

Picaros and shapeshifters: the postcolonial picaresque style in GauZ's *Standing Heavy*

Minna Niemi

To cite this article: Minna Niemi (2024) Picaros and shapeshifters: the postcolonial picaresque style in GauZ's *Standing Heavy*, *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 18:1, 50-69, DOI: [10.1080/21674736.2024.2313827](https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2024.2313827)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2024.2313827>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 22 Mar 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 169



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Picaros and shapeshifters: the postcolonial picaresque style in GauZ's *Standing Heavy*

Minna Niemi 

Department of Language and Culture, The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway



ABSTRACT

I read GauZ's *Standing Heavy* in connection with the postcolonial picaresque style, as GauZ's Ivorian immigrant characters are robust survivors who see through the French system and criticize it through their anti-idealist viewpoints. This cynical view, often disclosed through roguish language, provides the author the possibility of expressing aggression toward the unfair system and highlighting the characters' need to find their agency within its unequal structures. Meanwhile, the publisher's marketing techniques and the author's media appearances have contributed to the novel's great success on the literary market; however, I argue that the novel's success on the market should not diminish our understanding of its cultural criticism. Instead, the author himself may act as a shapeshifter in the competitive cultural marketplace, since his engagement in strategies of self-exotism exposes our sanctimonious need as readers to expect authenticity from African authors in Western contexts when they have to conform to Western codes.

KEYWORDS

Postcolonial picaresque novel; bildungsroman; precarity; irony; GauZ; *Standing Heavy*

GauZ's first novel *Standing Heavy* (*Debout-Payé*, 2014) creates a picture of Ivorian immigrants as half-outsiders, precariously surviving for decades on the rough cultural margins of Paris. I show here that the novel can be read in close connection with the picaresque style, because GauZ's picaros are tough outcasts who see through the French system and denounce it through their anti-idealist viewpoints. I further demonstrate that such cultural criticism can be read in the context of postcolonial satire: the novel's cynical view of the French system, often disclosed through roguish and vulgar language, provides the author the possibility of expressing some aggression toward the unfair system and highlighting the characters' central need to find their own agency within its unequal structures. Yet even if the novel's picaresque style is in many ways refreshing, because it emphasizes the characters' agency in adverse situations, picaresque novels cannot be considered more authentic than other representations of subaltern groups. Instead, these novels, including *Standing Heavy*, are mediated and stylized depictions of undocumented immigrants. I briefly examine the

CONTACT Minna Niemi  Mni139@uit.no  Department of Language and Culture, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, 9037 Tromsø, Norway.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

novel in the context of the theory of the postcolonial exotic, which is predicated on a commodified representation of the resistant outsider position, to show how the publisher's marketing techniques and the author's media appearances have contributed to the novel's great success in the literary market. At the same time, however, I remain wary of the idea that the economic success of a postcolonial novel should foreclose or silence the novel's poignant and astute representation of the terrifying social conditions affecting its characters. The novel's success on the market should not diminish our understanding of its cultural criticism. Thus, one can say that the novel appeals to the market and functions within it, yet it is also critical of the market. These issues cannot be separated from one another, and they characterize different sides of the same problematic, which, as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, remains essential to study.

I then move on to show that the author himself may act as a trickster or a shapeshifter in the competitive cultural marketplace to ensure his novel's success, and that he becomes capable, like his characters, of subverting our expectations as his audience. Rather than reading this as a lack of authenticity, I see this as a picaresque move and a subtle commentary on global/regional literary markets, which are not made or maintained by African writers who nevertheless have to compete in them. To a certain extent, such writerly trickster moves can call attention to the literary establishment's focus on markets. I conclude by addressing the notions of authenticity and authorial consistency, which as terms are often challenged by picaresque literature, since picaros are often unable to develop as characters within hostile conditions. GauZ's engagement in strategies of self-exotism similarly calls attention to our hypocritical need as readers to expect authenticity from African authors in Western contexts when they have to conform to Western codes and expectations. In sum, my application of the picaresque enables me to draw a connection between the resistance of the picaros in the novel and the playful marketing of the novel as parallel critical responses to Western capitalist marginalization of former colonial subjects. Picaros and shapeshifters reveal double standards, while they also utilize the existing systems in order to get by.

GauZ is the pen name of Armand Patrick Gbaka-Brédé, an Ivorian writer who published *Debout-Payé* in 2014 (*Standing Heavy*, 2022). Before writing the book, he emigrated to France to continue his studies in biochemistry, but he ended up living as an undocumented immigrant in Paris for a year, during which he also briefly worked in the security business. The author later moved back to the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), where he wrote the novel. The major storyline in *Standing Heavy* focuses on contemporary Parisian life, especially the unsafe positions of undocumented African immigrants in this former colonial center. The novel also presents the witty and humorous remarks of a security guard working at women's clothing stores in Paris. This new and funny, yet critical, aspect of the novel was highlighted by the publishers, and the novel "became a best seller and media phenomenon" (Sabo 55). The now-acclaimed semi-autobiographical novel was translated into English in 2022 and was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2023. Thus the novel has also claimed a place of prestige in the context of global Anglophone literature.

The postcolonial picaresque style

I will first examine the characters living in perilous conditions as savvy cultural critics who can handle their precarity without falling apart. Many characters, in their liminal situations, are forced into the realm of a dangerous, wandering existence. GauZ has employed a particular method of depicting risky immigrant lives by relying partly on a robust picaresque style, since the sad and difficult conditions fail to break the characters' agency, which is refreshing and important. "Picaro" often refers to the underdog who has to endure, and make the best of, hostile or otherwise difficult circumstances. Martin Halliwell notes that the picaro "is a prototype of the literary antihero, providing the author with a vehicle for ridiculing or exposing dominant social beliefs" (1001). Modern picaros hustle and find ways to deal with insecurity without losing their sense of self. We can clearly detect this style in depictions of undocumented immigrants in *Standing Heavy*. To use Jens Elze's terminology, postcolonial picaros, "like all picaros, clearly and explicitly resist ideas, political and otherwise" (59), and this comes across in GauZ's novel as well. Through a resistant and disinterested narrative voice, the novel shows suspicion toward Western ideals by creating characters who do not aspire to Western lifestyles, but instead see them as flawed.

Over recent decades, there has been much theoretical debate regarding how to represent subalternity in literature, and we can place the picaresque style in this discussion as well, since it challenges the empathetic view on otherness. In other words, there is a theoretical discussion relying on the idea that literature can help readers to empathize with subordinate others and therefore educate them about the precariat's vulnerable situation.¹ Ideally, reading fiction could serve an ethical function; however, empathetically reading and/or sentimentally writing about others' suffering has been shown to be much more complex than that (see, e.g. Limbu 77–87). Such an approach has, thus, been criticized as potentially paternalistic and Eurocentric. Joseph Slaughter, for instance, has identified a strong correlation between the bildungsroman and human rights discourse in the Western context, suggesting that the wretched literary subject can become accepted in Western culture as long as he/she submits him/herself to the perceived cultural norms of the host country and willingly accepts them. *Bildung*, as an enabling narrative, depicts, or at least suggests, the possibility of being included in the Western realm; as Slaughter notes, "the democratic social work of the Bildungsroman is to demarginalize the historically marginal individual—to make the socially unrepresentative figure representative" (157).

