



The Complex Dynamics of Africanness and Westernization: A Comparative Study of Dual Identity in African Literature

***Maxwell-Akani, L.N.**

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Africa, Toru-Orua

***Corresponding author email:** amadiokeylilian@gmail.com

Abstract

This study undertakes a qualitative comparative analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), focusing on the complex dynamics of Africanness and Westernization as expressed through the theme of dual identity. Drawing systematically on postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and identity theory, the research investigates how African characters such as Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki embody the tensions between traditional values and Western modernity. It draws on postcolonial theory to examine the impact of colonialism and Westernization on African cultures and identities. It employs cultural studies to analyze the cultural dynamics of Africanness and Westernization, highlighting the tensions between traditional African values and Western influences. Identity theory is used to explore the complexities of dual identity in African literature, examining how characters navigate multiple cultural identities and negotiate their sense of belonging. The analysis highlights issues of cultural assimilation, identity crisis, hybridity, and resistance, showing how these texts interrogate the challenges of belonging in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Unlike previous studies that often isolate individual texts, this work offers a comparative lens that synthesizes insights across West and East African traditions, emphasizing points of convergence and divergence in the representation of dual identity. By grounding its argument in close textual analysis and critical dialogue with existing scholarship, the study contributes fresh perspectives to debates on cultural hybridity and identity formation in African literature.

Keywords: Africanness, Westernization, Dual Identity, Postcolonialism, Cultural Hybridity

Introduction

Nothing has birthed socio-politico-eco issues, messages, and reflections as literature. Literature has long served as one of the most powerful sites for negotiating cultural, political, and social realities. African literature, in particular, has emerged as a critical space where the tensions of colonial encounter, cultural survival, and identity formation are dramatized. Among its recurring concerns is the convergence of Africanness and Westernization, a theme that continues to shape debates about belonging, authenticity, and cultural continuity in a globalized context. Africanness in literature refers to the constellation of cultural identities rooted in Africa's diverse traditions, histories, and values. It embodies practices such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, ancestral spirituality, and deep connections to land and language. In contrast, Westernization reflects the influence of European colonialism and modernity, often associated with Christianity, formal education, individualism, and political domination. The collision of these forces produces what may be termed a contract of dualism—the uneasy negotiation between preserving indigenous ways and adapting to Western systems. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) stand as three seminal African novels that capture this contract of dualism. Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki, the protagonists of these works, embody the struggles of cultural navigation in colonial contexts: Okonkwo as the defender of Igbo tradition, Samba Diallo as the intellectual torn between Islam and Western philosophy, and Waiyaki as the tragic mediator between tradition and Christian modernity. Each of them dramatizes the complexities of dual identity, illuminating the psychological and cultural fractures produced by colonial intrusion.

This study adopts a qualitative research design, using textual analysis to examine Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965). The qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of themes, characterizations, and narrative strategies, which are essential for understanding the complexities of dual identity in African literature. Three interrelated theoretical perspectives guide this analysis: postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and identity theory. Postcolonial theory is employed to examine the impact of colonialism and Westernization on African cultures, identities, and power relations. Concepts such as hybridity, cultural ambivalence, and the colonial gaze are used to interrogate how colonial structures shape characters' experiences and the broader social context. Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki are analyzed as embodiments of the tension between colonizer and colonized cultural paradigms. Cultural studies provide tools to analyze the interplay between tradition and modernity. This framework emphasizes how cultural practices, beliefs, and values inform characters' behavior and decision-making, highlighting the sociocultural dynamics of Africanness in the face of Western influence. By examining rituals, education, and religious practices in the texts, the study illustrates how characters negotiate or resist cultural transformation. Identity theory is applied to understand the psychological and social dimensions of dual identity. The study explores how characters' self-conceptions, sense of belonging, and conflicts between personal and collective identity shape their responses to Westernization. Identity theory allows for an analysis of internal conflict, ambivalence, and the negotiation of multiple cultural affiliations. On data collection and analysis, primary data consist of the three selected novels. Secondary data include scholarly articles, critical reviews, and theoretical texts relevant to postcolonialism, African cultural studies, and identity formation. Data analysis proceeds through close reading of key passages, thematic coding, and comparative interpretation. Passages illustrating cultural tension, identity conflict, and dualism are highlighted to support analytical claims. The study employs a comparative perspective to draw parallels and contrasts between Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki. This approach allows for a broader understanding of how African writers across linguistic and regional contexts depict dual identity, and how characters' experiences reveal shared and divergent responses to colonial and Western influences. While Achebe and Kane foreground the West African experience, Ngũgĩ situates the same crisis within East Africa, enabling a broader continental reflection on Africanness and Westernization. Through the characters of Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki, we see the challenges of navigating dual identities and the tensions between traditional African values and Western influences. These characters' experiences reflect the broader struggles of African people to maintain their cultural identities in the face of globalization and cultural assimilation. The methodology integrates textual analysis with theoretical rigor, enabling a systematic investigation of Africanness, Westernization, and dual identity. This approach ensures that the study is both analytically precise and sensitive to the cultural, historical, and psychological complexities presented in the texts. Therefore, this introduction sets the stage for a deeper interrogation of how literature functions as both a witness to and a critique of Africa's encounter with the West.

