Colonisation and African Modernity in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*

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IN *THE BLACK Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues that, from the late eighteenth century to the present, the cultures of Blacks in the West have been hybrid and antithetical to “ethnic absolutism” (4-5). According to Gilroy, the modern history of the Black Atlantic is a discontinuous trajectory in which countries, borders, languages, and political ideologies are crossed in order to oppose “narrow nationalism” (12). Gilroy's term “Black Atlantic” describes the “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation” of modern Black cultures that oppose the nationalist focus “common to English and African American versions of cultural studies” (4). Gilroy defines “modernity” as the period from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries when the ideas of “nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity” that sustain contemporary cultural studies in the West were first developed (2). Gilroy writes:

The conspicuous power of these modern subjectivities and the movements they articulated has been left behind. Their power has, if anything, grown, and their ubiquity as a means to make political sense of the world
is currently paralleled by the languages of class and socialism by which they once appeared to have been surpassed. My concern here is less with explaining their longevity and enduring appeal than with exploring some of the special political problems that arise from the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliations which link the Blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West. (2)

There are problematic aspects of Gilroy's concept of Black modernity. The first element is Gilroy's representation of the essentialising or romanticising of Black culture as being antithetical to modernity. The second is Gilroy's definition of Black modernity as simply a Western phenomenon, as if Africans and other Blacks from the non-western hemisphere had not produced valuable cultures and identity formations that fit popular notions of the modern. The third aspect is Gilroy's exclusion of the role that African intellectuals played in the international forms of nationalism and resistance movements that Gilroy found to be central in the history of the Black Atlantic and Black modernity. Conceiving Black modernity and the Black Atlantic as referring only to intellectual, cultural, historical, or technological developments in the African American and the Caribbean West is reductive and simplistic. The danger in such a rationale is the failure to validate the intricate relationships between Blacks of Africa in the West and those who have been in the Diaspora since slavery times, and those between tradition and modernity. In The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora (2001), Abiola Irele writes:
African literature may be said to derive an immediate interest from the testimony it offers of the preoccupation of our writers with the conflicts and dilemmas involved in the tradition/modernity dialectic. This observation is based on the simple premise that, as with many other societies and cultures in the so-called Third World, the impact of Western civilization on Africa has occasioned a discontinuity in forms of life throughout the continent. It points to the observation that the African experience of modernity associated with a Western paradigm is fraught with tensions at every level of the communal existence and individual apprehension. (ix)

Irele's statement suggests the big problem in how African culture and literature are often interpreted from Western notions of modernity that do not appreciate the African-centred idea of stable traditions. Alternatively, Abiola proposes a concept of modernity that acknowledges the continuous experimentation with new forms of expressions that negotiate in harmonious ways with old ones. Irele writes, “Significantly, the idea of tradition has featured prominently in the process, both as theme and as determining factor of the very form of our modern expression. Above all, the idea of tradition has served us essentially as a focus of consciousness and imagination and thus enabled us to formulate a vision of our place in the world” (67).

Two aspects of *Ambiguous Adventure* emerge by using similar conceptions of the relation between tradition and modernity in African literature. First is the book's representation of the experiences of the protagonist Samba Diallo in both Africa and France. The second is the book's depiction of Black cultural nationalism as a consistent element of African-centred notions of
modernity and modernization. As Kane's novel shows, modern Blacks can embrace both their hybrid and authentic experiences and identities while demanding that (1) Europeans acknowledge the humanity of Black people and that (2) they repair the consequences of their colonization of African lands and people.