The picaresque novel is considered a counter-genre to the bildungsroman (Elze 40; see also Malkmus, *The German Picaro* 34–35). In fact, what we detect in GauZ's novel is a reverse trajectory to postcolonial *Bildung*, because the characters refuse to admire the French system and instead stubbornly pinpoint its weaknesses. Oana Sabo has also noted this aspect of the novel; she writes that "the novel's ethnographic stance does not...aim to elucidate how to become French.... It tackles instead, from the perspective of the immigrant, the restrictive politics of French immigration over several decades" (55). Along these lines, GauZ's characters inhabit the margins and attentively observe the system around them. In a way, the novel sends a message to its readers that their empathy is not needed: instead, it is their own system that is

the problem. This is refreshing, and I connect this resistance to a discussion of the postcolonial picaresque novel, which has been theorized by Elze and Rob Nixon. I am not suggesting that the novel is a modern picaresque novel per se, but it borrows some elements from the picaresque.² More precisely, and pivotal to my reading of the novel in this regard, is its representation of the picaros' insecurity, combined with their steadfast refusal to admire or give in to Western ideals, which can be considered two quintessential parts of the postcolonial picaresque form. As Elze notes, "the picaresque novel is often evoked as the anti-idealist other of the dignified *Bildungsroman*," and he further suggests that "this anti-idealism [should be] grounded socially in the scarce landscapes of early modern Spain or the neoliberal shantytowns of the post-colony" (4). At the same time, he notes that postcolonial picaresque writing often becomes associated "with unreliability, impurity, with a comic voice, with anti-essentialism, with mimicry and indeterminacy" (5). *Standing Heavy* represents the outskirts of Paris and their uneven circumstances through picaresque stylistic features, suggesting a playful yet sardonic view of French culture and the French immigration system.

Critical representations of poverty and class collisions have been integral to the picaresque style from the beginning. As Nixon writes, "The picaresque emerged between 1550 and 1559 in the Spanish Golden Age as a countergenre, a reminder that, for all the infusion into Spain of transatlantic imperial wealth, the great majority of Spaniards remained deeply poor" (56). Elze has emphasized uncertainty and insecurity as common features in postcolonial picaresque fiction, as well as in early picaresque literature. In both cases there is often a focus on social deprivation.³ But while there is a focus on precarity, the genre also features a certain critical approach to these matters. J. A. G. Ardila notes that "a picaresque novel has a satirical purpose and is committed to a social cause" (4). Thus my usage of the term picaresque here also refers to the characters' and the narrator's stubborn resistance to Western ideals and their often bitter commentary on them. I will focus on the ways in which precisely this derisive style expresses a picaresque mentality in the novel. Such representational techniques in the novel can be further addressed in connection with John Ball's analysis of the postcolonial "model of satiric resistance" (13), which attacks unequal power dynamics. Satire and the picaresque are also often understood as closely related genres (Scholes 101–11; see also Gussago, *Picaresque Fiction* 19). Like Ball, Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein note that sarcastic postcolonial "black humor" may "relieve some of the potential aggression" and suggest that such humor represents "a struggle for agency" in uneven social situations (9).

GauZ's satirical representation of migrant experiences in France can be further contextualized in earlier Francophone African writing; in the 1990s various novels reflecting such experiences were published, including Calixthe Beyala's now famous *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (1992) and J. R. Essomba's *Le Paradis du Nord* (1996) and Bessor's *53 cm* (1993). Gloria Nne Onyeoziri has scrutinized various uses of irony in Beyala's and Bessor's as well as in others' writing, and she states that this literary device enables African authors to say more than their actual uttered statements mean and to create "a fictional context in which something unsaid can finally be addressed" (16). Francophone African writers have often employed this method because "irony remains a subtle but powerful means for African women and men to undercut

assumptions of their economic and social powerlessness by adding ironic subtexts to their words” (Onyeoziri 2). GauZ’s first novel can be contextualized in this rich tradition of writing, because GauZ, like his literary model Ahmadou Kourouma (see Sabo 57), as well as his contemporaries Alain Mabanckou and Abdourahman Waberi, utilizes irony in skillful ways to express meanings that mitigate against Western mainstream thinking.

Additionally, GauZ’s utilization of the picaresque style creates an appealing form of half-outsider resistance, because the characters and the narrative refuse to accommodate or accept the cultural values around them. In this regard, Sabo writes that *Standing Heavy* “underscores the honesty and dignity of the undocumented immigrant in opposition to mainstream racism and crass materialism. Critics have highlighted precisely this positive message and praised the novel for giving voice to the subaltern” (55). Even if it the characters are pushed to act like picaros, there is an underlying sense of human dignity and honesty about them. This unshaken and uncorrupted resistance to the surrounding cultural inequalities suggests an idea of a heroic outsider who sees through hollow and superficial Western values. This aspect of the novel becomes emphasized in the sections where consumer culture is ridiculed, because the male security guard’s comments target everyone around him, often making fun of them. It is crucial to remember, though, that the picaresque style, as much as any other depiction of the subaltern, is literally mediated and stylized, and this needs to be seen in a broader context of literary markets. In fact, *Standing Heavy* and its subsequent marketing involve a certain paradox when examined in the context of its heavy cultural criticism. On one hand, the novel seems to be resistant to French culture and immigration policies, but on the other hand, it also occupies a particular niche for certain cultural commodities. As Graham Huggan wrote twenty years ago, it is often precisely the notion of resistance that appeals to the markets for postcolonial literature.⁴

Nevertheless, cultural production in today’s world is tied to neoliberal markets, and that observation should not kill the discussion of art’s capacity to also criticize the world it is immersed in and is a part of; even if it cannot be separated from the market, its possibly critical attitudes toward the market should be worthy of examination. In fact, *Standing Heavy* is rich in cultural criticism, which is relevant to study. I therefore agree with Jeffrey Nealon, who contends that the “‘equipmental’ force of literature at this historical juncture may precisely lie in intensifying and expanding our sense of ‘the poetic’ as a robust form of cultural engagement or analysis, whose force is enabled not by its *distance from* dominant culture, but its *imbri-cation with* contemporary socioeconomic forces” (154). *Standing Heavy* is an interesting literary work to scrutinize because of its complex relationship to the market: it denounces markets yet is also firmly anchored in them, since it was vigorously marketed and became a bestseller. In today’s world these phenomena cannot be separated from one another, and with playful marketing techniques, GauZ might even be calling attention to these matters.

It conclude therefore that the author himself may act as a shapeshifter in the competitive cultural marketplace, because his engagement in strategies of self-exotism exposes our sanctimonious need as readers to expect authenticity from African authors in Western contexts when they have to conform to Western codes.

