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Between the "Broken Balafong" and the "Disenchanted Patriot": A Comparative Study of Cultural Dislocation in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative study of cultural dislocation in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961) focusing on how both novels dramatize the crisis of identity faced by the Western-educated African intellectuals in the postcolonial era. Through the emblematic figures of Obi Okonkwo, the "disenchanted patriot," and Samba Diallo, the "broken balafong," the analysis explores how hybridity, envisioned as a bridge between African tradition and Western modernity, often results in existential rupture, moral dissonance, and societal disillusionment. While Achebe emphasizes the socio-political consequences of alienation, notably the erosion of communal ethics and the spread of corruption in post-independence Nigeria, Kane adopts a more philosophical approach, probing the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of uprootedness in the Diallobé country. The study reveals that both authors, despite differing narrative strategies and ideological nuances, converge in portraying the hybrid intellectuals as trapped between irreconcilable cultural worlds, unable to achieve a stable synthesis without incurring loss. The paper further situates these narratives within the broader discourse on

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postcolonial African modernity and highlights their enduring relevance as cautionary tales about the fragility of cultural identity in the face of globalizing pressures.

Keywords: Alienation, cultural dislocation, hybridity, dilemma, metamorphosis, westernization

Introduction

The postcolonial condition in African literature is frequently marked by a profound sense of alienation—cultural, psychological, and moral—that arises from the clash between indigenous traditions and Western modernity. This tension is vividly explored in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, two canonical novels that portray the tragic trajectories of African intellectuals caught in the clefts of conflicting worlds. While Achebe's protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, can be referred to as the "disenchanted patriot," struggling with the disillusionment engendered by post-independence corruption and societal decay in Nigeria, Kane refers to his hero, Samba Diallo, metaphorically as the "broken balafong", facing a spiritual and cultural rupture as he navigates the fraught terrain between Islamic tradition and Western education in Senegal.

Conversely, both novels dissect the complexities of cultural dislocation that emerge from hybridity which, according to Senghor, is the "fusion of two in one" (102). Yet, it turns out ultimately that a division of two in one occurs as Kane poignantly illustrates it in his novel. The protagonists are emblematic of the postcolonial intellectual's crisis: neither fully belonging to the ancestral culture nor completely assimilated into the colonial legacy. They embody the paradoxes and pitfalls of cultural synthesis. This comparative study examines how Achebe and Kane portray the psychological, cultural, and moral dimensions of alienation and probes the broader implications for African identity and postcolonial nationhood. In fact, I deem it not necessary to come back on the causes of the phenomenon because my previous work developed it exhaustively. It would be easier to refer to that work referenced in my first endnote.

In fact, the scholarly discourse on *No Longer at Ease* and *Ambiguous Adventure* has vigorously engaged with the theme of cultural dislocation as symptomatic of the colonial and postcolonial encounter. Within this framework, Achebe's portrayal of Obi Okonkwo is frequently analyzed as an indictment of the impact of Western education and political corruption on African morality and communal cohesion. Simon Gikandi contends that Achebe's novel reveals the paradox of Western education in Africa: it offers both empowerment and entrapment, alienating

the educated elite from their roots while exposing them to the moral decay of modern bureaucracy.

Equally important, Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* has inspired different critical lenses, which focus on the philosophical and spiritual exploration of hybridity. Some scholars interpret Samba Diallo's journey as an allegory of the painful but necessary negotiation between tradition and modernity. While Samba's physical death appears as a tragic conclusion, Kane's narrative harbors an underlying optimism about cultural regeneration as embodied in the figure of his character Salif Bâ who challenges Samba's legacy in his sequel novel *Les gardiens du temple*. This optimism contrasts with Achebe's gloomier prognosis and suggests a nuanced vision of hybridity not as mere loss but as a complex, ongoing process. This resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's theories on hybridity and cultural negotiation, which have informed much postcolonial scholarship.

Previous comparative studies on the novels draw attention to the differing narratives and ideological strategies employed by Achebe and Kane. While Achebe foregrounds socio-political realities and the downfall of communal values in Nigeria, Kane adopts a more metaphysical approach, probing the spiritual dimensions of alienation in Senegal. However, both authors converge in their communities' skepticism toward credulous acceptance of Western modernity and in their critical interrogation of the postcolonial condition. This echoes my previous work in linking the two narratives through the concept of "cultural hybridity" arguing that both novels expose the "ambivalence and impossibility of reconciling multiple identities without loss.

Based on a comparative approach, this study contributes to the scholarly conversation by offering a nuanced comparative reading of *No Longer at Ease* and *Ambiguous Adventure* and focusing on the motifs of cultural dislocation and hybridity as embodied in their protagonists: the "disenchanted patriot" and the "broken balafong." It investigates how Achebe and Kane articulate the challenges of identity, education, and moral agency in the postcolonial African context, and how their narratives reflect divergent yet complementary visions of the future.