Review of Literature on *Things Fall Apart*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, and *the River Between*

Scholarship on African literature has consistently emphasized the negotiation of Africanness and Westernization, particularly from the context of identity and cultural conflict. Achebe, Kane, and Ngũgĩ are often read as foundational voices in dramatizing the dilemmas of colonial encounter, yet critics differ in how they interpret the outcomes of dual identity. The critical reception of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1963/1961), and Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* (1965) consistently foregrounds the tension between Africanness and Westernization as a central site of dual identity. Scholars agree that the novels do not merely narrate encounters with colonial modernity but dramatize the psychic, cultural, and epistemological fractures those encounters create. Bookshy (2020) and Avil (2017) underline that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was groundbreaking precisely because it told the story of colonization from the perspective of the colonized, unlike Conrad's Eurocentric narrative. This shift is not simply representational; it reclaims interpretive authority, positioning African writers as custodians of their own cultural memory (Nyeenewa, 2022). As Irele (2000) notes, the novel stages a "crisis of cultural memory," where colonial intrusion unsettles communal frameworks, producing both resistance and complicity. The critical consensus underscores that Okonkwo's fall is symptomatic of an unstable dual identity: a fractured negotiation between fidelity to Igbo tradition and the disruptive force of Western religion, education, and governance. Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* expands this debate by locating dual identity within the machinery of colonial education. Critics such as Dia (2014), Gueye (2023), and Steemers (2013) examine how Samba Diallo's trajectory embodies hybridity: his French schooling equips him with tools of modern rationality but estranges him from the sacred epistemology of the Diallobé. This duality aligns with Bhabha's (1994) theorization of hybridity as a "third space," where imitation and resistance coexist. Yet critics also stress its existential costs. Brodnicka (2020) reads Samba's journey as an initiatory path toward sacred personhood, revealing that Kane's philosophical lens goes beyond sociological conflict to dramatize the ontological stakes of identity. In this way, hybridity is not merely cultural ambivalence but a condition of fractured

being. The ambivalence Gueye (2023) foregrounds is thus both social and spiritual, exposing the dissonance between inherited traditions and the secularizing ethos of Western schooling.

Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* locates the same ambivalence in the collective struggles of the Gikuyu. Early commentary often emphasized Waiyaki's tragic role as mediator, tasked with reconciling Christian modernity and indigenous tradition but failing to unify his people (Iskarna, 2018; Thirsty Soul, 2019). More recent analyses, such as Mambrol (2024), read the Honia River itself as an allegorical boundary that embodies the impossibility of synthesis under colonial conditions. The symbolic geography of the novel encodes what Fanon (2008/1952) describes as the alienation of the colonized subject: Waiyaki's Western education promises liberation but also produces estrangement from his cultural center. Critics underscore that Ngũgĩ deliberately stages education, ritual, and love (notably Waiyaki's bond with Nyambura) as intersecting arenas of fracture, showing that colonialism imposes binaries that resist reconciliation. His later theoretical writings confirm this reading, insisting that the politics of language and education are central to the reproduction of colonial power (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). A cross-textual synthesis reveals shared thematic concerns: the destabilizing impact of Western education (*Ambiguous Adventure*, *The River Between*), the reconfiguration of religious and social orders (*Things Fall Apart*, *The River Between*), and the psychic disorientation of hybridity (*Ambiguous Adventure*). Yet the novels also diverge in scope. Achebe's work foregrounds communal disintegration, Kane's dramatizes philosophical ambivalence, and Ngũgĩ's exposes the collective contradictions of mediation. As Bedri (2017) and Suffern (2012) observe, Kane and Ngũgĩ interrogate education as both an emancipatory promise and a colonial trap, while Achebe stresses the erosion of Igbo socio-political institutions under missionary intervention. All three, however, resist portraying dual identity as a harmonious synthesis; instead, they leave it unresolved, reflecting the violent incompleteness of colonial modernity. In this regard, they anticipate later postcolonial theory: identity is not a stable essence but a field of contestation shaped by memory, language, and power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007; Bhabha, 1994). Thus, the literature suggests that African novels of the early postcolonial period are not only cultural artifacts but also theoretical interventions. They articulate, through narrative form and character fate, the dilemmas of belonging to two incommensurable worlds. Their tragic endings, Okonkwo's suicide, Samba's alienated death, Waiyaki's uncertain fate, are not failures of narrative closure but deliberate refusals of false reconciliation. They underscore what Fanon (2008/1952) and Ngũgĩ (1986) insist upon: that the work of decolonization involves not assimilation but the reconstruction of cultural memory and the reclamation of voice.

Africanness, Authenticity, and Identity Struggle in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Okonkwo, the character on whom major actions revolve, epitomizes traditional Africanness, defined by Igbo customs, masculinity, communal solidarity, and reverence for ancestral ways. His violent resistance to change underscores both the strength and fragility of indigenous identity. Achebe's narrative demonstrates how colonialism fractures communal bonds, leading to cultural and personal disintegration. *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel and the first book in his African trilogy is an influential work of the Nigerian literary renaissance in the 1960s which depicts the disintegration of Okonkwo's life and the Igbo society in Nigeria due to the arrival of British colonialism. The story follows Okonkwo, a man who, as white missionaries arrive in his tribe and start changing tradition, his life quite literally falls apart. Okonkwo's life is symbolic of Africa's pre-colonial lives and traditions and how it is forever changed by European colonialism. Initially, Okonkwo's life is marked by success and respect within his community, where he's renowned for his wrestling prowess, growing wealth, and expanding family. However, his fortunes take a downturn following Ikemefuna's tragic death and a series of unfortunate events, including the accidental killing of Ezeudu's 16-year-old son by his gun's explosion, which leads to his exile. During his time in exile at Mbanta, his motherland, the arrival of colonizers disrupts the traditional dynamics which he depended on, and his son Nwoye's interest in Christianity further strains their relationship. Upon his return to Umuofia, Okonkwo finds that the white have entered his community and that the white men's influence has transformed his community. Mr. Brown, a white missionary who is popular for his patience and understanding approach, has built a school (western education) and hospital (healthcare), and many clan members are enrolling their children in the school so that they can one day become clerks or teachers. However, soon after Okonkwo's return, Mr. Brown leaves the country due to health reasons, and Reverend Smith replaces him. Reverend Smith's rigid stance sparks tensions. Reverend Smith is uncompromising, encouraging acts among the converted clan members that provoke the rest of the clan.