Sardonic representations of French immigration policies

In *Standing Heavy*, GauZ has represented key moments in French immigration history over the past fifty years, and these moments are all narrated from a sarcastic point of view, highlighting the outsider status of his characters. The novel covers the perilous immigrant existence in France since the 1960s and shows how all three major characters, Ferdinand, Kassoum, and Ossiri, are compelled to live like modern picares due to their impermanent and fragile lives in Paris; however, all of them satirically observe the culture around them. By creating a historical overview of French immigration policies, the novel depicts how the processes of exclusion have functioned in the past and how they continue to operate in the present. *Standing Heavy* follows the lives of these three protagonists, whose experiences are recorded by a third-person narrator, and develops two connected story lines. Ferdinand, who arrives in France in the 1960s, represents the older generation of Ivorian immigrants, whereas Ossiri and Kassoum arrive in the 1990s. They are all very different characters: Kassoum and Ferdinand resemble picares more than the highly educated Ossiri because they are willing to exploit the system if need be in order to survive. Even if two out of three of them end up disappearing, the novel emphasizes their endurance rather than their vulnerability.

The picaresque attitude of disinterest and the antihero mentality are early on represented by Ferdinand, who belongs to a group of older immigrants. His disillusionment is strongly contrasted with his cousin André's view on things, as André belongs to a group of young Ivorian intellectuals who examine the current state of Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the French system. When Ferdinand arrives in Paris in the 1960s, the long-standing Ivorian president Félix Houphouët-Boigny is in power, and Houphouët-Boigny is condemned by the smart and intellectual André. By contrast, Ferdinand is not interested in politics, and in fact, to a certain extent, he succeeds in life because he is not politically active.

Ferdinand's story is narrated in the section "The Bronze Age 1960–1980," which represents Ferdinand's contemptuous commentary on the presidential election of 1974. Ferdinand works as a security guard at Les Grands Moulins de Paris, and his story captures the French anti-immigrant movements in the 1970s, partially triggered by the oil crisis. Laila Amine writes that "In the shadow of the 1973 oil crash that led to France's deindustrialization, the crisis of social housing and unemployment became synonymous with the crisis of immigration" (94). The government restricted immigrant residency policy and "ordered massive raids in select neighborhoods and immediate deportation of undocumented foreigners" (94). *Standing Heavy* closely follows "The Crisis" and its various political ramifications. It depicts how housing problems are blamed on immigrants when the oil crisis hits Paris. The main characters mostly live in the RSCI, "the Residence for Students from Côte d'Ivoire," a "filthy, ramshackle, tumbledown, overcrowded hellhole in the heart of the French capital" (*Standing Heavy* 146–47). The residents are pushed against each other and fight for minimal living space; the narrator explains that "in the early summer of 1974, the atmosphere in the residence was as toxic as the atmosphere in France" (49).

The narrator further comments on president Georges Pompidou's sudden death in 1974 by suggesting that "the 'oil shock' had probably finished him off" (52).

Pompidou's death is referred to in a casual and informal manner, suggesting emotional distance from the nation's matters. Ferdinand follows the presidential election debates and ironically notes that each candidate

had the solution to "The Crisis"...One of these ideas was that there were too many foreigners in France. During "The Crisis," they were stealing jobs from true-born Frenchmen, snatching the bed from the pure or the bread from the poor. It was intolerable.... The presidency, therefore, would be conferred on whoever came up with the best "idea" to stem the tide of those hordes of thankless foreigners. (56)

In this crisis situation, French hostility toward immigrants becomes clear when they are turned into scapegoats. And we can detect an astute use of irony in the statement in which the narrator pretends to sympathize with the voice of the presidential candidates who are concerned about the ways in which the "thankless foreigners" are taking jobs and "snatching the beds" from "true-born Frenchmen" and how this is "intolerable." This acerbic cynicism foregrounds the point of view of those "others" presumably stealing from the French population.

This is a passage in *Standing Heavy* where the picaresque disillusionment comes across, suggesting a lack of belief in the developmentalist ideal of inclusion. Specifically, rather than idealizing left-wing French politics as more immigration-friendly, the novel discloses its insincerity. In 1974, while observing the presidential debates, the narrator explains how "Ferdinand loathed hypocrites and was happy to see the balding left-wing bastard [François Mitterrand] being publicly put in his place. It was this...riposte [to Mitterrand] that led to Giscard d'Estaing winning the presidential election in May" (57). The narrator notes that after Valéry Giscard d'Estaing becomes president, "he appointed a man named Poniowski as Minister of the Interior. Poniowski immediately legislated to introduce 'residence permits' to 'deter' foreigners and signed a decree preventing family reunifications that would come into force the following summer" (57). The fact that the right-wing candidate wins leads to terrible consequences for immigrants, but regardless Ferdinand, as a postcolonial pica-ro, has no sympathy for Mitterrand or "the left-wing slaphead [who] had been Minister for the Colonies. The Malagasy and Cameroonian survivors of the revolutions that had been brutally and bloodily suppressed still remembered his sense of humanism and heart" (57). Through Ferdinand's disappointed eyes, French politics, whether it represents the ideas of the left or the right, is shown to be exclusionary and often violent toward postcolonial populations. The use of derogatory language speaks to this effect, as again roguish and disrespectful language is used when the presidential candidate is called a "bastard" and later a "slaphead." Furthermore, the use of irony here is sharp, as the colonial violence in which Mitterrand has been implicated is mockingly associated with his "sense of humanism and heart" (57). Both the derogatory language concerning high-level politicians who remain dear to the nation and the anti-idealist attitude exhibited by Ferdinand relate to the character's need to release aggression and to maintain his own agency in an overall hostile situation.

We can further understand this as the author's way of making social commentary while utilizing the picaresque style and depicting Ferdinand as an antihero, and, as Halliwell has noted, creating such a character enables the writer to express

disapproval of and reveal surrounding value systems. As a picaro, Ferdinand refuses to believe in leftist dreams, which, he understands, are implicated in colonial atrocities. This goes against the ideals of the bildungsroman (the picaresque novel's counter-genre), which would rather conform to the ideals of the nation and to the options it provides. Rather than cherishing ideals of inclusion, "the picaresque depicts what happens when one takes the last resort and actually embraces the vulgar realities that produce precarity" (Elze 40). Ferdinand is not considering the French system as something appealing; nevertheless, he realizes that he must play along with it in order to get by, since, according to Ardila, "the picaro exploits his cunning" (4). Such cunning is represented in the novel by Ferdinand, who manages to bring his fiancée Odette to Paris before the law "preventing family reunifications" comes into force (57), but who employs undocumented immigrants illegally in his own business. However, these workers are needed, and hence the society willfully ignores these "illegal jobs," as is suggested by Ferdinand: "Everyone knows I employ undocumented workers, from the firms who sub-contract me to the prefecture de Police, but they all turn a blind eye, because it suits them" (107). Ferdinand's cunning works well for a while, as his illegal security business momentarily propels him to middle-class prosperity; however, as the times change, he eventually loses his business and goes missing. When Ferdinand succeeds, he does so not because of his political ideals, but because of the lack of them (see also Fronsman-Cecil 75–76).