**Africa in Gilroy's Concept of the Black Atlantic**

Gilroy's concept of the Black Diaspora (or of the Black Atlantic) refers mainly to Black experiences in the United States, London, and to a degree in the Caribbean. The concept of "Diaspora," which is often used interchangeably with that of the Black Atlantic, comes from the Greek word *diaspeirein* (to spread about). It was traditionally applied to the dispersion of Jews outside Israel after the sixth century B.C. In the twentieth century, the term has been enlarged to include the dispersal of Africans in New World societies by historical forces such as slavery and imperialism (Bonnett and Watson 2). According to Gilroy, the "Black Atlantic" intellectual resistance began as a broad nationalist movement started by Blacks in England and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gilroy brilliantly explores the activism or writings of Black nationalists of the West such as the eighteenth century Black British Robert Weddeburn and William Davidson, whose radicalism and fight against racial oppression he validates and explores in depth. In 1778, Wedderburn, who was a freed mulatto and the child of a slave dealer named James Wedderburn, migrated to London at the age of seventeen (12). In London, Wedderburn published ultra-radical tracts in which he described the horror of slavery and the right of the Caribbean slave to slay his master. Wedderburn was tried for blasphemy when he promised to write home to Kingston and "tell them to murder their masters as soon as they please" (12). Wedderburn was later acquitted when he
persuaded an English jury that his words were not sedition but a mere practice of the "true and infallible genius of prophetic skill" (12). Soon after his release, Wedderburn and his associate William Davidson became active participants in the Marybone Reading Society, an ultra-radical Black subculture group formed in 1819 after the Peterloo Massacre. Wedderburn and Davidson were Black British navy recruits to whom the experience of slavery provided a motive for developing an ideology of liberty and justice for Blacks of the Diaspora.

According to Gilroy, like Wedderburn and Davidson, the African American Martin Robinson Delany was a strong voice for Black liberty and justice. In the 1858, Delany was one of the officers of the National Board Commissioners, an organization that aimed at preparing the return of African Americans to Africa. Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, Delany called for unity among Blacks of the world. In *The Condition* (1852), Delany pointed out that, in all ages, national groups such as the Hungarians, the Scotch, the Irish, the Welsh, the Jews, and the Russians have had the natural desire to maintain their national characteristics "in hopes of seeing the day when they may return to their former national position of self-government and independence let that be in whatever part of the habitable world it may be" (Gilroy 23).

While he recognises the importance of African-British and African American nationalists in the formation of Black modernist thought, Gilroy fails to represent the contributions of African intellectuals to this tradition. Apart from his very thin discussions of the Négritude movement, Gilroy practically leaves African intellectuals out of his focus. Négritude is a literary and political movement founded in 1932 in Paris by expatriate African intellectuals such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and
Leon Gontran Dumas. The goal of Négritude was to assert the power and beauty of Black culture through art and literature, and to demand the political and cultural independence of Africans (Chowdhury 36).

Moreover, Gilroy mentions how the formation of the journal Presence Africaine in 1947, which was spearheaded by the Senegalese philosopher Alioune Diop, "was an important moment in the developing awareness of the African Diaspora as a transnational and intercultural multiplicity" (195). He also suggests how the second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, held in Rome in 1959, was a determining moment when Richard Wright and the Negritude writers agreed, at least in the published proceedings, "that the unity of culture was not to be guaranteed by the enduring force of a common African heritage" (195). Gilroy credits the proceedings of the conference for defining "the colonial experience" as "an additional source of cultural synthesis and convergence" (195). Gilroy, however, deplores what he perceived as the actual sense of mystified unity and ragged anti-colonialism which emerged among the black scholars by the end of the conference. Gilroy then minimizes the cultural and political importance of the anti-colonialism put forth in the agenda of Presence Africaine and the Rome conference. By representing such movements as cultural and political essentialisms, Gilroy denies their relevance in modernity. Gilroy's failure to suggest the relevance of such movements in the struggles of modernity reflects the narrowness of his concept of "Black Diaspora."

Colonization and Modernity in Ambiguous Adventure

Ambiguous Adventure (1962) is a historical and autobiographical novel written by a Senegalese author who lived on different sides of the Atlantic Ocean and who examined the
change and dilemma that the contact between France and Africa brought into the cultures of Africans at home and abroad. The book is an essential work of African history because, as Irele has pointed out, it takes us “back to the early years of French occupation in Sahelian West Africa to the period of transition between the dissolution of the precolonial Islamic states in the region and the full establishment of the French colonial administration as the point of departure of the narrative” (*African Imagination* 87). In the book, Kane captures the transformation, anxieties, and ambivalence that colonization created in the lives of modern Africans as the latter attempted to define their identities and understand the nature of their relationships to the West. Drawing from the social, political, and cultural contexts of his upbringing in northern Senegal and of his expatriate years in France, Kane fictionalized the consequences that geographic displacement and fragmentation of Black identity created in the lives of modern Africans. This disintegration of Black identity was not alien to Kane himself because, like his hero Samba, he came from the noble and predominantly Islamic people of northern Senegal known as the Diallobé. Like Samba, Kane was sent to French school when he was about 10 years old, studied philosophy at a university in Paris, and returned home with an acute sense of the disillusionment that colonization had created in the mind of the educated African whose culture and humanity westerners represented as inferior. When he was asked why he wrote *Ambiguous Adventure*, Kane replied:

[I] was pushed by the desire to say that our societies had in themselves a profound reality. That any desire to assimilate them was an error since they have their own basic civilization. It was to justify colonization that the Europeans pretended that we were not human beings.
On this basis also they contested the validity of our cultural values. But this attitude wasn't consistent with reality. In his attempt to explain the history of European misperception and transformation of African cultures, Kane writes a novel in which Samba (which was the author's “house-name”), goes to France and finds that he cannot identify with western concepts of development and Africanity. Yet, in France, Samba also realizes that he cannot easily return to the stable African Islamic and cultural traditions that had produced him. Thierno, who used to be Samba's Coranic teacher in the Diallobé country, gets sick and dies in the absence of his former loyal student. Summoned by his father, Samba arrives to the country of the Diallobé late and, on account of being acculturated and lost in philosophical meditations, refuses to kneel and pray in front of his teacher's grave. It is at this unexpected moment that the character of Le Fou (the Madman), who had been Thierno's assistant during Samba's absence, stabs Samba to death. The exact cause of Samba's death is the most enduring philosophical question in African literature. Samba's death epitomizes the difficulty of knowing “how can the old values survive?” which Oscar Ronald Darthorne asks in his 1974 tribute to Kane. Yet Samba's death also symbolizes the hard task of knowing how to find a balance between African and Western values. As evident in W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of Double-Consciousness, the attempt to walk a fine line between African and Western cultures is a dilemma that African Americans and other Blacks of the Diaspora have experienced throughout history.

By 1890, Europeans had colonized most of Africa. The emancipation of African Americans in 1865 contrasted with the institution of a new form of slavery in Africa. From the 1880s to the
1960s, France, Britain, and Portugal took the land of Africans and forced the people to work for the prosperity of Europe. The dispossessed Africans witnessed the disintegration of their social lives as Europeans took their freedom and compelled them to work for the benefit of a foreign hegemonic power that had no other goal but to exploit African labour and raw materials. Like slavery, colonization was then a brutal phase in the history of Blacks, since it invokes the incalculable damage Europeans have inflicted on Africans.

In *Ambiguous Adventure*, Kane depicts the impact of colonization on Africans through the eyes of Samba Diallo, the major character who witnesses the social and economic collapse in his native Diallobé country on the first day when the French invaded it. The French colonization of the Diallobé began one morning in the 1880s when the Diallobé people woke up under the sound of canons announcing their forced subordination to the law and order of France. That morning, the Diallobé saw how their land was being robbed by the French with such a striking mix of unimaginable violence and terror. Kane describes:

Strange dawn! The morning of the Occident in black Africa was spangled over with smiles, with cannon shots, with shining glass beads. Those who had no history were encountering those who carried the world on their shoulders. It was a morning of accouchement: the known world was enriching itself by a birth that took place in mire and blood.

From shock, the one side made no resistance. They were a people without a past, therefore without memory. The men who were landing on their shores were white, and mad. Nothing like them had ever been known. The deed was accomplished before the people
were even conscious of what had happened. (44)

This passage reflects the sudden and horrible manner in which France subdued its Senegalese colony with the pretence of bringing civilization to a land that Europeans have traditionally imagined as being empty and inhabited by barbarians. Some of the consequences of Western colonization of Africa that Césaire inventoried in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) are noticeable in the dilemma that beset the Diallobé community, as the modern schools and administrative establishments of the French colonizers replaced their traditional, educational and political institutions. The disaster of colonization is suggested when Samba's father, who is the Chevalier [Knight] of the Diallobé, meets with Thierno and the Principal of the new French school, in order to discuss whether their society should accept or oppose the educational system of the settlers. On the one hand, the Diallobé express their frustration when the French force them to learn French civilization and language. The disappointment is apparent when Thierno worries about the distance that the French school could create between the Diallobé and their traditional Coranic school. Thierno asks the School Principal, “What new good are you teaching men's sons, to make them desert our glowing hearths for the benefit of your schools?” (8).