On the Cultural Alienation of the Protagonists

One of the most persistent consequences of the colonial encounter in Africa is cultural alienation. It is a condition that emerges from the failed symbiosis between traditional values and imposed Western modernity. In postcolonial African fiction, this theme recurs with particular urgency, as seen in the works under study,

Ambiguous Adventure by Cheikh Hamidou Kane and *No Longer at Ease* by Chinua Achebe. These texts dramatize the psychological and existential breach experienced by African returnees who become estranged from both their traditions and their acquired Western values. Indeed, this thematic concern is not isolated; it resonates across a corpus of African literature including Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel, etc*. In each case, protagonists undergo a crisis of identity. In other words, they undergo unsettling "alterity" that marks the cost of cultural transference.

The alienation they experience stems not from superficial imitation but from a profound and often uncritical internalization of Western culture at the expense of indigenous epistemologies. Their zeal to modernize, to assimilate Western values and education without critical self-preservation, results in a form of existential dislocation. Ironically, their pursuit of advancement renders them "strangers in their own cultures", which reflects not just cultural incongruity but ontological despair. Their condition is exacerbated by the intensity of their acculturation and their failure to negotiate a balanced cultural identity.

In both *Ambiguous Adventure* and *No Longer at Ease*, the first tangible symptom of alienation is uprootedness. It accounts for the protagonists' inability to locate themselves within the cultural frame of their societies. The loss of the Ibo and Pulaar aristocracies, respectively, is paralleled by the characters' individual fragmentation. Kane presents Samba as a "so-called courier", a symbolic figure meant to embody the cultural synthesis; yet he ultimately becomes disoriented and disconnected from his own spiritual heritage. Samba exposes his experience in these lines: "In former times the world was like my father's dwelling […]. The world was not silent and neuter. It was live. No scholar even had such knowledge of anything as I had then, of being" (149). This testimony reveals a loss of ontological anchorage. His attempted integration into global civilization fails to graft him into any stable identity. Instead, his journey intensifies his disorientation when he confesses this: "When I think about it now, I can't help wondering if there hasn't also been a little of the morbid attraction of danger. I have chosen the itinerary which is most likely to get me lost" (149). These passages appear contradictory as one suggests ignorance of the source of his cultural malaise, while the other indicates a haunting awareness of it. This contradiction is not accidental but a deliberate rhetorical strategy. Through chiasmus, Kane articulates the protagonist's fragmented consciousness and the paradox of knowing and not knowing simultaneously; hence the reader seizes clearly the "ambiguous adventure" of Kane's protagonist in the form of a dilemma. Samba

becomes then a cipher for the wider alienation of the African elite who, in the words of Achebe, are "no longer at ease in their societies." Babacar Mbaye encapsulates this cultural predicament arguing that "the disruption in which assimilation put the African is visible in Ambiguous Adventure in the alienation, restlessness, and confusion that confront Samba during the years of his education in France where the Diallobé had sent him to learn how to link wood to wood to build stronger homes" (199-200).

Mbaye's observation extends beyond Samba. It captures the collective trauma of a generation: Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Samba in *Ambiguous Adventure*, and Lakunle in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* all of whom enact the dramatic narrative that T.S. Eliot epitomizes in *Journey of the Magi*, which Achebe echoes in his title:

> We returned to our places, these kingdoms
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their goods.
> I should be glad of another death. (*No Longer at Ease* 100)

Thus, the alienated returnee becomes a symbolic figure of historical disillusionment. In *No Longer at Ease*, this alienation is conveyed with painful clarity: "In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country, the most painful thing one could say to Obi" (64-65). It appears that there is a "too much assimilated" class that epitomizes a crisis of disconnection. One character underscores Obi's estrangement. The president of the Umuofian Progressive Union makes this sentiment explicit: "A man can go to England, become a lawyer or a doctor, but it does not change his blood. It is like a bird that flies off the earth and lands on an anthill. It is still on the ground" (146).