The pessimistic view of French immigration policies continues to be expressed by the younger generation of Ivorian immigrants in Paris, and Ferdinand's story gives historical context to the more contemporary immigration crisis that Ossiri and Kassoum face in the 1990s and early 2000s. Kassoum comes from the Abidjan "ghettos" in the Ivory Coast, whereas Ossiri has a more educated background. Kassoum, like Ferdinand, represents a picaresque mentality and is "in opposition to qualities of virtue and decency" (Halliwell 1001), but Ossiri is the moral backbone of the duo and often takes care of Kassoum, who in the end is the only one of the three characters who survives the French system. Ossiri and Kassoum's stories are partly narrated in the section "The Golden Age: 1990–2000." Unlike Ferdinand, they belong to the group of "illegals" that was created by the 1974 legislation. When they arrive in the 1990s, they are both hired by Ferdinand, who now has a security company of his own. We see how Ossiri and Kassoum are heavily stigmatized as illegal immigrants existing in the shadows of the French capital, and hence we can relate their plight to that of the classic picaro, who "struggles to overcome his egregious origins by seeking social ascent" (Ardila 4). However, the most dangerous part of their existence is that they risk their lives every time they move in public. The novel refuses to sentimentalize this, however, and instead represents it as a terrifying yet normal part of the existence of undocumented immigrants. One day "Ossiri went out and never came back. No-one phones the police to report an undocumented immigrant as a missing person. Aside from a few questions from close friends, no-one made any effort to find him. Ossiri was no-one to anyone, and to everyone he was no-one" (166). No matter how "street smart" Ossiri has been, as Kassoum calls it, he still disappears (167), even if he has always carefully navigated the cityscape of Paris and "never took the metro without a valid ticket" (166) in order to avoid the risk of getting caught. However, something has happened to him, and Kassoum has no means of finding out

what it is. This tragic life of impermanence and the constant experience of insecurity drives these two characters to a situation of both danger and drifting.

Nevertheless, rather than highlighting the characters' desperation, *Standing Heavy* again emphasizes steadfast anti-idealism in its representation of the 1990s, as it does in connection with the 1974 presidential elections and the subsequent laws drastically affecting the status of immigrants. In fact, one of the most derisive ways of targeting the French culture relates precisely to the novel's reference to the *sans-papiers* movement, which is usually considered a hopeful revolt against a repressive order, but GauZ's novel again highlights anti-idealism.⁵ The "[*sans-papiers*] movement...emerged in 1996 in response to ill-conceived political-administrative policies targeting the so-called 'problem of immigration'" and as a revolt against "the tightened conditions for the acquisition of residency permits [which] stranded thousands of immigrants in an inextricable web of illegality" (de Laforcade 395). This "web of illegality" is precisely what determines Kassoum's and Ossiri's existence, yet *Standing Heavy* does not represent this movement as an event that could help their situation. Instead, the novel mockingly depicts this historical event, in which 300 Africans occupied churches in France in 1996. The narrator acidly tells us that occupying churches "in an attempt to avoid being deported from France" was a good idea because "Blessed France, handmaiden of the church, would not dare to invade a place where the two-thousand-year-old communion of the Holy Eucharist took place every Sunday. Sometimes, even undocumented immigrants have brilliant ideas" (159). The irony is that a French church, not the lives of undocumented migrants, remains sacred, as the "blessed" country cares about its precious historical buildings and Christian traditions to the extent that it "would not dare to invade" such a holy space in order to get rid of the unwanted immigrants. The cutting tone continues as the narrator explains how this incident has attracted media attention, and when

The police [finally] laid siege to the church.... for the duration of the siege, both the left- and right-wing press found a blue-eyed boy from Senegal who answered to the caricatural name of Mamadou. His actual name was Ababacar Diop, but when dealing with a Negro, you say Mamadou; it's simpler and easier to pronounce. Mamadou was photogenic, and he spoke French without too much of an accent—much better than the illiterates he was held up with inside the chapel. (159)

The narrator sarcastically explains that this "blue-eyed boy" with fluent French skills appeals to the hearts of French people, and the narrator further explains that Diop's situation becomes the exception: he is saved and granted a visa, whereas other undocumented immigrants are deported.⁶ The narrator also ironically identifies with the French audience by stating that when talking about Africans, "you say Mamadou," mimicking and parodying the logic that requires a simplification of African cultures and languages as well as producing a domesticated image of cultural others. Rather than improving the situation of the undocumented immigrants, the *sans-papiers* movement becomes a self-centered Western show highlighting the good will of popular French people: "famous White actors and actresses had exposed themselves in defense of The Cause, thereby stealing the limelight from any Black spokespeople. As a result, the riot police were able to evict the residents of the RSCI with minimal fuss or difficulty" (161). The eviction of the RSCI has serious consequences in the lives

of the Ivorian immigrants, because the RSCI has been a key location in their lives for decades, even if it is just “the filthy shithole on the boulevard Vincent-Auriol in the centre of Paris” (111). The scatological description of the RSCI emphasizes its unfortunate status as a place of accommodation, yet this is all the Ivorian immigrants have. While the leftist intellectuals focus on “their cause,” real damage is done to the people perilously living in this shady, yet life-sustaining, place.

Furthermore, the narrator sarcastically notes that “Ever since, at every highly publicized eviction, everyone had dreamed of being The Mamadou. *MSB syndrome: Mamadou of Saint-Bernard syndrome*” (160). It is sharply noted that no matter how serious their cases of MSB syndrome are, the other undocumented immigrants do not manage to empower themselves or propel themselves into freedom as “Mamadou” has done. With this particular event, it is the third-person narrative voice, rather than one of the characters condemning the French ideals, that becomes sardonic. This voice aligns the novel with the picaresque, which often “deconstructs and subverts the supposedly enabling notions of self-empowerment and freedom” (Elze 40). In other words, *Standing Heavy* shows how “MSB syndrome” remains a self-sabotaging dream because it keeps the immigrants in their place, rather than encouraging them to challenge the system. Playfully and ironically naming the tragic situation “MSB syndrome” further distances the style from seriousness and sentimentalism. Instead, the novel’s picaresque style employs such elements as “playfulness, irony, episodic incoherence, and anti-essentialism” (Elze 86). The novel takes narrative distance from Western ways of sympathizing with undocumented immigrants and reveals the perceived brutality of the situation. This bitter depiction of matters again gives the author a chance to release some aggression against the system. I agree with Jeremy Lane, who has also analyzed Gauz’s pessimistic view of French humanitarianism and the *sans-papiers* movement. Lane concludes his reading by claiming,

In *Debout-Payé*, Gauz offers an acerbic, incisive critique of the kind of limitations of apolitical humanitarianism...its taste for photogenic images of suffering victimhood; its eagerness to reduce the *sans papiers* to the role of “innocent expiatory victims” whose cause can redeem the sins of French society... In seeking to escape this stereotype of the expiatory victim, Gauz offers a subtle and detailed depiction of the *sans papiers*’ place within the contemporary political economy of France. (229)

I would like to add to this reading that it is especially the anti-idealist picaresque style that enables such perceptive depictions of these humanitarian fantasies in the novel.