When Enoch, a fanatical convert, rips the mask off of one of the clan's masked egwugwu during a ceremony, the clan retaliates by burning down the church. The desecration of the egwugwu by Enoch which was not taken lightly causes another uproar and incidents that lead to a tragic end for Okonkwo. Reverend Smith reports their transgression and the District Commissioner tricks the clan's leaders into meeting with him before handcuffing them. The clan leaders, including Okonkwo, suffer insults and beatings before they are released and their fine paid by the village. The District Commissioner's deceitful tactics and mistreatment of the clan leaders, including

Okonkwo, culminate in a final confrontation. The morning after their release, the clan leaders speak of war before they are interrupted by the arrival of court messengers. Full of hate, Okonkwo confronts the leader of the court messengers, who says that the white man commands the meeting to stop. In a flash, Okonkwo strikes down the messenger with his machete. Okonkwo's impulsive beheading of this court messenger is met with abandonment by his clansmen. Seeing that none of his clansmen support him in his violent action, Okonkwo walks away and hangs himself, taking his own life. When the District Commissioner comes to fetch Okonkwo the next day, the clansmen lead him to his hanging body instead, saying that they cannot touch it, since it's an abomination for a man to take his own life. The District Commissioner finds this custom an interesting anecdote for his planned book on Nigeria which he notes to title, "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

Achebe's ground-breaking novel thus, explores the life of Okonkwo, a complex and powerful Igbo man, in late 19th-century Nigeria. The story masterfully examines the human condition, delving into themes of identity, culture, colonialism, and the fragility of human relationships. As the plot reveals, Okonkwo's journey begins with his triumph as a young wrestler, earning him respect and admiration but, his life is marked by tragedy and struggle, driven by his determination to avoid his father's mistakes, and the arrival of British colonialists disrupts Okonkwo's world, introducing new laws, customs, and values that clash with traditional Igbo life. As Okonkwo navigates these changes, his personal demons, including his quick temper and complicated family relationships, exacerbate his struggles. The novel highlights the complexities of Igbo culture and tradition, revealing the richness of African society while critiquing the destructive impact of colonialism. The title "Things Fall Apart" references William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming," symbolizing the disintegration of social order and traditional values. Achebe's novel powerfully explores this theme, as Okonkwo's world is torn apart by colonialism and modernity. Through Okonkwo's story, Achebe sheds light on the human cost of cultural disruption and the importance of understanding and respecting traditional cultures. The novel remains a powerful exploration of the complexities of human identity and the enduring legacy of colonialism. Put it succinctly, *Things Fall Apart* explores dualism through the protagonist Okonkwo's struggles with tradition, culture, and colonialism. It highlights the contrast and clash that comes with westernization. Some key passages and sentences capture these. "And at last the day came by which he had fixed for his son's feasting, and he called on his kinsmen and acquaintances to come" (Chapter 4). This very sentence points to tradition and change, highlighting the importance of tradition, while also foreshadowing the changes that will disrupt it.

"Does the white man understand our custom about land?" (Chapter 16). This question points to cultural identity and colonialism, highlighting the clash between Igbo culture and British colonialism.

"He had a slight stammer, and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists" (Chapter 1). This illustrates Okonkwo's struggle with masculinity and his fear of being seen as weak.

"When did you become a shivering old woman?" (Chapter 3). At this point in the novel Okonkwo's individuality is questioned in relation to what is expected of him. It shows Okonkwo's struggle with his own emotions and the expectations of his community.

These excerpts demonstrate Achebe's exploration of dualism, highlighting the complexities of cultural identity, tradition, and colonialism in Igbo society.

"The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (P. 124)

This statement is made by Obierika in the novel. Obierika is a close friend of Okonkwo and serves as a voice of reason and insight in the novel. His reflection highlights the insidious impact of colonialism on Igbo society, emphasizing how the seemingly harmless introduction of Christianity ultimately led to division and disintegration within the community. This passage underscores the themes of cultural disruption and the complexities of resistance to change. "There is no story that is not true ... The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others." This statement in Chapter 15 is made by Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, who has seen the struggle of the Igbo people with colonialism and christianity. This profound quote is a highlight of the complexities of cultural differences and the subjective nature of truth. Coming from a tribesman, Uchendu, it serves as a response to the Igbo people's skepticism about the stories of white men. He emphasizes that every story contains some truth, and what's considered good or acceptable varies greatly between cultures. This wisdom is particularly relevant in the context of colonialism, where the Igbo people are struggling to understand and adapt to the sudden arrival of European colonizers. The quote can be broken down into two key parts: "There is no story that is not true". This phrase suggests that every story, no matter how fantastical or unbelievable,

contains some element of truth. Uchendu is encouraging the Igbo people to approach the stories of white men with an open mind. "The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others". This phrase highlights the vast cultural differences between societies. What may be considered good or moral in one culture may be viewed as abhorrent in another. This underscores the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences. By sharing this wisdom, Uchendu aims to prepare Okonkwo and the Igbo people for the changing world around them, encouraging them to be more receptive to new ideas and perspectives. But the character of Okonkwo was not in for such consideration because his tradition that he is so rooted in unlike Samba Diallo cannot be tampered with any external forces.

