

Hybridity and Cultural Conflict in Hamidou Kane's *The Ambiguous Adventure*

Adeuga, Francisca Folake

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Abstract:

Hybrid state of postcolonial Africa set the background for this paper. The study is literary, descriptive and analytic. The objective is to examine the role of cultural hybridity in the diverse social conflicts in modern Africa in the light of Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure Ambiguë* published in 1961 and later translated into English as *The Ambiguous Adventure* by Katherine Woods in 1963. The scope is the panorama of African civilization with an emphasis on the impact of European civilization. The scholarly textual method of data collection was adopted. Four research questions to serve as guide in the establishment of cultural hybridity, its causes and its relationship with the different conflicts identified in the novel were proposed. The findings established cultural hybridity and complexities caused by it in adaptation and lack of a sense of balance in modern Africa. These complexities include emotional stress, social conflicts, confrontations, violence and even fatality in the instrument were identified and submitted. The findings are analyzed in the light of Postcolonialism whose major goal is to address the domineering impact of western civilization in all formerly colonized societies. This article does not in any way intend to regret western civilization, no doubt, the development has contributed to African emancipation in no small measure. It does not equally solicit for despising African values in the name of any civilization. The recommendations and conclusion are, therefore, based on the orientation towards adaptation and a sense of equilibrium in the face of cultural hybridism and even globalization.

Keywords: Civilization, Culture, Conflict, Hybridity, Postcolonial.

Introduction

The central idea of this study is the hybrid situation of contemporary Africa and the challenges of socio-cultural conflict. According to Colin (1968:170), “notre plan de développement en Afrique ne doit pas être seulement un plan économique... les politiques africaines ont tendance à négliger la culture”. That is, “our plan of development in Africa must not only be an economic plan... African politics often tend to neglect culture” (Our translation). According to Colin, “la culture est à la fois la base et le but ultime de la politique”. That is, “culture is at the same time the basis and the ultimate goal of politics”. (Our translation). It happens most often in Africa to lay more emphasis on politico-economic issues while little or no attention is given to cultural challenges. The fact that a sustainable political situation can only be realized in a society devoid of cultural and ethnic sentiments should not be taken lightly.

Culture is a very important aspect of man’s life. Whatever affects a man’s culture affects his total life. Man is a product of his culture, he is the image of his culture wherever he goes. Culture is man’s identity, no wonder every society has the natural tendency to see her culture as superior. The imperial tendency of Europe is a good example, the Europeans practised imperialism in the name of civilization. Imperialism is the sense of feeling superior to other races socio-cultural wise. The European civilization process was then used to hijack the destiny of the less privileged societies. This eventually gave rise to a situation of cultural complexities especially in Africa. The civilized African has to adopt the ways of life of the West. Modern education and migration in particular have exposed Africans to western influences to a great extent. The black man is finally caught in the middle of two opposing civilizations, the African tradition and the western ways of life.

No doubt, the typical and indigenous African life never remained the same due to contact with the western world. Technology and bilateral relations have all paved ways for foreign social orientations. Falq and Kane (1978:42) explained that “Le débat est ouvert: Tradition ou modernisme?” refuge dans le passé ou fuite vers l’avenir? That is, “The debate is open: Tradition or Modernism? Take refuge in the past or run towards the future?” (Our translation).

This study is not out to bemoan western civilization but to see how the black man can still live a fulfilled African life even in a modern world. Colin (1968:123) in his submission said “l’aspect positif de la colonisation a été beaucoup plus important surtout la promotion humaine poursuivie par l’enseignement missionnaire”. That is, “the positive aspect of colonization has been very much important especially the human promotion pursued through missionary education”.

The justification is to address a social problem whose impact could be critical to the extent of affecting societies, organizations, families and individuals through our recommendations. The study would also serve as literature in the domains of cultural analysis, civilization and conflict resolution in general.

The concept of hybridity

Various scholars have described hybridity from different angles which include biology, culture, language and even agriculture. Some on the other hand have described the concept as a process which involves several components. Genetically, the *ChambersEnglish Dictionary* (1998:785) has described a hybrid as “an organism which is the offspring of a union between different races”. According to (Nodier, 1829), a hybrid is “aucune chose qui tient de deux natures”, that is, “anything bearing two natures” (Our translation). Grammatically, (De Rivalol, 1828) says hybridity is an adjective which points to an object born out of two different natures.

From the linguistic view, a hybrid is a word formed of elements from different languages. The *ChambersEnglish Dictionary* (1998:785) says to describe a product as ‘hybrid’ or ‘hybridous’ is to refer to its “state of being made up of different elements”. From the biologist ideology, hybridity is the state of a plant or an animal whose genes are made up of two different species, Hagege, (2009:41). Generally, the term hybridity describes the complex state of any being that is hybrid.