The cynical representation of the *sans papier* movement is further connected to French humanitarians who arrive to help the “wretched” others at RSCI. In these circumstances, again, suspicion concerning humanitarianism is voiced effectively, as the narrator explains: “When local humanitarian associations arrived to support the RSCI residents, they realized it was all over. When... sundry humanitarian associations come knocking, you know you are up shit creek” (*Standing Heavy* 158). Rather than treating humanitarianism as a benevolent (yet potentially condescending) discourse, the novel discloses its effects on the immigrants in an almost naturalistic manner through scatological language: their presence represents not hope but acute despair. Again, *Standing Heavy* dissects Western ideals because it represents this

benevolence as a discourse seen from the perspective of the underdog who refuses to resign his agency and become the helpless other or the object of humanitarian help. The savvy postcolonial picaro refuses to believe in humanitarian missions supposed to help the doomed others. Instead, “while their [humanitarian associations’] members felt they were Christians who brought hope through social responsibility, to undocumented immigrants and the homeless, they were virtue-signalling symbols of their despair and a realistic portrait of their tragic situation” (158). Western goodwill just highlights their role as miserable others in the French paradise, another instance of the novel’s anti-idealism and thorough suspicion toward the surrounding cultural settings and beliefs.

Nevertheless, rather than highlighting the overwhelming misery of such situations, *Standing Heavy* underscores the two protagonists’ agency. Kassoum and Ossiri are depicted as persevering outsiders; however, historical instability is represented in these characters’ life stories as well. Namely, if the oil crisis in the 1970s heavily affects Ferdinand’s generation of immigrants, then the attack against the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 shakes Ossiri and Kassoum’s life, but also destroys Ferdinand’s business and leads to his disappearance. After the attack, Ossiri explains to Kassoum, “After today, the world will never be the same again. Take my word for it: a month from now, you and I won’t have a job” (145–46). As predicted by Ossiri, after 9/11 everything is different, in Paris as well, illustrating their uncertain position and lack of safety net, because everything changes overnight, leaving them unemployed. In this desperate and vulnerable situation, they dare to claim the city: “Kassoum was...beginning to get to know Ossiri. The shy and reserved boy who lived at the RSCI was utterly unlike the stellar, generous being who showed him around Paris and made him see life from a perspective different to that of an undocumented immigrant constantly fearful of being stopped by the police” (155–56). Instead of staying in the ghetto at the RSCI, Kassoum follows Ossiri to the city and “did things he had never imagined” (154). Even if this remains a dangerous survival technique, they make the life they can by improvising and taking risks.

We can discuss this drifting existence in connection with the concept of the picaro whose life is associated with a meandering lifestyle (Elze 24). Ruth Bush has written about *Standing Heavy* in conjunction with the notion of “The Parisian *flâneur*—a free-wheeling wanderer, observer, and reporter of city life” (99), and has noted how “Gauz’s celebrated novel...offers a formally experimental and satirical reworking of the migrant-*flâneur* figure operating as *chômeur* and *débrouillard*” (100). The classic *flâneur* is usually considered a “lounger, with connotation of leisure and idleness” whereas “*chômeur*...[is] an unemployed person [and] *débrouillard*...a resourceful, wily person” (112). The last two terms come close to the notion of the picaro. As Bush suggests, Gauz’s characters significantly differ from the classic *flâneur*, who can usually roam freely—Gauz’s characters are often unemployed, exist without legal support, and must rely on their own resourcefulness. In many ways, the novel represents what Nixon says about the picaro’s life: “His or her existence depends on quick-witted improvisation coupled to expedient parasitism” (56). Such a coping mechanism becomes particularly clear in connection with the hardly existing labor market after 9/11. The narrator notes, “Thanks to all of Ossiri’s acquaintances and friends, Kassoum always found work. Removals, setting up and dismantling market stalls, removing

rubble, gardening etc.—wherever there was work to be found, Kassoum was on hand” (161). He has to accept any job that comes along, and thanks to Ossiri there are acquaintances who can help.

The illegal and shady labor markets easily exploit characters like Kassoum and Ossiri, who cannot have any guarantees in life because they are constantly waiting for their residence permits to be processed by the state. However, a couple of years later, “paradoxically, when terrorist attacks began to immigrate to Europe with the Madrid train bombings [in 2004], the security sector was once again opened up to people like Kassoum with dubious legal status” (161–62). Whenever security guards are hired in the city, a big group of African immigrants apply for the jobs. To be hired would mean “an escape from unemployment or a zero-hours contract” (3), and this needs to happen “by any means necessary. Security guarding is one of those means” (3). The title of the novel refers to this phenomenon: “In the Ivoirian community in France, security is a profession so deeply rooted that it has spawned a specific terminology...[in which] *standing heavy* designates all the various professions that require the employee to remain standing in order to earn a pittance” (22). The characters desperately accept low-paid, illegal jobs in the security business when they are available. The novel’s postcolonial picaros are paradoxically both needed in the labor market and excluded from the official structures of society that would enable belonging.⁷ Their lives remain insecure, which is naturally highly ironic since they work in the security business. Subha Xavier has read this theme of unfair labor conditions in the context of contemporary Francophone African writing and maintains that “African migrant texts in French like those of Alain Mabanckou, Fatou Diome or Gauz—to name only few—specifically address the exploitative work conditions that African immigrants face in France” (“African Boat Narratives,” 243).

In this context too, while depicting such unfair labor market conditions, *Standing Heavy* refuses to create a heartbreaking scenario of this dilemma, and instead employs vulgar language, playfulness, and stereotyping in its piercing representation of the problem. Thus, the narrator explains how the African immigrants have to utilize “the medieval circumlocutions and arse-licking phrases of covering letters” in order to compete in this questionable labor market, which partially relies on the “jumble of ‘noble savage’ clichés,” and “every Black man...has come to use these clichés to his advantage” (3). The narrative builds upon naturalistic elements and brutal realism in its depiction of these matters too, because it emphasizes the picaros’ coping mechanisms, in these challenging circumstances. Here we can see an example of how post-colonial fictions’ uses of “subversive laughter, carnivalesque exhilarations, wry smiles, selfdeprecation, gallows humour, or black humour...reflect a struggle for agency, an imbalance of power, and a need, a desire, for release” (Reichl and Stein 9). The rogue-style endurance is often associated with carnivalesque laughter that also targets the surrounding society without mercy.