Thierno's fear of the alienation that French education may create in the Diallobé community is an implicit criticism of the consequences of colonial politics of assimilation on Africans. As Ihechukwu Madubuike defines it, the concept of assimilation describes “the traditional colonial policy of France” dating back to the days of Richelieu “when the Royal edicts of 1635 and 1642 made native converts of the Catholic faith citizens and natural French men” (*Senegalese Novel* 3). After the French Revolution of
1789, the Ancient Regime survived into a political and cultural assimilation of all the French colonies in Africa. In Senegal, the French initiated assimilation policy as early as the late 19th century. The Article VI of the French Constitution of the Year III states: “The colonies are an integral part of the Republic and are subject to the same law”(3). Assimilation was a primitivistic, condescending, and intrinsically in-egalitarian French policy based on the assumption that the culture, civilization, and institutions of the Africans were inferior to those of the French. The civilizationist claim of the French is also apparent in their claim that they were in Africa to bring the light of civilization to a “dark” continent. The French's strategy of displacing the local African tradition in order to impose their civilization had negative effects on modern African Francophone societies. From a socio-cultural point of view, this assimilation alienated Africans from their tradition, leaving them in a restless, unsafe, blurring, and indeterminate life where they could identify neither with the tradition of their ancestors nor with the culture of the newcomers. Madubuike observes:

> French education, without a doubt, has produced individuals who are alienated from their traditional culture, who display a Western model of behaviour (they eat at the table, wear suits and ties, spend their holidays in France) but who all the same are not assimilated because they betray by their social conduct some of the traditional values still clinging to their inner selves (167).

The disruption in which assimilation put Africans 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 built stronger houses (10). While they hoped that the West would teach Samba its philosophy, science and technology, the Diallobé dreaded that it would educate him in the “art of winning without being right” (122). Before crossing the Atlantic Ocean to go to Paris and learn western knowledge, Samba already knew that the French school would alienate him from his tradition by ending his priceless education at Thierno's Coranic school and weakening his spiritual ties to the past. When the knight receives a letter from the Chief of the Diallobé telling him that the family has decided to send his son to him “so that he might be enrolled in the new [French] school,” Samba feels a striking panic in both his father's face and his. After the knight finished reading the letter, he went to bed and started meditating over the ambiguous life that his people would have if they decided to go the French school. Looking at his father's face, Samba could sense anguish and outburst in the Knight's mind. A silent and restless voice in his father's mind told Samba that education might bring irreparable loss and uncertain gain in the Diallobé community. On the one hand, the voice tells Samba that the French school would sever the Diallobé “from the Glowing Hearth” of the Coranic school (65). On the other hand, the voice confides to Samba that the school would lead the Diallobé to a new world where spiritual development would be less valued than economic progress. Kane writes:

What the knight felt when he received the letter was like a blow in his heart. So, the victory of the foreigners was complete! Here were the Diallobe, here was his own family, on their knees before a burst of fireworks. A solar burst, it is true, the midday burst of an exasperated civilization. The knight was suffering deeply in the face of this irreparable thing which was being accomplished here, before his eyes, upon his own
flesh. Those who, even down to his own family, who were racing headlong into the future, if they could only understand that their course was a suicide, their sun a mirage! If only he himself were of the stature to rise up before them on the road, and put an end to that blind contest! (63)

