and calls for reflection on migration policies and how society can better welcome and support these young people in search of a future.

« Les chances de réussite sont infiniment minces à cause des conditions extrêmement dures auxquelles sont soumis les candidats à la migration. Chaque étape, du long périple qui conduit à l'Europe, équivaut à un parcours du combattant. La mort guette partout, du début jusqu'à la fin du trajet » (p.176)

[The chances of success are immensely slim because of the extremely harsh conditions to which candidates for migration are subjected. Each stage of their long journey leading to Europe entails many obstacles to cross. Death lurks everywhere, from the start to the finish line].

While early works often portrayed travel as a means to bridge divides and realise dreams of a better life, this novel has revealed the limitations and failures of such aspirations. Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel has exposed the inherent inequalities and power dynamics that persist within migration encounters, emphasising the need for a more nuanced understanding of solidarity. This study is a call to examine the complexities of cross-cultural interactions and to consider alternative pathways to genuine and transformative solidarity in an ever-changing global landscape.

This novel eloquently highlights how, in pursuit of a better life, young African migrants daringly embark on the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The journey begins with a determination to escape poverty, violence, and limited opportunities in their homelands. The promise of a more prosperous life across the Mediterranean serves as a beacon of hope for these brave souls. As they set out on their perilous venture, they must traverse through a labyrinth of dangers, risking their lives every step of the way.

Migrants endure the constant threat of being preyed upon by armed smugglers and human traffickers. Those fortunate enough to survive must then face the hazardous sea crossing. Boarding overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels, they brave the unpredictable waters of the Mediterranean. These makeshift boats are often operated by unscrupulous traffickers, who care little for the well-being of their human cargo. Tragically, many of these boats capsize or sink, leading to countless drownings and a deepening refugee crisis. Furthermore, European authorities have enacted stringent measures to deter migration. Detention centres, often overcrowded, become their temporary homes. Even if they secure some form of asylum, the challenges are far from over. Integration into European societies presents another uphill battle. Language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination hinder their efforts to build a stable life. Many face limited access to education and job opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and marginalisation.

Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel offers a poignant insight into the reality experienced by many young Africans who undertake the crossing of the Mediterranean. It highlights the hopes, dreams and disappointments of these migrants in search of solidarity and social justice. Their journey to Europe embodies a complex and dissonant experience, marked by the duality of discordance between their ideals of cosmopolitanism and north-south solidarity. Motivated by the desire for a better life and the pursuit of environments that reflect their cherished values of inclusivity, tolerance, and cooperation, they embark on a perilous migration across the Mediterranean.

In their homelands, they envision the West as a haven, where the principles of cosmopolitanism flourish, and cultural diversity is embraced. They hope to break free from the shackles of limited opportunities and prevailing prejudices, seeking a place where their talents and aspirations can thrive unhampered. However, upon arrival on the other side of the Mediterranean, their optimistic dreams collide with a harsh reality. They encounter an unexpected and cruel response to their aspirations. Despite their eagerness to contribute to their newfound societies, they are met with scepticism and resistance, based solely on their origin. The ideals of cosmopolitanism, once so promising and alluring, begin to falter under the weight of this bitter reception.

The disillusionment experienced by these young migrants extends further, creating a tension between their ideals and the north-south solidarity they hoped to find. As they witness the vast economic disparities and social injustices in their new European host countries, they become

acutely aware of their role in perpetuating these inequalities. Their presence as migrant workers fuels the very system they sought to escape, inadvertently becoming a part of a cycle that often exploits and marginalises people from their home continent. This dualism of this dissonance leaves them torn between their individual aspirations and their internal struggle to balance their personal pursuits with the north-south solidarity adds in relation to the complexity of their experiences. The quest for solidarity north-south becomes a myth of a holy grail in the midst of a failed cosmopolitan ideals within cross-cultural encounters.

6. Conclusion

This study has highlighted that in the face of lack of solidarity and prospects in their home countries and in Africa in general, young Africans find themselves compelled to seek a better life elsewhere, driven by the hope of finding supportive communities and social justice. However, it was revealed that the reality they encounter on their journey exposes the harsh truth of restrictive migration policies that obstruct their aspirations. Closed borders, unwelcoming immigration policies, human trafficking and mistreatments by host immigration authorities contribute to their disappointment, reinforcing social injustice and thwarting their dreams.

Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel serves as a poignant denouncement of these systemic exclusionary practices that young African migrants face. It sheds light on the challenges they confront both individually and structurally, urging society to reflect on its migration policies and consider how to better welcome and support these hopeful seekers of a brighter future. This novel stands as a stark reminder of the urgent need for change, urging a re-evaluation of the approach to migration and the treatment of those who cross borders in search of a better life. The author's intention is clear: to provoke deep contemplation on the complexities of cross-cultural interactions and to ignite conversations about genuine and transformative solidarity.

The journey of young African migrants, as portrayed by N'Kaloulou, should serve as a catalyst for change. It is a call to action, urging policymakers and societies to move beyond superficial solutions and delve into the root causes of migration. The novel's revelations prompt readers to question the notion of "fortress Europe" and the pervasive fear of the other that leads to exclusionary policies.

Moreover, the novel reminds readers of shared human solidarity and interconnectedness. It challenges readers to consider how they can build bridges of understanding and empathy, rather than walls of division and indifference. True solidarity requires breaking down the barriers that prevent genuine integration and creating pathways for mutual growth and prosperity.

In the global landscape of the 21st century, where migration is a defining aspect of the interconnected world, the novel's message resonates deeply. It is a call to embrace complexity, challenge preconceptions, and recognize the potential for positive change through solidarity.

Finally, this study has demonstrated how Bernard N'Kaloulou's novel offers a powerful indictment of inequalities and discriminations that hinder young Africans' dreams and perpetuate social injustice. By embracing the complexities of interactions and pursuing genuine solidarity, it is possible to work towards a world where borders are not barriers, but gateways to understanding and prosperity for all.

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