The strong criticism of Western cultures continues in the sections representing consumer culture in Parisian clothing stores, since consumerism is portrayed as a thoroughly frivolous and useless addiction people are unable to resist. Ossiri is the witness to this ridiculed culture, but his own point of view is the only one that is not made fun of. Therefore, this satirical approach might also create an idea of Ossiri as a stoic hero. On one hand, this narrative method, thus, provides Gauz with the

tool of disclosing these cultural patterns; on the other, it romanticizes the male outsider position. These sections depicting consumerism's artificial and alienating nature take up half the book, and their postmodern stylistic features break with the more realistic narrative style that is used to depict Ferdinand, Kassoum, and Ossiri's various experiences in Paris. This ruptured style paradoxically represents the "reality" of the security guard's fragmented day, a series of disconnected moments related through various observations at the hectic department store. However, Ossiri's agency and perseverance are again highlighted in these sections, and his active inner life is depicted as one of the many techniques security guards employ to endure this line of work; the narrator notes that "In order to survive in this job, to keep things in perspective, to avoid lapsing into cosy idleness or, on the contrary, fatuous zeal and bitter aggressiveness, requires either knowing how to empty your mind of every thought higher than instinct and spinal reflex or having a very engrossing inner life.... Each to his own goals" (4–5). Ossiri has to make the best of the circumstances he finds himself in, and these fleeing thoughts seem to give him some inner agency.

The narrator tells us that "Ossiri started working security at the Bastille branch of Camaïeu [a women's clothing store]" (12), and the first thing he notes is that "These women buy clothes as though they were perishable goods. They pop in every month, every week, every day, sometimes several times a day" (13). In a way Ossiri notices what Stavrakakis has written about "the profound socio-political implications of consumer culture, whose hegemony...[is connected] to a *society of commanded enjoyment*" (Stavrakakis 22). The novel represents forms of consumerism in which owning objects becomes a promise of the ever-escaping satisfaction of a given subject's lack (see McGowan 211). The novel's biting commentary on Western hypocrisies, and particularly on its obsessional consumer culture, remains sharp because rather than representing the impoverished immigrant as desiring consumer goods, the novel instead shows how Ossiri, an apt chronicler of superfluous and hollow consumption patterns, exposes the hollow nature of this culture. And this is exactly what GauZ had in mind while writing the book. He has explained in an interview that

When I found myself working as a security guard during the sales in a department store in Paris, I immediately understood that this device was ideal for observing without being seen. I was at the very heart of the absurdity of the consumerist society. And as an African, I could finally be a "reverse ethnologist," coolly describing the behaviour of those who had described us as entomologists describe ants.

Strategically, the novel represents the subject forced to deal with the insecure labor market which eagerly exploits him, not as a mere victim of these circumstances. Instead, Ossiri is portrayed as a character who, unlike the French consumers, challenges the logic of the hollow appeal to consume and acts as a "reverse ethnologist" instead. Here GauZ's employment of the reverse ethnologist gaze also continues a pattern established by other Francophone African writers, including Ousmane Sembène and Fatou Diome.⁸

Nevertheless, *Standing Heavy* not only dissects these cultural patterns, but again relies on roguish language and plays with gross stereotypes, and hence deliberately crosses the line of decency. It takes the reverse ethnologist approach to the extreme, with the remarks concerning female bodies and habits open to almost unlimited

commentary. One paragraph notes how “African women rarely buy anything other than tops because of their callipygian anatomy. Trousers, shorts, culottes and the like are made according to the vital statistics of the White woman, who is naturally flat, by women in Chinese factories, who are naturally flat” (15). Not only women’s bodies but also their behavior patterns are repeatedly reviewed, and in a vignette entitled “The Cute Little Top,” women’s behavior is ridiculed quite directly, when the narrator explains that “OMG, this little top is just sooooo cute!...is one of the most common phrases used to describe the tops at Camaïeu. It is always said with head bowed, eyelashes fluttering, chin holding the aforementioned ‘cute little top’ as it is carefully held taut against the breasts. The presence of an appreciative female friend is optional” (18). This detailed mimicry of perceived female behavior makes the female customers sound unintellectual, to say the least. These observations are sexist, and in these instances, female characters again become exposed to the unfiltered male gaze. We can relate these chauvinist notes to the picaresque genre, which has historically been considered male-centered and even misogynist (see Cruz 7; Gussago, “A Perfect Match” 79). Unfortunately, the analysis of consumer culture is made at the expense of women. The novel, as an example of the picaresque style, pushes limits and relies on offensive language and stereotyping. However, these witty remarks poke their targets across the board, as all the nations, ethnicities, cultures, and genders (particularly women) are provocatively made fun of in the funhouse of the Parisian department store. The picaresque playfulness reaches its peak in these passages: there is an almost carnivalesque ethos in these sections in which consumer culture is depicted in a form of hysterical chaos.

These passages also idealize the male point of view, because the male security guard is portrayed as the impoverished outsider who has to put up with this culture. Furthermore, male intellectual savviness is compared to unintellectual female customer habits, since the security guard sometimes contemplates mathematical formulas while interpreting consumerist patterns. The narrator explains that “The Laplace transform is a complex mathematical operation [which] these days...is used in financial modelling, i.e. to determine prices... A complex equation to regulate frivolous pleasures” (29). Furthermore, toward the end of the novel, this idealized male outsider position is highlighted, when Ossiri’s life is sacrificed in the system that does not offer him legal rights. In his last words, his genuine care for Kassoum and his astute assessment of consumer culture are exposed, when after his disappearance, “Kassoum found a scribbled note in Ossiri’s sloping hand [placed in Kassoum’s coat pocket]: ‘Leave the vultures’ work to the vultures’” (167). Ossiri has also “made Kassoum promise that, from the day he got his residence permit, he would stop doing ‘paid standing.’ ‘I have never seen you as happy as the time we spent together working as gardeners,’ he said simply. Two days later, Ossiri went out and never came back” (166). This ending also showcases the picaresque novel’s tendency to foreground male homosociality (see Davis 138), emphasizing the strong bond between Kassoum and Ossiri. Gardening also serves as an image of an uncontaminated world where they have experienced some moments of happiness. Furthermore, whereas others are depicted as mesmerized by consumerism, Ossiri maintains his critical distance from this imperfect world all the way to his tragic end, and his inner integrity remains unshaken. All these resisting aspects of the novel create a sense of active

outsiders stoically condemning the shortcomings of Western cultures, whether the flaws are understood in terms of treatment of immigrants in France throughout decades, humanitarianism, or consumerism. This aspect of the novel is particularly emphasized toward the end, as the resilient Ossiri disappears in the world of the cultures.