The Knight's statement raises questions about the significance of a colonial policy of modernization of Africa in which overindulgence in material gain and spiritual void will compromise the salvation of Africans. The Knight's strongest fear is that "the balance of man" and "the love of God" upon which social and economic stability depend may not be valued in the rush to modernization (63). The Knight perceives modernization as a race in which colonial policy of unequal distribution of resources will turn the Diallobé into dependents of the West by jeopardizing their balance of power and social stability. The main goal of the colonists was to subordinate Africans by exploiting their natural resources systematically. As Keith L. Walker argues, in Africa, colonization was a system of exclusive exploitation of all the natural resources of Africans "as well as the exclusive monopoly of the colonial marketplace" (104). This system "not only formally and legally outlawed all direct trade among the colonies or with foreign powers, but also limited local rates and levels of production" (104). The colonizer's exploitation of Africa's natural resources had irreparable consequences on the economic structures of contemporary African societies. This exploitation accounts for the drastic poverty and lack of manufactures in the continent. It created an unequal system of power relations between Europeans and Africans, forcing the latter to rush headlong to Western ideals and policies that do nothing but increase corruption and greed in the
continent. The Knight observes:

Happiness is not a function of the mass of responses, but of their distribution. There must be a balance. But the West is possessed by its own compulsion, and the world is becoming westernized. Far from men's resisting the madness of the West at the time when they ought to do so, in order to pick and choose, assimilate or reject, we see them, on the contrary, in all latitudes, a-quiver with covetousness, then metamorphosing themselves in the space of a generation, under the action of this new egotism which the West is scattering abroad. (64)

The Knight's statement suggests the economic and social disruption that neo-colonization can create in Africa by influencing Africa's political elite to participate in the oppression of their nations, at the detriment of the people who had sent them to school. Many African intellectuals returned home only to reject their traditions and impose Western policies and ideals that they were supposed to understand and evaluate before implementing them in their newly independent nations. In this sense, most of the Socialist and Capitalist ideologies that the African political elite implemented in their independent nations in the 1960s and 70s turned out to be instruments of either Western colonial tyranny and totalitarianism or of Western neo-colonial exploitation in the continent. As Frantz Fanon points out, in a post-colonial world “The national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement” (124) and establishes a mono-party system which is “the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous, and cynical” (The Wretched 133). Indeed, the national bourgeoisie and expatriate intellectuals
of newly independent Africa have often been instruments of Western oppression against their own people. The West has often turned these leaders into puppets of European diplomacy and required that they implement in their countries incoherent political and economic systems that served no practical purpose other than to maintain the power that the former colonists gave them.  

Another legacy of colonialism in Africa is the insecurity of African intellectuals when they realize that modernization has alienated them from their tradition. This entrapment of the modern African intellectual is visible when Samba goes to Paris to study philosophy. Walking in the streets of Paris, Samba is overwhelmed by a confluence of material substance and spiritual emptiness around him. Kane writes: “'These streets are bare,' he was noticing. 'No, they are not empty. One meets objects of flesh in them, as well as objects of metal. Apart from that, they are empty. Ah! One also encounters events. Their succession congests time, as the objects congest the street. Time is obstructed by their mechanic jumble’”(119). In Paris, Samba experiences the pain of being invisible to the Western eye. This strange sense of being invisible to Europeans is strongly felt when Pierre-Louis, an African-Martiniquan revolutionary expatriate that Samba meets in Paris, tells Samba:

Ha, ha, ha! I know what it is. It is not the material absence of your native soil that keeps you in a state of suspended animation, it is its spiritual absence. The West passes you by, you are ignored, you are useless and that at a time when you yourself can no longer pass by the West. Then you succumb to the complex of the Unloved. You feel that your position is precarious. (130)
This dilemma is the same type of estrangement that confronts the African American, the Caribbean, or the African expatriate in the West. This Afro-Diasporic alienation develops in what Gilroy calls the “contact zones,” which are these areas in between cultures and histories where many Black intellectuals such as C.L.R. James, Stuart Hall, Anthony Appiah, and Hazel Carby who crisscross the Atlantic Ocean found themselves in and noted the urgency of “cultural interpositionality” and the end of racial particularism (*Black Atlantic* 6). Fanon described this area as this “zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born” (*Black Skin* 10). Strange as it is, this alienating “zone” in the West, where the modern Black individual realizes the indeterminacy and instability of his (or her) self, is the same “area” where Samba discovers a way out of his predicament. The same ambiguous position in which Samba finds himself in the West provides him with alternatives to the uprootedness and estrangement in which colonization had put him.

