

A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE WEST AFRICANS' REACTION TO THE INTRODUCTION OF WESTERN EDUCATION IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF SELECTED FRANCOPHONE AND ANGLOPHONE NOVELS

Moussa Traoré*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v11i1.5>

Abstract

This paper analyzes the Francophone and the Anglophone Africans' attitude towards the introduction of Western education in Africa by the British and French colonizers. Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* are used as samples of Francophone writing and John Munonye's *The Only Son* and *Oil Man of Obange* represent Anglophone writing. The research demonstrates that Francophone education was received with more reluctance and apprehension while the Anglophone Africans received British education with more co-operation and collaboration. The paper shows that both Francophone and Anglophone novels ultimately attempt to oppose Modern European hegemony.

Key words: Francophone, Anglophone, Centre, Periphery, Postcolonialism, Hegemony.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine closely in the texts which constitute the primary source of this work the Africans' reaction to the Western school in its first days. The traits characterizing the Francophone Africans' attitude towards the Western school are analyzed based on two Francophone novels: Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*. The second part of the research focuses on the Anglophone Africans' reaction to the Western school in the Nigerian John Munonye's two novels: *The Only Son* and *Oil Man of Obange*. The research also examines how the authors in these works attempt to shift the poles by trying to rectify the situation - some injustice - by lifting the pre-colonial African values from the oblivion where

they have been dumped by the colonizer, to the level of universal or human values. It is important to point out here that by historical coincidence, Francophone Africa is Islamic in majority - so Islam plays a central role in those societies - unlike Anglophone West Africa which is mostly Christian. This research is based on the Postcolonial Theory or Postcolonialism which in essence means the encounter between Europe and its colonies, and the socio-cultural and political repercussions of such an encounter.

The Francophone African and the Introduction of the French Education System

One trait which emerges in the treatment of the theme of Western education in the Francophone novel is the mindset of the Francophone novelists, the ideological preparation they had received, and which the Anglophone novelists did not have. The Francophone had experienced a more blatant and effective form of alienation which explains the caution with which the Francophone novelist guards the precious components of his/her traditional African culture. The nostalgia present in his novel is the expression and denunciation of this alienation of which he has been a victim. That nostalgia is a direct product of the Francophone novelist's mindset.

The fact of being far away from familiar surroundings and cultural values led Camara Laye to the writing of *The African Child*. This feeling of nostalgia concerns the time prior to the Western school, and urges the writer to carry out a thorough depiction and recreating of the past of the African values. The Francophone novelist presents the pre-Western school era which is also the moment he feels some nostalgia for, as the moment of "the entity", the moment when everything was running smoothly. This era corresponds to the reign of Islam in *Ambiguous Adventure* and *The African Child*. In *The African Child*, various ceremonies of initiation exist side by side with Islam. Young boys join the society of the uninitiated at the time of meeting with "Konden Diara". Laye's own experience is described in these lines:

I was growing up. The time had come for me to join the society of the uninitiated. This rather mysterious

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

society - and at that age, it was very mysterious to me, though not very secret - contained all the young boys, all the uncircumcised of twelve, thirteen, or fourteen years of age, and it was run by our elders, whom we called the big "Kondens." I joined it one evening before the feast of Ramadan (78).

After this stage, the children are ushered into the group of the initiated. This passage involves an ordeal which is more painful and scaring than the "Konden Diara":

Suddenly the operator appeared. We had caught a glimpse of him the night before, when he had performed his dance in the main square. And now, also, I only caught a brief glimpse of him. I had already realized he was there, before I saw him standing in front of me. Was I afraid? I mean, was I even more afraid, had I at that particular moment a fresh access of fear - for I had been beset by fears ever since I had entered the clearing? I did not have time to be afraid. I felt something, like a burn, and I closed my eyes for a fraction of a second. I do not think I cried out; I certainly did not have time to do that either. When I opened my eyes, the operator was bent over my neighbor. In a few seconds the dozen or so boys who were there that year became men: the operator made me pass from one state to the other, with an indescribable rapidity (pp.102-103).

Foreign Education, Nostalgia, Islamic Religion and Trauma

The nostalgia came from the state in which the Francophone writer found himself. He was taken away from his motherland both physically and mentally during the process of the quest for Western education. Out of the loneliness and a sense of estrangement and also due to the incapacity of the Western education to fulfill the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of the African student, he started to idealize his childhood, recreating his identity. Laye depicts his

father as a very powerful man. He owns magic potions which make him invulnerable, he is the most skillful and the most renowned blacksmith of the area, and he is the only member of his family to benefit from the protection and the friendship of the sacred snake: "That snake", he went on, "has always been with us; he has always made himself known to one of us. In our time, it is to me that he has made himself known" (17)

The glorification of Islam is one of the aspects of the idealization of the period preceding the Western school. Islam was the main religion of the Mendes and the Diallobes before colonization, and Camara Laye and Cheikh Hamidou Kane recall the moment when Islam ensured a peaceful and prosperous life in their societies. This idealization is seen in *Ambiguous Adventure* through the Koranic school master who is presented almost as a perfect man, or a prophet:

The teacher was from several points of view a formidable man. Two occupations filled his life: the work of the spirit and the work of the field. To the work of the field he devoted the strict minimum of his time, and he demanded from the earth no more than he had to have for his extremely frugal nourishment and that of his family, not including his pupils (7).