Unlike Obi, Samba Diallo becomes aware of his metamorphosis and reflects on his journey and the shame it evokes:

> It may be that we shall be captured at the end of our itinerary, vanquished by our adventure itself. It suddenly occurs to us that all along our road, we have not ceased to metamorphose ourselves, and we see ourselves as other than we were. Sometimes the metamorphosis is not finished. We have turned ourselves into hybrids, and there we are left. Then we hide ourselves, filled with shame. (112-113)

This passage is deeply metaphorical. The image of the "courier" who fails to deliver the message parallels Obi's failure to fulfill the expectations of his community. The

metaphor of the "broken balafong" later used by Samba further intensifies this idea: not only has the hybrid failed to harmonize cultures, he has lost the capacity to produce any cultural resonance at all. Obi, in contrast, remains entrenched in the moral and spiritual disintegration brought by his blind embrace of Western norms. His failure is not only cultural but ethical. Both characters, however, reflect the deeper disillusionment with postcolonial promises. The culmination of their metamorphosis is the spiritual death they undergo. Samba describes this explicitly: "Here, now the world is silent, and there is no longer any resonance from myself. I am like a broken balafong, like the musician that has gone dead. I have the impression that nothing touches me anymore" (150). Omar Sougou interprets this metaphor as a symbolic death, postulating that 'Samba reflects the tension within the subject and problematizes hybridity. It is hard to contrive a Janus-faced identity" (222-23). For Sougou, being two in one sounds impossible even if one is aware of accommodating two domains of experience. However, there is recognition of the need to achieve a synthesis. He infers that "the balafong has gone dead because it cannot tune itself to the pitch of the metropolis. The metaphorical death of the balafong prefigures Samba's own demise" (222-23)

Achebe's treatment of Obi seems comparably unsympathetic. His fall is compounded by a failure to uphold the core communal values of duty and honor. His alienation is exacerbated by his neglect of familial obligations, particularly in moments of crisis:

> It was a thing of shame," he said. Someone else wanted to know, by the way, why that beast (meaning Obi) had not obtained a permission to go home." That is what Lagos can do to a young man. He runs after sweet thing, dances breast to breast with women and forgets his home and his people. (144-45)

The metaphor used by an elder in the novel underscores the gravity of Obi's transformation:

> You see this thing called blood. There is nothing like it. That is why when you plant a yam, it produces another, and if you plant an orange, it bears oranges. […] This boy that we all are talking about, what has he done? He was told that his mother died and he did not care. It is a strange and surprising thing, but I can tell you that I have seen it before. His father did it." (145)

Obi's failure, then, is generational and cyclical. Despite the privilege of his birth, his education, and the communal support he receives, particularly from the Umuofian

Progressive Union, he fails to honor his obligations: "Although they called it a scholarship it was to be paid. In Obi's case it was worth eight hundred pounds, to be paid within his return. […] But when he got to England he read English; his self-will was not new" (6).

Obi's alienation contrasts with the character of Mr. Green, whose colonial commitment, though problematic, is underscored by a steadfast sense of duty. The dialectic between the two men reflects a broader irony: "Obi had come to admit that, no matter how much he disliked Mr. Green, he nevertheless had some admirable qualities. […] It was like a man who had some great and supreme task must be completed before a financial catastrophe intervened" (96). Mr. Green, as Thomas Melone observes, is a figure whose imperial loyalty never withers: "Green, the always green man, whose imperialistic ideas never get old-fashioned despite the impressions and the changes of history. He is the type of a nostalgic colonial civil servant of a certain past and who does not grant any credit to the promises of the future" (78). This dialectic reaches a poignant irony in Obi's false sense of patriotism, dramatized through his nostalgic poetry for the motherland, which shows that he ultimately fails to serve.

The narrator underscores an ironic tension in Obi's ambition to build a new nation, highlighting the confusion inherent in a patriotic message that he conveys in his poem for Nigeria:

> God bless our noble fatherland,
> Great land of sunshine bright,
> Where brave men chose the way of peace,
> To win their freedom fight.
> May we preserve our purity
> Our zest for life and jollity
> God bless our noble countrymen
> And women everywhere
> Teach them to walk in unity
> To build our nation dear;
> Forgetting region, tribe or speech
> But caring always each for each. (94)

The fifth and sixth lines blatantly contradict the last three verses of the poem, revealing an antithetical relationship between the terms "purity" , "jollity" , "unity" , and "each for each." This contradiction encapsulates the narrator's derision toward Obi's vision

of patriotism, as Obi fundamentally misinterprets these concepts. More damning than this conceptual confusion is Obi's profound ignorance of his motherland: "It was only in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him. […] But the Nigeria he returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years" (11). This particular form of so-called devotion to the motherland is indicative not of true patriotism but rather of Obi's initial disillusionment. His nationalist fervor is rendered ironic in the passage below:

> Here was Lagos, thought Obi; the real Lagos he hadn't imagined exists until now. During his first winter in England, he had written a callow nostalgic poem about Nigeria. It was about Lagos in particular but Lagos was part of the Nigeria he had in mind.
> 'How sweet it is to lie beneath a tree
> At even time and share the ecstasy
> Of jocund birds and flimsy butterflies. […]
> And the tender glow of the fading sun. (14-15)