In summary, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) remains a cornerstone of African literature because it reclaims the African perspective from colonial misrepresentations. Through Okonkwo, Achebe dramatizes the resilience and fragility of Africanness under colonial intrusion. Okonkwo is deeply rooted in Igbo cultural values: masculinity, communal solidarity, and ancestral authority. Yet these very values also expose his vulnerabilities. His rigidity and fear of weakness mirror the Igbo society's difficulty in adapting to colonial disruption. Achebe situates this conflict in scenes such as Obierika's lament: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (124). This underscores how colonialism fractured communal identity, eroding both cultural and social cohesion. Postcolonial theory helps explain how Achebe positions Okonkwo as a figure resisting the colonial gaze but unable to withstand the cultural disintegration brought by missionaries, education, and political imposition. From a cultural studies perspective, rituals such as wrestling, yam festivals, and funeral rites highlight the vitality of Igbo traditions, which clash with Western religion and institutions. Identity theory further illuminates Okonkwo's tragic duality: while he insists on embodying Africanness uncompromised, his suicide signals the impossibility of sustaining identity in an irrevocably altered colonial context.

Hybridity and Ambivalence in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*

Samba Diallo, the central character in the work, embodies the intellectual caught between Islamic-African traditions and Western philosophy. His dual identity is marked by existential ambivalence, as he becomes estranged from both cultural spheres. His tragic death dramatizes the cost of hybridity, an incomplete belonging that alienates rather than liberates. *Ambiguous Adventure*, a Senegalese Cheikh Hamidou Kane's 1961 (early post-colonial period) novel considered philosophical is a classic of Francophone African literature first written in French and translated into English in 1963 by American Katherine Woods. It tells the story of Samba Diallo, a young Senegalese boy from the Diallobe region who is caught between his traditional Islamic upbringing and the allure of Western education and culture. The plot explores the conflict arising from the collision of these two worlds, particularly when Samba is sent to France to study philosophy. The novel examines the impact of colonialism and the struggle for identity as Samba grapples with his divided self and the changing landscape of his homeland. In essence, *Ambiguous Adventure* which revolves around the character by name, Samba Diallo explores the duality of human experience in colonial and postcolonial societies. The novel opens with Samba's immersion in the spiritual and traditional life of the Diallobe, particularly his education in the Quranic school. Samba's parents, along with other members of the community, decide to send him and other young people to France to understand the colonizers and their ways. In France, Samba excels in his studies and is drawn to the intellectual and materialistic aspects of Western civilization. Samba experiences a growing sense of division within himself, struggling to reconcile his traditional Islamic beliefs and the values of the West. Samba returns to his homeland, now significantly changed by the influence of French culture, further intensifying his internal conflict. Consequently, the novel culminates in a moment of crisis as Samba wrestles with his divided identity, ultimately leading to a tragic end. The novel ends with the death of Samba Diallo, the protagonist, at the hands of Thierno, a man driven by a desire to protect and preserve the traditional ways. Samba Diallo by influence from two sides is disconnected from both sides, as he is neither one nor the other and can decide anything in favour of any to the detriment of the other. Thierno, a respected elder and teacher, views Samba's Western education with suspicion and sees his intellectual journey as a betrayal of their culture. He ultimately kills Samba because Samba refuse to promise to pray at his grave. *Ambiguous Adventure* splits the colonized and the colonizer into two distinct and opposing cultures: The former (the Diallobe) is traditional, religious, and death-focused, while the latter (the French) is modern, secular, scientific, and life-focused. The novel is structured as vignettes that oscillate between the settings of the Diallobe' community, the city of L. in Senegal, and Paris, France. The narration style involves both subjective and objective third-person point narrative. Each vignette incorporates philosophical discussion, usually consisting of a traditional point of view represented by a Diallobe' person and a non-traditional/progressive point of view represented by a French person.

An analyses of *Ambiguous Adventure* as a representation of dualism is accurate then. Samba Diallo is the main character in the novel as we have noted and demonstrates identity dualism (hybridity). He is a confluence of African and western culture, an expression of the conflict that happens when two different systems coexist. From

the first chapter of the novel Samba exists between two seemingly opposite lifestyles. As the cousin of the Chief of Diallobe tribe and son of an important worker in the city of L, obviously is described as a noble man. Due to his noble heritage, Samba Diallo is sent by the Diallobe to learn about the modern life of the colonizers and in return, translate it into the community's long-term survival. Unfortunately, Samba Diallo finds this unsatisfying, hence finds himself lonely as he walks the streets of Paris. Samba Diallo, a young man from the Diallobe community in Senegal sent to France to learn about Western culture finds life difficult as his personality becomes twisted by conflicts in systems. As Samba navigates between his traditional roots and modern influences, he embodies the conflict between two distinct worldviews. Through Samba's journey, Kane examines the tensions between traditional and modern perspectives, highlighting the challenges of identity and cultural duality in a postcolonial context. Samba's experiences serve as a microcosm for the broader struggles of cultural identity and adaptation.

Closely read, Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* is an insightful novel that explores the struggle for identity, dual identity, and the complexities of cultural assimilation. The novel is set in Senegal during the colonial era and follows the journey of Samba Diallo, a young man who navigates the challenges of traditional African values and Western education. Samba Diallo's character embodies the struggle for identity that many Africans faced during the colonial era. As a student in a French educational system, he is caught between two worlds: the traditional African values of his community and the Western philosophical ideas that shape his education. This dual identity creates tension and confusion, as Samba Diallo grapples with the question of who he is and where he belongs. The novel highlights the complexities of dual identity, where individuals are torn between two cultures, languages, and worldviews. Samba Diallo's experiences illustrate the challenges of navigating multiple identities, as he struggles to reconcile his African heritage with Western influences. This dual identity is a source of both strength and weakness, as Samba Diallo grapples with the contradictions and complexities of his own identity. Samba Diallo is a complex and nuanced portrayal of the struggles of dual identity. He is a symbol of the African intellectual, caught between two worlds and grappling with the complexities of his own identity. Through Samba Diallo's experiences, Kane highlights the challenges of navigating multiple identities and the importance of finding a sense of belonging and purpose. Thus, evident in the novel are the themes of:

Cultural Assimilation: Kane highlights the impact of colonialism on African cultures, as Western values and practices are imposed on traditional African societies.