From the theoretical perspective, hybridity is one of the ideologies promoted by the post-colonial intellectuals to address the problem of cultural complexities occasioned by western influences in all former colonized societies. According to (Toro, 2005), “l’hybridité est la situation socio-culturelle ayant sa source dans le déplacement d’une culture vers une autre”, that is, “hybridity is the socio-cultural situation having its source from the displacement of one culture towards another” (Our translation).

The onus of this article is the social challenges of an individual who is a cultural hybrid due to different socio-cultural orientations. Cultural hybridity is the inter-relationship between two races or cultures.

Hybridity and socio-cultural conflict in modern Africa

Africa already had an organized and rich cultural system before the Arab and the European penetrations. Olatunbosun (1981: XV) taught that “the notion of Africa as a dark continent is a parochial idea”. According to him, several foreign authors who projected Africa in a dark and backward image only did so due to their poor understanding of the continent. “The statements presented by writers in History are influenced by factors like the personality and the belief of the writer, the materials available to him and the current wave of opinions at the time of writing”.p.XV

Pre-colonial Africa did not only develop a rich cultural system but had equally developed a very relative traditional educational practices whose objectives were to prepare the youths for an economically independent adult lives. Going by Fafunwa (1974:15), “no study of the history of education in Africa is complete without adequate knowledge of the traditional educational system prevalent in Africa before the arrival of Islam and Christianity”.

The pre-colonial African society is one which was indigenous until the exposure to western civilization and modern influences which ended up altering the African traditional life style. According to Mbiti (1962:216), “Africa is caught up in a world of revolution which is so dynamic that it has almost got out of control, it is a revolution of man as a whole”. This revolution has affected all the social institutions and organizations of the African continent.

Though caught up in the web of modern civilization, the moral justification that Africa still remains Africa has provoked the challenge of competitions between the demands of tradition and modern civilization. Fabarebo (2011:54) explained that “western civilization may have changed African’s lifestyle but not totally. The foreign culture superimposed on the people was only given and received in part making the modern Africa a product of two cultures and a hybrid”.

Years after independence in Africa, intellectuals started Afro-centered literature which features disillusion especially in the area of governance with emphasis on the poor political performances of African leaders in running politico-economic affairs. Apart from political displeasure, African

intellectuals also featured socio-cultural complexities in their various writings. The modern African society witnessed challenges such as cultural alienation, hybridism, multiculturalism, generational conflicts and the likes. Hamidou Kane's *The Ambiguous Adventure* is one of the literatures that ventured into revealing these socio-cultural challenges.

Methodology

The study is literary, descriptive and analytic. "An analytic application is the use of analysis to break a problem down into the elements necessary to solve it" (www.thwink.org). It is a detailed study and analysis of the different factors of a problem in an attempt to solve it.

The scholarly textual method was adopted for data collection. The term 'textual' was first used by a Roman linguist, Eugene Coseriu in 1955. According to Delbouille (1967:136), "les étapes de l'étude textuelle incluent la lecture profonde, la compréhension totale et l'analyse minutieuse d'un texte en donnant toute attention au texte", that is, "the different steps of textual study include the critical reading, the total comprehension and the detailed analysis of a text with all attention on the text" (Our translation). This method requires total attention on the adopted text for all data, it is a method that helps avoid sentiments especially from the researcher.

Theoretical Background: The article has adopted Postcolonialism. "Edward Said is the originator and the patron of post-colonial theory and discourse" (en.m.wikipedia.org). The principal objective of the theory is the redefinition of the history and the right of all formerly colonized societies. Its principal concern is the antisocial effects of western civilization on other societies. Its position in this discourse is the promotion of socio-cultural liberty and diversity in every society. According to Césaire (1955), "Postcolonialism is a theoretical approach in various disciplines whose concern is the impacts of western civilization in all former colonies".

Synopsis of *The Ambiguous Adventure*

The novel is about Samba Diallo, a young Senegalese whose story moved from the Diallobé society to France and from France back again to his country home. He grew up within a typical African royal family and society.

At the age of seven, he was introduced into the Islamic faith. He was handed over to an Islamic Instructor by the name Thierno where he lived in the quranic center with other young scholars. Just before concluding his studies in the center, western education was introduced into the society. Very soon, the choice of modern education for the children became a serious challenge for this indigenous and especially agrarian community. No doubt, modern education will affect their traditions and even their Islamic position. This hybrid society started experiencing conflict from this juncture. The society was divided vis a vis the choice of modern education, while some felt the new system will overturn their agricultural culture, others showed concern for the Islamic religion which will be negatively affected and others felt that modern education is a tool with which the younger generation must be equipped. Eventually, the choice of modern education became more popular and Samba Diallo as a prince in the community must be among the first to taste the system.

This step marks the beginning of cultural derailment for Samba Diallo who is now a rooted Muslim with the conviction that God should be given the highest position in man's heart. His belief is that God should come before self, family, freedom, science and even health. He eventually travelled to France to pursue a higher study in Philosophy with these Islamic convictions.