Obi's ambition to forge a new nation is ultimately doomed by his superficial grasp of the ideology he claims to uphold. Chinua Achebe critiques this fractured African intellectual mindset with precision:

> Who is a patriot? He is a person who loves his country. He is not a person who says he loves his country. He is not even a person who shouts or swears or recites or sings his love of his country. He is one who cares deeply about the happiness and well-being of his country and all his people. Patriotism is an emotion of love directed by critical intelligence. A true patriot will always demand the highest standards of his country and accept nothing but the best for and from his people. He will be outspoken in condemnation of their shortcomings without giving way to superiority, despair or cynicism. That is my idea of patriotism. (15-16)

Obi's trajectory epitomizes the unchecked loss of identity faced by many intellectual hybrids. Yet, fact or fiction, not all of Obi's contemporaries are ensnared in this predicament. There are some notable exceptions; the writers themselves, Kane, Achebe, and Wole Soyinka, attended Western schools like their characters, but they leveraged this cultural conjunction differently. This is rather a fictional representation of both sides of the story. There are, however, some works that feature protagonists who negotiate hybridity without forsaking their cultural identities. Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* offers a poignant illustration in the character Olunde, a

cross-bred intellectual who undergoes a journey akin to Obi's and Samba's, yet preserves his cultural integrity. Olunde embodies cultural relativism; despite his education, he respects the aspects of his culture that Europeans might dismiss as "*mumbo jumbo*." He represents a well-educated African synthesis of cultures, conscious of preserving his heritage.

It is important to underscore dissimilarities in literary techniques and how Kane and Achebe portray their characters. The former foregrounds Samba's tragedy by using him as a character-focalizer: narrator, observer, and commentator on his own fate, which testifies the awareness of the failed "courier" or the cultural ambassador he was supposed to be. Obi's metamorphosis is similarly profound; yet Achebe adopts a different narrative approach. The novel's title, *No Longer at Ease*, alludes intertextually to T.S. Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*, a technique that shapes the novel's temporality, both analeptic and proleptic opening with Obi's failure and his community's bewilderment: "I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this [...]" (2).This fragmented plot structure intricately situates the novel in time, recounting past events through the omniscient voices of characters such as Isaac Okonkwo and Odogwu, contemporaries of Obi's father. Intertextuality is also very important here because it connects the novel to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and retraces the genealogy of Obi through his father Isaac Okonkwo the son of Okonkwo, Nwoye, in *Things Fall Apart* who abandoned his culture and religion then converted into Christianity, becoming Isaac. These narrative strategies show the novel's distinctiveness compared to *Ambiguous Adventure which introduces the difficult journey of Samba.* Indeed, Achebe's intertextual links, spanning from *Things Fall Apart* to *No Longer at Ease*, underscore the evolution of his thematic concerns. His apprehensions about the immature African elite engaged in a precarious identity quest are justified. He encapsulates this fear in the following statement: "What happened to Africa in its meeting with Europe was devastating. It was our people losing grip of their history; being swept out the current of their history into somebody else's history, becoming a footnote […] you cannot have a present if you don't have a past" (320).

Disillusionment and Failure of Civilization

Disillusionment and the failure of civilization are deeply intertwined themes, particularly salient in African literature of the 1960s, often referred to as the "disenchantment era." While disillusionment is commonly interpreted as the political failure of newly

independent African nations, another critical perspective focuses on the cultural dimension as African societies anticipated that their educated elites would bring fruitful cultural exchanges; yet this expectation has largely been unmet. The returnee intellectuals who were envisioned as the backbone of civilization undergo alterations that result in disillusionment, finally exposing the failure of cultural symbiosis. This process of hybridization, once seen as promising, reaches a crisis point and echoes the questionable viability of Senghor's formula to "become two in one." The failure manifests in three dimensions in the novels: the intellectual's dilemma, societal disillusionment, and the broader collapse of civilization.

The dilemma of the intellectual is vividly portrayed in both *No Longer at Ease* and *Ambiguous Adventure* through Obi and Samba, two highly educated Africans caught between conflicting cultural identities. Consequently, they can neither fully reclaim their original culture nor wholly assimilate the Western one they idealize. Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou articulates this predicament as such:

> The cultural hybrid is not free because he can [...] neither choose, nor reject. He is doomed to assimilate. [...] The more the degree of the hybridization is raised, [...] the more the Negro seems to be distant from his own civilization, from his original culture. [...] From our experience, one can remark it; the more the individual resulting from a cultural exchange opened his 'self' toward the white color, the more he rejected his sociological milieu. (82) (My translation)

In fact, Samba's awareness of his complex condition confirms Makouta-Mboukou's point:

> You know, the fate of us Negro students is little like that of a courier: at a moment of leaving home we do not know whether we shall ever return. [...] It may be that we shall be captured at the end of our itinerary, vanquished by our adventure itself. It suddenly occurs to us that, all along our road, we have not ceased to metamorphose ourselves, and we see other than what we were. Sometimes the metamorphosis is not even finished. We turned ourselves into hybrids [...]. (112-13)

While Kane and Achebe do not primarily associate hybridity with dilemma, they recognize that Samba's and Obi's flawed trajectories exemplify this peril. Both protagonists uncritically embrace Western civilization at the expense of their indigenous cultures. Samba's dilemma is particularly acute. In realizing his entrapment, he attempts to synthesize both identities: "I am not a distinct country of the Diallobé

facing a distinct Occident, and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave it by way of counterbalance. I have to become the two" (150). However, rather than resolving his crisis, this marks only the beginning of his dilemma. Samba's hybridization fails to produce the fusion of "two in one" ideal. He remains alienated from both cultures, trapped in two different worlds:"There is not a clear mind deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange nature, in distress over not being two" (151).

Samba's metamorphosis through his "ambiguous adventure" mirrors Obi's psychological disarray. Both characters' journeys are captured in the titles of the novels, symbolizing the fate of countless African intellectuals who returned from Europe as "lost souls." Their homecoming hints a cultural disillusionment as they fail to reintegrate their ancestral identity. Thierno's ideal of returning "to the source" remains unfulfilled, and instead, they embody the spiritual malaise of negative hybridity. This cultural disenchantment resonates beyond fiction; it reflects broader postcolonial realities. The African novel of tradition, often termed *le roman de moeurs* in Francophone contexts documents this era's disenchantment. Telling works include Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, alongside scholarly texts such as Georges Balandier's *L'Afrique ambiguë* and René Dumont's *L'Afrique étranglée*. Jacques Chevrier fittingly describes Achebe's novel as emblematic of the difficulties confronting African modernity: "*No Longer at Ease* (*Le Malaise*), this title of a novel by the great writer Chinua Achebe, published in 1960, the year of African independences, could be used as an emblem with any slope of the fictional prose which explores the difficulties of the entry in modernity for its protagonists" (*Littérature Africaine: Histoire et Grands Thèmes* 73).

Keith Booker too highlights Samba's predicament within this philosophical framework:

> Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventureambiguë* (1961), trans. *Ambiguous Adventure*, (1963) set the stage for another important trend. /…/ the book tells the story of Samba Diallo, a young man from Senegal who moves from an early devotion to Islam to education in French colonial schools in an attempt to discover the secrets of European power. He eventually moves to Paris to study philosophy, but he is disappointed to find that Europe's ultimate secrets remain hidden. (56-7)

Booker's observations confirm the pinnacle of Samba's disillusionment. Hybridity here is a cyclical process involving an expansion of the "self" to encompass the "other," ideally culminating in a return to the source, a reconciliation of identities.

Kane's and Achebe's vision seem to be the formula of "one within two," a nuanced alternative to Senghor's concept of merging of "two in one." Unfortunately, both Samba's and Obi's journeys are linear and marked by progressive identity loss, culminating in cultural malaise.

The final turning point in the cyclical narratives of *No Longer at Ease* and *Ambiguous Adventure* is marked by the profound failure of civilization, a failure intimately linked to the protagonists' cultural disillusionment. This failure is epitomized by the downfall of African tradition as they were supposed to be the cultural ambassadors of the people, which is critical because the foundation of any global civilization depends on the reciprocal exchange of cultures, wherein each contributes positive elements. However, the novels reveal the contrary: instead of cultural synthesis, there is cultural alienation. Both protagonists Samba and Obi reveal no remnants of their ancestral identities or traditions; instead; they only seem African in appearance through "residual features" of their original culture and western values pervade their consciousness but fail to root them authentically in either culture. These "residual features" are problematic because they represent a pseudo-assimilation. The "been-to" intellectual, a person who has returned from the West, is entrapped by the urge to "play white," losing the substance of his African identity and becoming what Frantz Fanon describes as "black skins, white masks." This phenomenon signals a profound cultural failure: these returnees embody a lost soul, caught between two worlds but belonging fully to neither.