Historically, the detrimental impact of colonization on Africa was also visible on the huge disparity in socio-economic conditions that existed between those who lived in the village and those who were in urban centres. In Senegal, Beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, colonization created a huge gap between wealthy administrative officials called “citoyens” [citizens] and the poor inhabitants labelled as “sujets”[subjects]. However, the most striking contrast was the disparity that existed in the facilities and living conditions in urban and rural areas. Boahen explains: “In the social field, hospitals were built, though they were found mainly in the urban centres to serve the expatriate communities. Other amenities such as piped water, electricity, dispensaries, paved streets, and the like were also provided, but mainly in the urban
centres” (59). Another disparity was the low number of schools in the village in contrast with the comparatively high number of educational centres in the urban centre. This gap in educational opportunity created social inequalities that have certainly contributed to the national divisions that one find today in Africa. It was from an awareness of this disruption --that the French colonial administration and economy created in West Africa--, that Kane wrote *Ambiguous Adventure* in order to suggest that Africans create a balance between “man” and “work,” and between spiritual growth and material expansion. Madubuike explains: “What Kane is arguing for is the reconciliation of the material and the spiritual . . . modernization must not overlook the spiritual concerns of man because these concerns are real” (32-33).

Seeking a balance between tradition and modernity, Kane envisions a world in which Blacks can appropriate Western culture to support their hybrid social, economic, and cultural existence, knowledge, and skills without loosing the spiritual foundation of their African tradition. Kane strongly encourages Africans to enter the doors of Western civilization in search of a magic that can guarantee Africa's survival in the modern world. Yet he urges them not to let modernity replace the traditions of their ancestors. In reaction to the Teacher's claim that by allowing their children to attend the French school, the *Diallobé* will offend God and provoke his anger, Samba's father points out that European education can be appropriated and transformed into tools that will help protect the spiritual and material interests of the *Diallobé*. The dialogue between the teacher and Samba's father speaks to this effect:

> Master, what you say is terrible. May God's pity be upon us . . . But must we push our children into their schools?”
“It is certain that their school is the better teacher of how to join wood to wood, and that men should learn how to construct dwelling houses that resist the weather.”

“Even at the price of His Sacrifice?”

“I know also that He must be saved. We must build solid dwellings for men, and within those dwellings we must save God. That I know. But do not ask me what should be done tomorrow morning, for that I do not know.” (10)

The Knight's response to Thierno's questions is an objective assessment of the positive impact that Western education could have on the Diallobé when it is constructively acquired and utilized. The Knight's idea that French education will help the Diallobé maintain their religion and achieve secular development while shaping their future is a realistic acknowledgement of the unpredictable power and hybrid conditions that European culture could create in Africa. The knight's conviction that crossing out into the Western world will help the Diallobé develop the knowledge that is necessary for their survival in the modern world reflects his pragmatic and practical approach to economic urgencies. Likewise, the knight's belief that going to school will help the Diallobé learn new skills such as the art of building more resistant “dwellings” where they can worship God is a constructive domestication of Western knowledge for African development.

In this sense, Kane's fascination with French culture reflects his desire to create a synthesis of Western and African culture that is hybrid and estranging, yet which is the road to Africa's freedom and triumph. In his genuine devotion to hybridity, Kane envisions the development of a future Diallobé society in which Western science and African wisdom are intertwined to create human progress. As
Lilyan Kesteloot observed, Kane's alternative to underdevelopment is “the coexistence of traditional and modern societies” and the integration of “the culture of Descartes and a certain African mysticism” (Black Writers 351).

Yet it is with shock that Samba realizes that Western culture is a fantasy in its claim for an international humanism that is undercut by pervasive ethnocentrism. David Leeming reports an incident in which the French police arrests Baldwin in Marseille on December 1949 for having received a stolen bed sheet that a friend from New York had given him (70). The incident creates in Baldwin the same devastating effect that French ethnocentrism produces in Samba when he realizes that Western cultural and racial ideologies of supremacy were pervasive realities in France, contradicting the ideals of universal liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice of the French. Leeming explains: “For Baldwin this was a terrifying experience. Here in Paris, where he had come to be free, he found himself facing policemen who were 'no better or worse than their American counterparts’” (71).  