This hybrid state made his life conflictual in France. Though he did well in his studies, his Islamic stand affected his relationship with the western neighbours. He would not taste any alcoholic drink during outings, he rejected love offers which could have led to marriage on two occasions. As a prince, back home he enjoyed respect and attention from the community but in France, his feelings of loneliness provoked nostalgic and emotional disturbances. The western world talked more of science, love and relationships while the expectation of Samba Diallo was the usual Islamic instructions of holy and separated life. Samba Diallo eventually returned to his country on an invitation by his uncle and his father with the intention of making him the next chief in the community. His life back home is an image of a completely derailed life. His return to this Islamic community became a big challenge as no one ever involved him in religious practices throughout his stay in France. To him, science as well as religion now matter, religion to him should no longer be a forced affair now, and it should be linked to choice. This explained the tragic death of Samba Diallo occasioned by a violent attack from a mentally challenged

neighbour popularly known as the mad man. He had known Samba Diallo to be an active Muslim and is now surprised and frustrated about his unwillingness to go to mosque and even to pray.

The novel is a celebrated classic by a ground breaking figure in African literature. It addresses a critical contemporary issue, the collision of Islamic African values and western culture (<https://www.scribol.com>). Hamidou Kane is a Senegalese writer best known for his novel *L'Aventure ambiguë* which is about the interactions of western and African cultures. His hero is a Senegalese boy who goes to study in France, where he loses touch with his Islamic faith and his African roots. (<https://www.wikipedia.com>). According to Chevrier (1981:5), “après les servitudes de la société coloniale, les écrivains se sont attachés à l’analyse des conflits de culture et du malaise engendré par la quête d’une identité problématique dont Hamidou Kane a donné une très convaincante illustration dans *L'Aventure ambiguë*”, that is, “after the colonial slavery, authors attached themselves to the analyses of cultural conflicts and the unease engendered by the quest for a problematic identity of which Hamidou Kane gave a convincing illustration in *The Ambiguous Adventure*”. (Our translation).

The following research questions shall assist us in establishing the manifestation of cultural hybridity, its contributory factors and its impacts on the characters.

- i. Is cultural hybridity established in the instrument?
- ii. What are the factors that led to hybridity in the novel?
- iii. What are the various consequences of hybridity in the affected society?
- iv. Is adaptation to the demands of modern and traditional lives easy for the characters?

Findings and Analyses

So far, we have established cultural hybridity and complexities orchestrated by western orientation in a postcolonial African society. This situation has given rise to diverse social conflicts which ranges from emotional disorders to fatality. We have identified and submitted five examples of such situations below:

- i. Abuse of royal authority in a monarchical society. (Pp. 14-15,32)

- ii. Dilemma and incertitude: Islamic education, western education or tradition. (pp.47-48, 93-94, 56-57)
- iii. Cultural alienation and emotional stress.(pp.59,72,78-79)
- iv. Revolt and violence. (pp.178-189)
- v. Fatality. (pp. 185-189)

Number one is about the amount of disrespect the Islamic instructor showed in punishing Samba Diallo corporally and severally despite being a prince in the name of religion. In a typical African setting, people worked and survived independently, here, all Islamic scholars including the prince were made to beg around for food in tattered clothes on a daily basis.

Number two is the reflection of the fear, the confusion and the misunderstandings caused by the positions of different people vis-a-vis the adoption of modern education. Relationships were adversely affected due to different choices.

Number three is the reflection of emotional stress, psychological maladies, loneliness and nostalgia orchestrated by alienation especially in the life of Samba Diallo.

Number four talks about revolt and violence. The family friends in France all made serious effort to make Sambo Diallo embrace a sociable life of winning and dinning, Adèle and Lucienne, two young ladies did all their best to make Samba Diallo succumb to love relationship. All these attempts were resisted by Samba Diallo all in the name of religion. His attitude back home is a reflection of confusion, lost identity and consciousness. All efforts made by his mentally upset to involve him in Islamic religion practices which he hithertostood for were vehemently resisted.

Number five is a reflection of what followed Samba Diallo's resistance and revolt. The mad man got confused and provoked. The attack he launched on Samba Diallo led to his eventual death.

Conclusion and recommendations:

Africa had been a culturally oriented society before the advent of western influences. The western civilization in question is not regretted in this discourse because it has greatly contributed especially to African emancipation notwithstanding its antisocial nature. Today's world has metamorphosed into a global village due to technology, migration and bilateral relations. Inability to adapt to social orientations outside one's culture could be very distressing. On the other hand, debasing one's cultural values in the name of civilization could equally lead

to distress. Our recommendations are therefore geared towards adaptation, flexibility, self and mutual respect and a sense of equilibrium in the face of different socio-cultural orientations in a globalised world. This is necessary if we must avoid the kinds of complexities witnessed in *The Ambiguous Adventure*. Samba Diallo eventually ended up as a tragic hero and of course, the entire community was one way or the other affected by the unfortunate incident.

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