A significant cause of this failure lies in the misunderstanding of the cyclical cultural process. The protagonists fall into confusion about how to negotiate their dual heritage. Instead of achieving the ideal symbiosis, being "one within two" cultures, they follow the flawed path "to become two in one," leading to a hybrid identity fraught with ambiguity and tension. This hybrid state is not the successful merging hoped for, but a state of liminality where ancestral traces are obliterated and western elements predominate. In this respect, the characters symbolize the triumph of western civilization over African traditional values, a situation poignantly captured by the metaphor of the "banana tree" in *No Longer at Ease*: "When something stands, another thing stands beside it [...] I have never yet seen a banana tree yield a coco yam" (145). Obi's failure, as noted by G. D. Killam, is rooted in this ambiguity: "If one word can characterize the circumstances in which the characters of the book find themselves, it is 'ambiguous'... none of the central characters escape failure" (*The Novels of Achebe* 36).

Similarly, Samba is represented as a "broken balafong" whose metaphorical death prefigures his own demise and that of the global civilization he is meant to represent. Unlike Obi, Samba shows few western values; rather, he is overwhelmed by cultural fragmentation and loss. Their tragic ends underscore the consequences of their failure to navigate cultural duality successfully. This disillusionment is central to both narratives and reflects Fanon's critique of the colonial intellectual caught between identities. Neither Achebe nor Kane offers an anticolonial triumph; instead, they expose the tragic consequences of excessive openness to western culture without adequate retention or synthesis of African identity. The protagonists' failure represents the breakdown of the cycle of "self" and "other," which Homi Bhabha describes as the enunciation of the "I and You."

This theme is anticipated in *Ambiguous Adventure* from the outset, through Thierno's lament on the dying Diallobé culture: "But, at the same time as him, he felt the country of the Diallobé was dying from the assault of strangers come from beyond the sea..." (23). Despite Samba's spiritual forging in the Diallobé culture, western influence eventually undermines his African identity, thus resulting in a metamorphosis that symbolizes the global civilization's failure. Samba is African "only by name," with "mere western 'left-overs'" marking his character as much as Obi's. Yet, both heroes return with cultural malaise and disillusionment and their earlier prospects extinguished by the dilemmas of their hybrid identities. Their communities share this disenchantment, reflecting the broader failure of global civilization to realize a successful cultural fusion.

Although not desirable, solutions to the ambiguities are shown in both novels notably the tragic fates of the protagonists. These solutions are embedded within the narrative discourse in which the *dénouements* serve to justify the protagonists' tragic ends and reveal perspectives on the African intellectual's hybrid predicament. Having gone through uncertain education and cultural hybridity, the heroes face profound dilemmas. Aware of their predicament, they embark on a quest for resolution, which unfolds in three stages: first, an exaltation of doubt, second, an experience of exile or isolation, and finally, a decisive action that leads to their downfall. The first two strategies, doubt and exile, fail to resolve their crisis but constitute their initial responses. Samba's experience with doubt is intense. His return to the Diallobé country initiates a spiritual exile where his western rationality clashes irreconcilably with African spirituality: "Samba received The Knight's letter the next day. 'It is high time that you should come back, to learn that God is not commensurable with anything."(163). As for Obi, his exile is psychological and social. His struggles with

family, his marriage to Clara, and his alienation from his society culminate in isolation and mental breakdown: "Mercifully he had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life... He thinks that only isolation can help him escape from his 'agony' (2).

Both Obi and Samba experience a form of cultural exile as theorized by Georges Balandier. For the latter, they are physically present in their communities but spiritually disenchanted. Samba's exile is both physical and spiritual, whereas Obi's case stems from the materialistic and individualistic philosophies of the West which contribute to his moral and social disintegration. Their final recourse is tragic action: Samba dies finally in the hands of the Fool who stabbed him, while Obi indulges into corruption, marking the ultimate failure of their hybrid identities. Achebe and Kane deliberately portray their heroes as anti-heroes and their defeats foreshadow the fate of future African intellectuals confronting similar dilemmas. The remedies offered by the novels, death and failure, highlight the insufficiency of current responses to this cultural dilemma. As Indrasena Reddy once said: "The remedy turns out to be worse than the disease" (108). This is echoes in T. S. Eliot's *The Journey of the Magi*, from which Achebe draws inspiration:

> We returned to our places, these kingdoms,
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation
> With an alien people clutching their gods.
> I should be glad of another death. (119)

Obi's spiritual death haunts him until his last breath, while Samba's physical and cultural death dramatizes the stakes of this cultural conflict. His demise, though tragic, symbolizes rhetorically the peril of losing his African cultural identity entirely. Yet, the tragic ending of the novel does not mean a pessimistic view of the author because Kane's second novel, *Les gardiens du temple,* further underscores Samba's death as a symbolic crisis for the Diallobé's cultural future. This highlights the paradox of the Most Royal Lady's hope that the Diallobé survive culturally even if they must "die physically" in their children:

> From Thierno's evocation of the Most Royal Lady, Salif Bâ's thought reminded him of the tragic figure of Samba Diallo, killed by a demented person. The country of the Diallobe had been struck down by this death, because the man, whose destiny delighted, was not only an almost idealistic personification of the values with which all the Diallobe identify themselves. (42)

This passage from Kane's sequel novel provides substantial evidence of his optimistic perspective on Samba's death. A parallel can be drawn in his use of intertextuality to convey thematic perspectives in his second novel. He prophesies a cultural revival of the Diallobé embodied in the figure of Salif Bâ, who emerges as the future challenger to Samba's apparent failure. In contrast, Obi is portrayed as a victim of cultural death, emblematic of a wider crisis, as shown through the novel's title, *No Longer at Ease*. Achebe thus anticipates the demise of African values through Obi's heartbreaking downfall. Unlike Kane, who attributes the physical death to Samba but simultaneously evokes cultural survival, Achebe leaves this legacy embodied in Isaac Okonkwo's return to ancestral roots.

The solutions are coherent within the narrative frameworks that revolve around the cyclical failure of the heroes' journeys. They are expected to bear a dual identity, an ambivalent upbringing to become "one within two"; yet ultimately embody the contradictory state of "two in one." In other terms, it is one torn in two. The shift from the ambivalence inherent in their education to the ambiguity of their socio-cultural realities underscores the complexity and intractability of cultural hybridity. The "been-to" intellectual becomes a failed hybrid whose only recourse is physical or spiritual death. This is a persuasive literary device used by Kane and Achebe to sensitize readers, particularly future generations of Africans about the consequences of cultural dislocation. Rouch and Moriceau encapsulate this rationale behind Samba's death in Kane's narrative:

> In the story, Cheikh Hamidou Kane makes Samba Diallo die so as to put an end to the adventure of his hero and thereby that of any culture choked by another one. /…/ But, on purpose, Cheikh Hamidou Kane 'dramatises' the situation: 'I do not mean at all that I consider such a significant synthesis between the traditional cultures and the acquisition of the good the influence of the western cultures [...] is impossible. (79) (my translation).

This solution is deliberately non-definitive as Kane presents the issue with verisimilitude, acknowledging that many cultural hybrids fail tragically. Nonetheless, Kane's ultimate stance is not pessimistic. This nuance appears clearly in his interview with Maryse Condé when he articulates a generational hope:

> Besides, it is that generation which we are trying at this moment, which our states, our contemporaries are trying, and which individuals, especially modern ones, the young brothers of Samba Diallo, those who have followed Samba Diallo in universities, schools, colleges, like those who will read

> *Ambiguous Adventure*, and those for whom we have ourselves interviewed. I consider that it is up to them to establish this new equilibrium. (79)

Conversely, *No Longer at Ease* culminates in Obi's tragedy, closing with the bewilderment of the Umuofian Progressive Union which fails to comprehend the fall of such an educated man:

> Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his attitude, Mr Green did not either (154).

Obi's psychological torment compels him to deviate from his principles, which climaxes in his moral and social downfall. His recourse to corruption emerges as a response to his predicament despite his initial ambition to combat corruption through his campaign for national renewal. For example, Obi's denunciation of the cheating boy on his journey back to Nigeria illustrates his early integrity. Yet, his cultural dissonance lies at the core of his tragedy, intensified by Mr Green's harsh, stereotypical judgment:

> The African is corrupt through and through. […] The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him? (3)

Mr Green's overgeneralizations reflect a Eurocentric prejudice that fails to engage with the complexities of hybridity. Rather than illuminating hybridity, such stereotypes fuel the polarizing debates between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. While Obi disappoints his tribe, his downfall is not solely his burden. His community tacitly condones his actions, exemplified in the proverb: "I am against people reaping where they have not sown. But we have a saying that if you want to eat a toad you should look for a fat and juicy one" (5). Obi "has reaped where he has not sown," but this is a common practice in his society, reflecting the widespread moral decay in postcolonial Africa. The narrator further underscores this with irony:

> Had not a minister of state said, albeit in an unguarded, alcoholic moment, that the trouble was not in receiving bribes, but in failing to do the thing for which the bribe was given? And if you refuse, how do you know that a 'brother' or a 'friend' is not receiving on your behalf, having told everyone

> that he is your agent? Stuff and nonsense! It was easy to keep one's hands clean." (80-81)

Corruption, as a motif, is central to Achebe's portrayal of post-independence Nigeria, serving as the narrative's denouement. Yet, the tragedy of Obi's fate is as much the product of his society's dysfunction as of his personal failings. Rather than portraying death as the final solution, Achebe transforms the cultural malaise into a "plague," reminiscent of Indrasena Reddy's observation that "the remedy turns out to be worse than the disease." It is obvious that Samba's end is more deliberate and tragic than Obi's, but still Kane has already elucidated the rationale behind his hero's demise, which does not equate to pessimism.