Identity Crisis: Samba Diallo's struggles reflect the identity crisis that many Africans faced during the colonial era, as they navigated the complexities of dual identity.

Tradition vs. Modernity: Kane explores the tensions between traditional African values and Western modernity, highlighting the challenges of balancing cultural heritage with modernization.

Ambiguous Adventure is a powerful novel that explores the complexities of identity, dual identity, and cultural assimilation. Through Samba Diallo's character, Kane highlights the challenges of navigating multiple identities and the importance of finding a sense of belonging and purpose. The novel is a thought-provoking reflection on the human experience, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of identity in a postcolonial context. In other words, Samba Diallo is the eye of the author, reader, and critic. Kane explores dualism through the protagonist Samba Diallo's struggles with identity, faith, and cultural heritage.

Some key passages and sentences illustrate dualism and the challenges that come with it:

"I'm torn between two worlds, one foot in each, yet belonging to neither" captures the essence of dualism and identity conflict, and is practically reflected in Samba's experiences, as he navigates between his Islamic heritage and Western education.

Samba's father writes to him, "God is not our parent. He is entirely outside the stream of flesh, blood, and history which links us together. We are free!" (p. 162). This highlights religious and traditional conflicts, as well as the contrast between the spiritual depth of the Diallobé's traditions and the secular rationalism of the Western world. The Most Royal Lady's statement, "The foreign school is the new form of war which those who have come here are waging, and we must send our elite there, expecting that all the country will follow them" (page 37), showcases the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing modernity. The Most Royal Lady in the novel, as the name implies, is a significant character and the sister of the CHIEF of the Diallobe. She is a woman of great wisdom and decisiveness, holding an esteemed position in Diallobe society due to her lineage and intelligence. Her role is pivotal in advocating for the children of Diallobe to attend French schools, despite her reservations about Western culture. She believes this is necessary for the survival and empowerment of her people, allowing them to navigate the complexities of colonial influence. Samba's experiences in Paris make him realize, "I have become the two", referring to his identity as both a Diallobé heir and a person accepting capitalist views (page 150). This cultural displacement illustrates the alienation that comes with straddling two worlds. Also, the novel's conclusion, where Samba's attempts to reconnect with his roots are fraught with difficulty, raises questions about integrating tradition and modernity without losing one's essence.

“The school in which I would place our children will kill in them what today we love and rightly conserve with care. Perhaps the very memory of us will die in them. When they return from the school, there may be those who will not recognize us.” Here, The Most Royal Lady recognizes the risks in sending the boy (and others like him) off to the foreigners' schools. But Samba Diallo rejoices that he has not lost his identity but now a confluence of two cultures. According to The Complete Review, while Samba Diallo Islamic teacher was disappointed in the loss of his promising pupil, Samba Diallo “never entirely forsakes his religious upbringing, remaining a good Muslim (praying as prescribed, abstaining from alcohol, etc.) and always trying to reconcile the Western philosophy he learns with the religious tradition that formed him. He reads Pascal (“Of the men of the West, he is certainly the most reassuring”) and thinks he sees some positives in the advancements brought by European civilization.” An examination of Samba Diallo’s relief that he has not lost totally indicates his realization that his true identity as an African has been tampered with.

The passages above demonstrate Kane's exploration of dualism, highlighting the complexities of identity, faith, and cultural heritage in a postcolonial context. Other passages and sentences in the novel that highlight the complexities and contradictions of dualism are:

“The line between love and hate is thin, and I've walked it many times.”

“I'm searching for truth, but the more I find, the more I question.”

“My heart says one thing, my mind another; which one should I listen to?”

“In the darkness, I find light; in the silence, I find noise.”

These passages and sentences illustrate hybridity by highlighting: inner conflict evident in the struggle between opposing forces or desires; ambivalence which characterizes mixed feelings or contradictory emotion; paradoxical or contradictory ideas or situations and; the multifaceted nature of human experience. In summary, Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961) foregrounds the philosophical crisis of hybridity. Samba Diallo, the protagonist, embodies the ambivalence of dual identity: rooted in Islamic tradition yet seduced by Western rationalism. Kane presents the colonial school as both a site of empowerment and alienation. The Most Royal Lady recognizes its necessity—“The foreign school is the new form of war” (37)—while also warning of its dangers. This tension illustrates Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, where colonial education creates subjects who are “almost the same but not quite.” Samba embodies this liminality: he never fully abandons his Islamic heritage, yet his immersion in Western philosophy estranges him from his community. Identity theory helps reveal Samba's fractured self. His lament, “I have become the two” (150), captures the instability of hybrid identity—simultaneously expansive and paralyzing. Postcolonial readings interpret his death at the hands of Thierno as symbolic: the community's rejection of the Western-educated subject who can no longer fully belong. Unlike Okonkwo, who rejects compromise, Samba represents the intellectual caught in-between, rendered powerless by ambivalence.

Contrast and Mediation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*

Waiyaki, the central character, symbolizes the possibility of reconciliation between African traditions and Western education. Tasked with uniting divided Gikuyu communities, he envisions schools as sites of cultural integration. Yet his failure reveals the impossibility of harmonious dualism under colonial conditions. His ambiguous fate underscores the unresolved nature of identity negotiations. Set specifically on two ridges, two Gukuyi villages of the Kenyan highlands, *Ambiguous Adventure*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1965 novel tells the story of the two Kenya villages, Kameno and Makuyi, separated by the Honia River during the early days of British colonialism. There is a conflict between traditional Gikuyu customs (Kameno) and the encroaching Christian missionaries (Makuyi) that encapsulates an ideological divide, and also the struggle of a young leader, Waiyaki to unite the two villages. Kameno adheres to traditional Gukuyi customs, including the practice of female circumcision, while Makuyi embraces Christianity and rejects many traditional practices. Waiyaki, the main character is prophesied to be the saviour of his people hence, is sent to missionary school to learn the ways of the colonizers. Influenced by his father's prophecy and his own experiences, Waiyaki who is now a confluence of his traditional religion/education and western religion/education, attempts to bridge the gap between the two villages by establishing schools that blend traditional knowledge with what he learns from the missionaries. However, his efforts are met with resistance from both sides, and he is eventually accused of betraying his people. A tragic end follows. The end of the story sees Waiyaki and Nyambura caught by the Kiama, a traditional council who will decide their fate. The specific details of their fate are left ambiguous, creating an ominous conclusion to the narrative, as the reader is left to ponder the consequences for the couple.