The all-consuming markets of cultural commodities

In many ways, *Standing Heavy* emphasizes the idea of dissecting Western values through the outsider point of view, because it goes against the codes of developmentalist thinking that could lead to inclusion or to a host culture's acceptance. This comes close to what Elze writes about the postcolonial picaresque, which in contrast to the bildungsroman "is a form that exposes global relations of inequality, depicts them naturalistically, and seriously insists on their disabling precarity" (Elze 40). Misogynous commentaries aside, there is something refreshing about GauZ's style, and not surprisingly, the novel has been hailed as giving voice to the subaltern (see Sabo 55), and it has also been marketed as such. But as noted before, picaresque novels are also mediated, the voices they represent curated and stylized, as much as bildungsromane are. As Xavier notes, all "migrant texts...exploit a variety of national, political, racial, ethnic, and linguistic factors, making their economic success a result of conscious decision making about how the experience of immigration can be woven into the craft of fiction writing" (*The Migrant Text* 92). All the views on the subaltern are literally or culturally mediated, and the marketing of these texts plays further into this process of affirming the images such texts create.

Nevertheless, it is not just *Standing Heavy* that becomes commodified in the literary market; it is also the logic of cultural capitalism and the postcolonial exotic that informs the production and reception of postcolonial fiction on a broader scale. Over twenty years ago, Huggan wrote that "in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products" (6).⁹ The same trend has continued in the twenty-first century. Writers, including GauZ, become drawn into this game. On the whole, one should resist the thought of literature written more clearly as a form of resistance as somehow being able to resist such commodification.¹⁰ But before following too far the debates surrounding postcolonial literary markets, I would like to present my own argument here, namely, when closely scrutinizing the structures of global or regional postcolonial literary markets, I refuse to let the question of economic success, or lack of it, dictate the cultural or analytical potential of these novels. It is important that the discussion of the market of cultural commodities does not remain a way to undermine postcolonial authors or their work. Instead, it is pivotal to read literary products as part of the markets while they simultaneously judge these markets. As I suggested before, the force of literature is not its dissociation from capitalist culture, but its capacity to critically function within this culture (see Nealon 154). Sometimes the best way for a cultural commodity to remain critical is to embrace—and use—its very position as a commodity.

Thus, rather than chastising GauZ for not taking necessary distance from the market, I would like to read his marketing style as a picaresque move. There is no “pure” cultural criticism, criticism that avoids being “contaminated” by the market, just as there is no “outside” to the market. Therefore, I detect certain picaresque or trickster-type moves in the novel’s marketing and reception, which have also embraced certain types of playfulness, just as the novel itself does. Some of these moves have strategically improved the novel’s sales. *Standing Heavy* reached an acclaimed *Livres Hebdo* list, which is “a weekly list of the fifty best-selling novels,” and stayed on the list for “sixteen weeks in 2014–15” (10–11). According to Sabo, “the achievement was in large part due to the marketing strategies and publicity campaign of Benoît Virot, the editor of Le Nouvel Attila, a small press founded in 2007” (52–53). This is further related to the book covers selected for the novel, as “great attention to format and cover design went into the production of *Debout-payé*” (Sabo 53). The cover of the French edition creates an enigmatic yet appealing aura for the novel. The language of the novel itself also promises an entertaining reading experience, and Sabo concludes that “While the dust jacket targets more playful readers, the book’s pages—where long and short paragraphs alternate, and words in italics, boldface, and underscored fonts catch the eye—give the impression of a fun and easy read for ‘average’ readers” (56). These marketing techniques, along with GauZ’s profile as an enigmatic and dazzling author who comments on his work in media, have created a certain aura around the novel and enhanced its sales. There is nothing subtle about this marketing agenda that draws attention to itself. Like everything else about the novel, its marketing also challenges existing boundaries. In discussing French literary markets, Xavier explains “how best-selling migrant texts are always entangled in the market ambitions of their authors” (*The Migrant Text* 70), and states that “financial success in the literary marketplace can no longer be conceived as the accidental after-effect of artistic genius” (91). At the same time, there are certain unspoken rules about such commercial success; as Sabo notes, “not all writers, however, are forthcoming about this oft repressed reality of artistic production and many fear losing the cultural legitimacy of their creative work to candid actions taken to secure financial viability” (91–92). The marketing of *Standing Heavy* makes this phenomenon explicit, to the extent that it might draw attention to itself as such.

I would like to relate this to another question of picaresque style, as well as to GauZ’s role as a writer. Bernhard Malkmus writes that “For [the picaro] playing a wide range of different roles is often a question of survival” (“Picaresque Narratology” 211). If we think about this in the context of the literary market, we could say that the novelist has to play different roles as well: GauZ might profile himself as an anti-capitalist, yet as an emerging Francophone African writer he has to compete on the market to make his work known. Here I have discussed GauZ’s characters as immigrants who have to live in a world that is not of their making. Not altogether differently, GauZ himself has emerged in the Francophone literary world, which has rules of its own. Literary markets are neither made nor controlled by African writers; thus, who says these markets should not be utilized by postcolonial writers to their own benefit? In other words, the literary establishment might create certain hypocrisies concerning markets and authors’ commercial successes, when in fact the writers’ mobility within these markets, maintained by multinational corporations, can be quite limited.

Malkmus further notes that picaros often question the notion of authenticity. Rather than targeting GauZ and blaming him for inauthenticity when securing financial success, I would like to think about the very premises of authenticity. Maybe a postcolonial African writer like GauZ has good reasons to teach us some lessons about it. By playing a writerly trickster role, he “implicitly debunks the very notion of authenticity and calls into doubt one of the tenets of post-Enlightenment and bourgeois culture, namely the consistency and organic development of character” (Malkmus, “Picaresque Narratology” 211). His fictional characters do not have the space or means to develop themselves in Western society. Thus why would we expect such bourgeois consistency from the writer who has satirically targeted the dishonesty of this same world? GauZ debunks such a notion of consistency and subverts the expectations of his audience. While so doing, he once again exposes Western double standards, but this time he targets the literary marketplace and the expectations set for the postcolonial authors.

Notes

1. One of the first advocates of this approach was Richard Rorty (see Rorty 123).
2. Regardless of their major focus on class divisions and societal hierarchies, picaresque narrative forms have proven to be difficult to define, because several different understandings of the style remain. My intention here is thus not to insist upon a reading of GauZ's novel as a picaresque novel per se. In fact, there are several elements in the novel that do not support the definition of it as a picaresque novel: it does not have a strictly autobiographical form or a first-person narrator, and it does not focus on the life of one picaro, but instead follows the lives of three protagonists whose experiences are recorded by a third-person narrator.
3. Elze thus wishes “to establish the ‘precarious’ as a generic marker of the picaresque” (10). Like Elze, Nixon has noted how the picaresque genre has re-emerged from postcolonial, fragile existence to depict the experiences of the global poor, bearing witness to an ever-growing economic discrepancy between the poor and the rich (56).
4. It has been recently discussed how both the market for postcolonial fiction and its reading audiences are complex and nuanced (see Benwell et al. 11).
5. GauZ is very critical of the *sans-papiers* movement, which usually is considered revolutionary. Geoffroy de Laforcade, for instance, notes that “a broad solidarity movement with the *sans-papiers* drew religious, trade union, and civil rights organizations to the defense of undocumented workers for the first time” (395). Even if GauZ's cynical view creates a dark picture of the movement in the novel, in reality some positive changes have taken place as well. For instance, Jennifer M. Wilks writes that in 2012 “Guianese legislator Christiane Taubira became justice minister” (91). Taubira has acted as a progressive politician in France throughout the twenty-first century, and Wilks maintains that for “Taubira, the goal is not to reify blackness or dismantle French republicanism but to deconstruct the essentialism behind the latter's purported colorblindness and challenge the persistence of antiblack racism” (92).
6. GauZ is referencing a historical figure with the same name. Diop acted as a spokesperson for the movement, published his book *Dans la peau d'un sans-papiers* in the following year (2017), and afterwards managed to capitalize on the movement, making several million euros (see Scopsi 175–76).
7. As Prem Kumar Rajaram notes, “Undocumented migrants may be a surplus population, but they are not outside of the political economy of the neoliberal state.... [instead, they are, paradoxically], at once locally embedded in economies and societies and excluded from a territorially inflected account of belonging” (78).