In Adventure, Samba is as disillusioned about Paris as Baldwin was at one time. Like Baldwin, Samba realizes that the idea of cosmopolitanism that is easily credited to the French was a façade since the French did not integrate Black culture genuinely into their lives and cultures. Like Baldwin, Samba also finds that the French perceive Africans as inferior people. This racism and primitivism was the result of the obsession that the West has for substance and illusion at the expense of spirituality and truth. Substance, the teacher had told Samba, results in spiritual emptiness. The teacher asked the Diallobe: “How are the Diallobe to be given knowledge of the arts and the use of arms, the possession of riches and the wealth of the body, without at the same time weighing them down,
dulling their mind” (31). The Chief of the Diallobé, who shares the teacher's fear and doubts about the virtues of Western education, says:

“If I told them [the Diallobé] to go to school,” he said at last, “they would go en masse. They would learn all the ways of joining wood to wood which we do not know. But, learning, they would also forget. Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget? I should like to ask you: can one learn this without forgetting that, and is what one learns worth what one forgets? (30-31)

The biggest tragedy that Samba faces after his return home is the impossibility to reconnect with African tradition without, a priori, paying the price of such atonement. Back home, Samba realizes that becoming who he was required him to strip himself of his Western self, which is feasible upon the condition that he ceases to exist. As Jacques Nantet argues, the only way Samba can reconnect with tradition is to commit “genocide of the souls” (1-2). The tragic nature of this fate is what leads Samba to refuse to pray, not because he does not wish to do so, but because resistance is the only way for him to surrender to God. Samba meditates: “To constrain God. . . To give Him the choice, between His return within your heart and your death, in the name of His glory . . . He cannot evade the choice, If I constrain Him truly, from the bottom of my heart, will all I have of sincerity” (162). These words seal Samba's fate. Kane writes: “As he [Samba] spoke the fool had begun to walk along behind Samba, burrowing feverishly into the depth of his frock-throat”(162). The fatal end of Samba's life is described in the following scene:
The fool was in front of him.
“Promise me that you will pray tomorrow.”
“No! I do not agree….”
Without noticing, he had spoken these words aloud. It was then that the fool drew his weapon, and suddenly everything went black around Samba Diallo. (162)

The tragic death that Samba experiences in order to be reconnected with his authentic Black culture is similar to the spiritual vacuum that African expatriates who return home, after long years abroad, face before they can regain their sense of self. Reclaiming the African past often requires a tragic spiritual rebirth similar to that of Samba. This is a spiritual rite of passage and a descent into an apocalyptic world in which one lost soul regains a true sense of the past and identity. Samba then is a modern African who surrenders to the unshakeable force of his Black culture before he can regain true consciousness in another world free of the burden of material substance. As critic Kenneth Harrow points out, “his [Samba's] death, far from implying the defeat of the Diallobé society Islamic doctrine, vindicates its view of the ephemerality of mortal existence and the primacy of the spiritual” (169).

*Ambiguous Adventure* represents the oppression and transformation that colonization brought about in the lives and cultures of modern Africans. As the book suggests, colonization took away the freedom and economic stability of Africans, forcing them to work for the benefit of Western progress.

Moreover, *Ambiguous Adventure* provides alternatives to Gilroy's dismissal of Africa's contributions to the formation of Black modernity. Rather than simply dismissing cultural essentialism as being gregarious and backward, as Gilroy has done in *The Black Atlantic*, Kane represents modern Black cultures as
being authentic (and hybrid) and nationalist (and internationalist) at the same time. Recognizing such complexity of Black cultures will help us better understand the cultural, economic, and political relationships between Blacks of Africa and of the Diaspora. Moreover, acknowledging such ambiguity will allow us to validate and represent the contribution that African intellectuals have made in the theorizing of Black modernity in Africa and abroad.

NOTES

7 Khapoya, 120.
11 Karen Thorsen's documentary The Price of the Ticket (1989), a
posthumous video tribute to James Baldwin, has a scene in which poet
Maya Angelou describes the surprise that many Black-American expatriate intellectuals such as Baldwin and Wright felt disillusioned when they realized that the French were racists toward Black people even if they acted as passionate devotee of “Negro” art. See Karen Thorsen, dir., James Baldwin: the Price of the Ticket (San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel, 1990).


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