The River Between is a seminal novel in African literature that explores the cultural and ideological conflicts arising from colonialism in Kenya. At its core, the novel presents a profound dualism between Africanness (embodied by Gikuyu traditions) and Westernization (represented by Christianity and colonialism). This duality is not just a clash of cultures but also a struggle for identity, autonomy, and survival. Through its style, setting, background, characters, and symbolism, *The River Between* explores the concepts of contrast and dualism. It interrogates the tensions between tradition and modernity, indigenous spirituality and Christianity, and resistance versus assimilation. It explores the complexities of identity, culture, and colonialism in Kenya during the early 20th century. The novel follows Waiyaki, a young man torn between his loyalty to his tribe and his desire for education and progress. The title of the text is itself aesthetic. Ngugi names his work what could capture underlying meaning. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o effectively captures the complexities of colonial experience and its impact on the Gikuyu people by focusing on the river as a symbol of division and tension. The title *The River Between* is a powerful metaphor that encapsulates the central themes of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel. The river Honia serves as a physical and symbolic divide between the two villages, Kameno and Makuyu, representing the cultural and ideological differences between them. It highlights the physical and metaphorical division between the two communities, representing the conflict between traditional Gikuyu beliefs and the influence of Christianity and colonialism. The river itself symbolizes the tensions and divisions that arise as the communities grapple with changing times and the intrusion of Western ways. This is proven in the text in the following ways:

Physical and Symbolic Division:

The river physically separates Makuyu and Kameno, highlighting the distinct cultures and beliefs of each community. The "river" also represents a metaphorical gap. It signifies the divide between traditional Gikuyu practices and the introduction of Western education, Christianity, and colonial ideologies. Ngugi explores the role of religion in shaping identity and culture, highlighting the conflicts between traditional Gikuyu practices and Christianity.

This divide is further emphasized by the differing approaches of Waiyaki and Kabonyi, representing the tension between progress and tradition, and between embracing change and resisting external forces.

Conflict and Tension:

The title underscores the conflict between the two communities. The river is a constant reminder of their differences, and it becomes a symbol of the struggles they face in navigating their changing world. The river represents the struggle to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, and the anxieties that arise when attempting to balance the old with the new. The clash between traditional Gikuyu practices and the influence of Western culture and colonialism gives rise to the struggle of individuals to define their identities in a changing world and to find their place in a society grappling with new ideas and values, and consequently, leads to resistance and adaptation where the community attempts to navigate the complexities of colonialism and find ways to resist or adapt to the changing circumstances. Ngugi explores the tensions between traditional African values and Western modernity, highlighting the challenges of balancing cultural heritage with modernization. The river also mirrors the internal conflicts within the characters, such as Waiyaki's struggle to reconcile his love for Nyambura with his commitment to the kiama, or Muthoni's dilemma of whether to adhere to traditional circumcision or embrace Christianity.

Metaphor for Colonial Influence:

The river, as a boundary, can be seen as a metaphor for the boundaries imposed by colonialism, which fragmented Gikuyu society and introduced new ways of life.

The arrival of Christian missionaries and the subsequent clash between traditional and Christian beliefs further underscores the impact of colonialism on the community.

The river, with its flow and dynamism, can also be interpreted as representing the relentless and disruptive nature of colonialism, which constantly changed the landscape and the way of life for the Gikuyu people.

In essence, the title *The River Between* is a powerful and multi-layered metaphor that encapsulates the novel's central themes.

Through the element of **setting** Ngugi explores the concepts of contrast and dualism. The novel's setting itself embodies dualism: Kameno represents traditional Gikuyu values (led by Chege, Waiyaki's father); Makuyu symbolizes conversion to Christianity (led by Joshua, a fanatical Christian); and the river Honia ("cure" or "life") between them is both a physical and metaphorical divide, representing: Unity and division (it could bring people

together but also separates them); purification versus corruption (traditional rituals versus colonial influence). This geographical split mirrors the ideological rift between Africanness and Westernization.

The **historical and cultural context** (the Gikuyu and colonial disruption) of the novel is relevant in the exploration of the concepts of contrast and dualism. The novel is set in the early 20th century, during the height of British colonialism in Kenya. The Gikuyu people, like many African societies, had their own religious beliefs (Mwene-Nyaga, the Gikuyu god), social structures (elders, rituals like circumcision) and, economic systems (land ownership, agriculture), but colonialism disrupted these structures by imposing Christianity (missionary influence, denunciation of African customs), western education (schools that taught European values), and land alienation (displacement of Africans for white settlers). This historical backdrop frames the novel's central conflict: Should the Gikuyu adapt to Western ways to survive, or should they resist to preserve their identity?

Ngugi presents **key characters** as embodiments of dualism. Waiyaki represents dualism, Joshua represents Christianity, and Mu represents a strong believer and upholder of African tradition. These characters and others in the novel carefully live out the conflicts and struggles that shape the novel, a result of collision of different cultures.