Comparatively, the ending of *Ambiguous Adventure* is more tragic than *No Longer at Ease* but carries a less pessimistic vision of the future. Samba's death, affected by the Fool, symbolizes a vanguard's sacrifice with ethical lessons, whereas Obi's crisis degenerates into an endemic "plague." As Achebe states: "If one finger brought oil it soiled the others". This metaphor aligns with the old man's image of Obi as a plant whose fruit will propagate across the country, embodying the cyclical nature of corruption. Obi's failure becomes a generational burden as reflected in the accusation that he is a typical case of "Like father, like son": "His father did the same thing" (145).

However, Samba's tragic death functions as a cautionary tale with instructive effects on subsequent generations, exemplified by Salif Bâ in *Les Gardiens du temple*, who contests Samba's defeat. Conversely, Obi's failure continues to infect subsequent Nigerian intellectuals, such as Nanga and his contemporaries, who exemplify a deeper erosion of societal virtues. Thus, Obi's downfall predicts ongoing challenges in post-independence Nigeria. Achebe's intertextual engagement from *Things Fall Apart* through *A Man of the People* maintains a consistent thematic concern with corruption, indicating that Obi does not serve as a beacon for future generations. In contrast, Kane's optimism is manifest in the prospect of cultural synthesis and global civilization, embodied by SalifBâ's emergence after Samba's fall. Achebe's portrayal, while dark, remains ultimately hopeful, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing the limits and challenges inherent in cross-cultural contact.

Conclusion

The comparative exploration of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* have underscored the profound complexities of cultural alienation in the postcolonial African condition. Through the figures of

Obi Okonkwo, the "disenchanted patriot" and Samba Diallo, the "broken balafong," both narratives dramatize the existential ruptures and moral dissonances born from the encounter between African tradition and Western modernity. While Achebe situates alienation within the socio-political erosion of communal ethics in post-independence Nigeria, Kane foregrounds the metaphysical crisis of spiritual uprootedness in the Diallobé country. They offer complementary visions of a shared dilemma: the hybrid intellectual's inability to achieve a stable synthesis of identities without incurring loss.

The protagonists' trajectories reveal that hybridity, far from guaranteeing enrichment, may create a loss of identity and lead to dislocation, ambiguity, and disillusionment. The cyclical failure of their journeys, from hopeful engagement with Western ideals to ultimate collapse, reflects the broader postcolonial malaise wherein the promise of cultural symbiosis transforms into alienation. Obi's descent into corruption and moral compromise exposes the structural decay of Nigerian society, while Samba's physical and spiritual demise dramatizes the cost of severing ancestral roots. Yet, the authors diverge in their diagnoses: Achebe's *dénouement* offers a bleak vision of generationally entrenched failure, whereas Kane, through the symbolic continuation in *Les Gardiens du temple,* intimates the possibility of cultural regeneration.

The implications of this study extend beyond literary criticism into the discourse on African modernity, national identity, and global civilization. By comparing and contrasting these works, it is important to recognize that the crisis of the postcolonial intellectual is neither solely personal nor purely political; it is civilizational in scope. Achebe and Kane induce readers, especially African audiences, to confront the enduring challenge of cultural negotiation in a globalized yet hierarchically skewed world. Nonetheless, these narratives are bound by their temporal and historical contexts. Written in the immediate aftermath of African independence, they reflect the anxieties and ideological currents of the 1960s, when the viability of modern African nationhood was under intense scrutiny. Though their thematic concerns remain resonant, further inquiry might consider how subsequent generations of African writers, intellectuals, and leaders have reimagined or resisted these paradigms of alienation. Future research could thus investigate whether contemporary global interconnectivity has deepened the crisis of hybridity or created new spaces for equitable cultural dialogue.

Ultimately, Achebe and Kane remind us that the vitality of any civilization depends on the reciprocal recognition and preservation of its constituent cultural identities.

Without such reciprocity, the hybrid subject might become either a fractured self or a cultural void. The tragedies of Obi and Samba serve as enduring literary testimonies, cautionary yet instructive, to the delicate choice of young African intellectuals who engage into the same journeys.

Endnote:

I have decided not to come back on details like the causes of alienation and the process of hybridization because I have exhaustively dealt with these issues in my previous research. For this purpose, I invite readers to refer to the paper: Dia, Alassane Abdoulaye. "Diversity vs. Difference: A Critical Analysis of Hybridity and Cultural Identity Crisis in the Novels of Cheikh Hamidou Kane and Chinua Achebe." *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies,* vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, pp. 31-44.

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