8. This technique is used, for instance, by Ousmane Sembène in *Le Docker noir* (1956) and by Fatou Diome in *La Préférence nationale* (2001). I thank the anonymous peer reviewer for making this observation.
9. Huggan and Sarah Brouillette have focused on questions of the literary marketplace in the context of anglophone postcolonial writing, but Xavier has demonstrated a similar trajectory in the French literary marketplace (*The Migrant Text* 70, 91). Sabo has also discussed these matters in the French context and writes that “a profitable market for migrant fiction informs and sustains literary production in contemporary France” (3) and that “migrant novels are an integral part of the French literary mainstream” (10). In other words, the novels’ depiction of potentially marginalized social themes is however firmly anchored in mainstream literary production.
10. As Brouillette writes, summarizing David Harvey’s thinking, “one of the most attractive ‘variations’ for capitalist repurposing is anything which seems antimarket and anticommercial” (132; see Harvey 409).

Disclosure statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

Notes on contributor

Minna Niemi is associate professor in the English literature section at the Arctic University of Norway. Her book *Complicity and Responsibility in Contemporary African Writing: The Postcolony Revisited* was published by Routledge in 2021. Her earlier work has appeared in *Callaloo*, the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, the *South African Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* and *ARIEL*. She is currently co-editing a collection of essays focusing on Zimbabwean politics of the past and working on her second monograph on western complicity in the postcolonial political arena.

ORCID

Minna Niemi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4554-8603>

References

- Amine, Laila. *Postcolonial Paris: Fictions of Intimacy in the City of Light*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.
- Ardila, J. A. G. “Introduction: Transnational Picaresque.” *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1–11.
- Ball, John C. *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel: V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Benwell, Bethan, James Procter, Gemma Robinson, et al. “Introduction.” *Postcolonial Audiences: Readers, Viewers and Reception*, edited by Bethan Benwell New York: Routledge, 2012. 1–23.
- Brouillette, Sarah. *Literature and the Creative Economy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Bush, Ruth. “Unworlding Paris: Flânerie and Epistemic Encounters from Baudelaire to Gauz.” *The Cambridge Companion to the City in World Literature*, edited by Ato Quayson and Jini Kim Watson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 98–114.
- Cruz, Anne J. “Figuring Gender in the Picaresque Novel: From ‘Lazarillo’ to ‘Zayas.’” *Romance Notes*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2010, pp. 7–20.

- Davis, Nina Cox. "Breaking the Barriers: The Birth of López de Ubeda's *Pícara Justina*." *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*, edited by Maiorino Giancarlo. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. 137–58.
- De Laforcade, Geoffroy. "Racialization and Resistance in France: Postcolonial Migrants, Besieged Cityscapes, and Emergent Solidarities." *WorkingUSA*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2006, pp. 389–405.
- Elze, Jens. *Postcolonial Modernism and the Picaresque Novel: Literatures of Precarity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Fronsman-Cecil, Dortha. "La Prise de la Bastille Libérerait Des Milliers de Prisonniers de Consommation: The 'Spirit of '68' in Gauz's *Debout-Payé*." *Etudes Francophones*, vol. 31, 2019, pp. 71–90.
- GauZ. *Standing Heavy*, translated by Frank Wynne. Quercus: Mclhose Press, 2022.
- GauZ. Interview. *The Booker Prizes*, 18 Apr, 2023. <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/gauz-interview-my-role-is-to-make-the-best-assist-then-trust-the>. Accessed 24 May 2023.
- Gussago, Luigi. "A Perfect Match? A Semiotic Analysis of the Wife Figure in Four Early Picaresque Novels." *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2023, pp. 79–97.
- Gussago, Luigi. *Picaresque Fiction Today: The Trickster in Contemporary Anglophone and Italian Literature*. Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL, 2016.
- Halliwell, Martin, et al. "Picaresque." *Encyclopedia of the Novel (2 Volumes)*, edited by P. Schellinger. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Lane, Jeremy F. *Republican Citizens, Precarious Subjects: Representations of Work in Post-Fordist France*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021.
- Limbu, Bishupal. "The Permissible Narratives of Human Rights; or, How to Be a Refugee." *Criticism*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2018, pp. 75–98.
- Malkmus, Bernhard. "Picaresque Narratology: Lazarillo de Tormes and Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi Und Der Friseur*." *Clowns, Fools and Picaros*, edited by David Robb. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007. 211–29.
- Malkmus, Bernhard. *The German Picaro and Modernity: Between Underdog and Shape-Shifter*. Continuum: New York, 2011.
- McGowan, Todd. *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Nealon, Jeffrey. *Post-Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Onyeoziri, Gloria Nne. *Shaken Wisdom: Irony and Meaning in Postcolonial African Fiction*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- Rajaram, Prem Kumar. "Common Marginalizations: Neoliberalism, Undocumented Migrants and Other Surplus Populations." *Migration, Mobility, & Displacement*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 67–80.
- Reichl, Susanne, and Mark Stein. "Introduction." *Cheeky Fictions*, edited by Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005. 1–23.
- Rorty, Richard. "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality." *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, edited by Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley. New York: Basic Books, 1993. 111–34.
- Sabo, Oana. *The Migrant Canon in Twenty-First-Century France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018.
- Scholes, Robert. "Towards a Poetics of Fiction: An Approach through Genre." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1969, pp. 101–11.

- Scopsi, Claire. "Représentations Des TIC en Milieu Migrant: Le Cas Des "Boutiques de Communication" de Château-Rouge. Sciences de L'information et de la Communication." Université Paris 10 – Nanterre, 2004.
- Slaughter, Joseph R. *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Stavrakakis, Yannis. *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007.
- Wilks, Jennifer M. "Revolutionary Genealogies: Suzanne Césaire's and Christiane Taubira's Writings of Dissent." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2015, pp. 91–101.
- Xavier, Subha. "African Boat Narratives, Disposable Bodies, and the New Native Survivor." *Cambridge Companion to Slavery in Global Literatures*, edited by Laura T. Murphy and Sheffield Hallam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 235–50.
- Xavier, Subha. *The Migrant Text: Making and Marketing a Global French Literature*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016.