"was life all a yearning and no satisfaction? Was one to live , a strange hollowness pursing one like a malignant beast that would not let one rest?...Waiyaki was made to serve the tribe, living day by day with no thoughts of self but always of others". This statement shows the pain of Waiyaki. He realizes he never lived for himself but for others and this pushed him to do things because of others. His father's desire to put him in a leadership position makes him decide Samba Diallo get western education to make him fit in properly. He wants his son to be prepared to attain the skills he will need to lead his tribe. However, this leaves Waiyaki with a sense of confusion, loneliness and loss of identity. He does not fit into either faction. He doesn't consider himself to be a Christian neither does he fully consider himself to be a traditionalist. You can sense deeply his sense of despair in the statement.

Waiyaki, known as the tragic mediator embodies the struggle for identity that many Africans faced during the colonial era. He's caught between two worlds: the traditional Gikuyu culture and the Western influences of the Christian missionaries. This dual identity creates tension and confusion, as Waiyaki grapples with the question of who he is and where he belongs. Waiyaki is caught between two worlds: He is educated in Western schools (symbolizing progress) but raised in Gikuyu traditions (expected to lead his people). His attempt to reconcile both worlds fails because: the elders distrust his Western education, the converts (like Joshua) see him as a pagan threat, and his love for Nyambura (a Christian) becomes a political liability. His downfall illustrates the impossibility of complete synthesis—colonialism forces a choice between tradition and modernity.

Joshua, the fanatical convert represents extreme Westernization. He rejects Gikuyu customs (calls them "sinful"), and forbids his daughters (Nyambura and Muthoni) from traditional rites. He symbolizes religious and cultural self-hatred under colonialism. His rigidity contrasts with Waiyaki's flexibility, showing how colonialism fractures communities.

Muthoni, Joshua's daughter and the symbol of defiance and tragedy in the novel, undergoes female circumcision—a key Gikuyu rite—despite being Christian. She seeks a middle path but dies from complications. Her death symbolizes the fatal cost of cultural conflict. Her story shows that partial resistance is not enough—colonialism demands total submission or total rebellion.

Chege, Waiyaki's father and custodian of tradition represents pure Africanness. He believes in prophecy (Waiyaki as a saviour), fears the loss of land and culture. His death marks the decline of untainted tradition. His warnings go unheeded, showing how colonialism erodes indigenous authority.

In this novel, the complexities of dual identity, where individuals are torn between two cultures, languages, and worldviews is highlighted. Waiyaki's experiences for example, illustrate the challenges of navigating multiple identities, as he struggles to reconcile his Gikuyu heritage with Western education and Christianity.

Conclusively, *The River Between* suggests that colonialism makes harmonious dualism impossible. The novel ends tragically because Waiyaki fails to unite the villages and the Gikuyu are either destroyed by resistance or corrupted by compliance. Ngũgĩ's message here is clear: True liberation requires rejecting colonial mentalities, not just colonial rule. The novel foreshadows Kenya's later struggles with neo-colonialism, where Westernization persists even after independence. *The River Between* is therefore, not just a story about Kenya but a universal allegory of how colonialism forces oppressed people into false binaries: tradition or modernity, resistance or assimilation. The tragedy is that the river never truly unites; it only divides.

In summary, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) explores cultural division through the metaphor of the Honia River, which separates the villages of Kameno (tradition) and Makuyu (Christianity). At its heart is Waiyaki, a young leader educated in missionary schools but charged by prophecy to safeguard his people. Ngũgĩ's symbolism emphasizes dualism. The river represents both life and division, mirroring the impossibility of harmony under colonial disruption. Waiyaki's attempts at mediation, founding schools that integrate traditional and Western knowledge, fail because neither side accepts hybridity. His romance with Nyambura, the daughter of a Christian convert, becomes politically untenable, revealing how personal identity is entangled with communal loyalties. From a cultural studies context, Ngũgĩ highlights the deep significance of rituals, such as initiation rites, which colonial Christianity condemns as barbaric. Postcolonial readings frame Waiyaki's failure as emblematic of Kenya's broader colonial dilemma: survival demands adaptation, yet adaptation risks erasure. Identity theory situates Waiyaki in perpetual liminality, trapped between belonging and betrayal. His tragedy, like Samba's, is not only personal but collective, as it dramatizes how colonialism forces false binaries—tradition or modernity, resistance or assimilation.

Comparative Discussion: Africanness, Westernization, and the Crisis of Dual Identity

Taken together, Achebe's Okonkwo, Kane's Samba Diallo, and Ngũgĩ's Waiyaki illustrate three distinct but interconnected responses to the pressures of Africanness and Westernization. Their trajectories reveal both the diversity of African experiences across regions and the shared dilemma of navigating identity in colonial contexts.

Models of Resistance and Negotiation:

Okonkwo resists compromise entirely. His rejection of Christianity, Western education, and colonial authority embodies a radical defense of Africanness. Yet his rigidity leaves him unable to adapt, and his suicide reflects the collapse of uncompromising traditionalism in the face of irreversible cultural change. Samba Diallo, by contrast, negotiates between worlds. He embraces Western philosophy yet never abandons his Islamic formation. His struggle illustrates hybridity as both enrichment and alienation. Unlike Okonkwo, whose Africanness remains intact until death, Samba experiences identity as fractured and unsettled, a constant oscillation between belonging and estrangement. Waiyaki represents a third model: mediation. He envisions an integrative path where Western education could empower rather than erase Gikuyu identity. However, colonialism's divisive power structures and communal distrust doom his project. His failure underscores Ngũgĩ's point that colonialism makes synthesis impossible—forcing Africans into binary choices where mediation becomes betrayal.

Postcolonial Tensions Across Regions:

Achebe's Nigeria, Kane's Senegal, and Ngũgĩ's Kenya reflect different colonial legacies (British and French), yet the dilemmas converge. Each protagonist dramatizes how colonial education, religion, and governance destabilize cultural continuity. The novels reveal that the crisis of dual identity is not confined to one community but is continental, suggesting that Africanness itself is always negotiated against external impositions.

Identity Theory and Psychological Conflict:

From an identity-theory perspective, all three characters undergo deep psychological struggles. Okonkwo fears weakness and emasculation, projecting his anxieties into violent defense of tradition. Samba Diallo experiences intellectual paralysis, torn between spiritual depth and rational philosophy. Waiyaki suffers loneliness and despair, unable to reconcile personal love and communal expectations. Their crises reveal how colonialism does not merely alter external structures but reshapes internal consciousness, creating fractured selves.

Comparative Insights on Dualism:

Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki can be read as three faces of the “contract of dualism”:

Resistance (Okonkwo): Defending Africanness to the point of self-destruction.

Hybridity (Samba Diallo): Living “in-between,” gaining breadth but losing stability.

Mediation (Waiyaki): Seeking reconciliation, but failing in a polarized world.

Together, they illuminate the multidimensional struggles of African identity under Westernization. Their stories underscore that colonialism created not only cultural losses but also profound dilemmas of choice, belonging, and survival.

Conclusion

This study has examined the complex dynamics of Africanness and Westernization in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. Through a qualitative, comparative approach grounded in postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and identity theory, the research has shown how Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki embody different responses to the pressures of colonial encounter and cultural transformation. The analysis reveals that dual identity is central to understanding African literature's engagement with colonialism. Okonkwo illustrates the tragedy of uncompromising resistance, Samba Diallo dramatizes the ambivalence of hybridity, and Waiyaki represents the futility of mediation under divisive colonial conditions. Together, they map the spectrum of African responses to Westernization, underscoring both the resilience and fragility of Africanness. The study contributes to scholarship in three main ways. First, it deepens comparative analysis by bringing West and East African texts into direct dialogue, showing how similar tensions recur across regional and colonial contexts. Through a systematic comparative study Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki are placed into a sustained dialogue. Second, it demonstrates the value of integrating identity theory with postcolonial and cultural approaches, highlighting the psychological as well as social dimensions of cultural conflict. Third, it underscores the interpretive power of close textual analysis, showing how key passages illuminate broader theoretical questions of hybridity, ambivalence, and identity crisis. Ultimately, this research affirms that African literature does more than narrate colonial disruption; it provides a framework for understanding how cultural identities are negotiated, contested, and reimagined. By foregrounding the struggles of Okonkwo, Samba Diallo, and Waiyaki, the study highlights the enduring relevance of African literature in conversations about cultural hybridity, belonging, and survival in a globalized world.

References

Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann.

Achebe, C. (1988). An image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In R. Kimbrough (Ed.), *Heart of Darkness: An authoritative text, backgrounds and sources, criticism* (3rd ed., pp. 251–261). W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1977).

Ambiguous adventure by Cheikh Hamidou Kane. (2023). *The Complete Review*. <https://www.completereview.com/reviews/senegal/kanech.htm>

Avil, B. (2017, October 30). Book review: *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958). The Long Victorian. <https://theinvisiblementor.com/things-fall-apart-by-chinua-achebe-a-book-review/>

Bedri, A. (2017). A critical study of Sheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous adventure*. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321474262_A_Critical_Study_of_Sheikh_Hamidou_Kane's_Ambiguous_Adventure

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Boahen, A. (1987). *African perspective on colonialism*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bookshy. (2020, October). My thoughts: Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart*. *Bookshy Books*. <http://www.bookshybooks.com/2012/01/my-thoughts-chinua-achebes-things-fall.html?m=1>

Brodnicka, M. (2020). The ambiguous path to sacred personhood: Revisiting Samba Diallo's initiatic journey in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*. *Journal of World Philosophies*, 5, 13–27.

Dia, A. A. (2014). Diversity vs. difference: A critical analysis of hybridity and cultural identity crisis in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous adventure* (1963) and Chinua Achebe's *No longer at ease* (1975). *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 39, 93–122. <https://hal.science/hal-02340354>

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1952).

Gikandi, S. (2000). *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge University Press.

Gueye, M. (2023). Ambivalence in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous adventure*. *Journal of Advanced Education and Sciences*, 3(4), 29–33. <https://www.dzarc.com/education/article/view/373>

Irele, F. A. (2000). The crisis of cultural memory in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *African Studies Quarterly*, 4(3), 1–40.

Iskarna, T. (2018). The relation between Christianity and colonialism in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 18(2), 184–192.

Kane, C. H. (1963). *Ambiguous adventure* (K. Woods, Trans.). Walker. (Original work published 1961).

Mambroll, N. (2024, March 27). Analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The river between*. *Literariness*. <https://literariness.org/2024/03/27/analysis-of-ngugi-wa-thiongos-the-river-between/>

Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

Mantooth, K., & Lineberger, J. (n.d.). *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe: Summary, character & themes. *Study.com*. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/things-fall-apart-summary-characters-themes.html>

Nyeenewa, S. (2022). A cultural critique of Chinua Achebe's book *Things fall apart*: The Igbo ethnic group's excessive desire for materialism. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 5(1), 77–94. <https://gnosijournal.com/index.php/gnosi/article/view/178>

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1965). *The river between*. Heinemann.

Review: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958). (2017, October 30). *The Long Victorian*.

Steemers, V. (2013). (Post)Colonialism and ideological configurations: An analysis of the power structures in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous adventure*. *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 67(2), 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rmr.2013.0017>

Thirsty Soul. (2019, January 10). Book review of *The river between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Imthirstysoul*. <https://imthirstysoul.wordpress.com/2019/01/10/book-review-of-the-river-between-by-ngugi-wa-thiongo/>