The master devotes most of his time to prayer, meditation, and his noble profession: to mold the character and personality of the young men put in his care. He lectures them in classical studies and sees to it that the disciples strictly follow the self-deprivation which accompanies the quest for spiritual knowledge. The end result of the master's work is people who are "learned, democratic, and seasoned in body and clear in mind" (24). The teacher is presented as an immortal person due to his concern for his disciples and society as a whole. The idealization of the past is carried further, to the point of presenting Islam as a religion which dominates life and death, as a path which is better than the Western school, because it is concerned with the spiritual aspect, whereas the Western school is concerned

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

with mundane or down to earth things which can be designated by a single word: the material.

Another feature which emerges in the treatment of the Western school in Francophone works is the distortion of the individual, as a result of the trauma he suffers. People are faced with dilemmas, positions which are impossible to conciliate. This restlessness is present in *Ambiguous Adventure* where the choice must be made between the new school and the legendary Muslim tradition. The complexity lies in the fact that Islam recommends self-deprivation, and the Western school appeals to material well being, to personal qualification. But at the same time, poverty is considered to be the enemy of God, yet abundance makes the human mind dull. The trauma associated with the Western school is also perceived in the image of the African society, after the colonizer had penetrated it. The presence of the Western school made the Diallobe land helpless, it was turning around and around on itself like a thoroughbred horse caught in a fire (Kane: 12). The new school was finally associated with "a new war ", and the Diallobe society was dying as a result of the Westerner 's attack.

The trauma of the African is expressed in *The African Child*, where pupils have a great fear of their teacher. Those pupils believe that they know nothing and stay in constant terror of being sent to the black board by the teacher.

The trauma, the restlessness and the incapacity of the Western school to satisfy the spiritual aspirations of the African justify the numerous fundamental questions in the Francophone works. Such questions remain without any answer, and they evolve around death, Islam, Western religion, power, and civilization. In *Ambiguous Adventure*, the knight raises such issues:

Is civilization outside the balance of man and his disposability? The civilized man, is he not the expendable man-expendable for the love of his fellows, expendable above all for the love of God? But, a voice within him will object, man is surrounded by problems which prevent this quietude. He is born to a forest of questions. The

substance of matter in which he participates through his body - which the soul hates - harasses him with a cacophony of demands to which he must respond (68).

In Francophone Africa, uncertainty surrounds parents' acceptance to send their children to school. People cannot tell why they sent their children to school, they are not sure whether there is a benefit in the new institution or not. The children also do not know what awaits them in the Western school. No one can affirm exactly that he is in favor of the new school because of certain advantages, which are attached to it. The illustration in *The African Child* is striking. Camara Laye has been attending school for a long time, following his father's acceptance and decision to send his child there. Then suddenly, one night, the father discloses his uncertainty about the wisdom of his decision. He wishes the boy had been assisting him in the workshop:

I fear, I very much fear, little one, that you are not often enough in my company. You are all day at school, and one day you will depart from that school for a greater one. You will leave me, little one... (20).

The father's uncertainty is clearly perceived when some years later, his son is preparing to go to a secondary school in Conakry. His father urges him to make the most of this opportunity, and to work hard in school. "Seize your opportunity. And make me proud of you. I ask no more of you. Will you do it? "(117). The father's initial uncertainty leads the child to wonder which way to follow, whether to abandon school or not:

Yes, I had been day-dreaming: my life did not lie here...nor in my father's forge, either. Then what sort of life was I going to lead? And I would tremble the thought of the unknown existence ahead of me. Wouldn't it have been simpler to follow in my father's footsteps? "School ...school..." I did say to myself. Did I like schooling all that much? May be I

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

did. My uncles...Yes, my uncles had followed quite naturally in their father's footsteps, though others had taken a different course: my father's brothers had gone to Conakry; my Uncle Lansana's twin brother was...But where was he now? (49)

It is when Laye reaches secondary school that he starts getting a rough idea of what he would like to do in life after school. He realizes that he prefers being a clerk instead of a mechanic.

On the other hand, uncertainty is also the reason behind some people's decision to send their child to school. Their aim is to discover whether the new institution bears profits or not. Such an attitude comes closer to that of Ezeulu of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. The main reason behind the Most Royal Lady's decision to send Semba Diallo to the Western school in *Ambiguous Adventure* is to see if "one can win without being in the right" (152). She justifies her view by the wrong which has been done to the Diallobe by the white intruder. There is to some extent, a desire for vengeance behind such a decision. In the Francophone novel, there is not a single parent who wants his child to join the Western school with the expectation of material or financial success. The Western school is not seen as a means of making it in life, by opposition to the Anglophones who display the mentality of the cult of material wealth. In such a context --the Anglophone colony-- the one who completes his education and does not possess material wealth is rejected by his parents and society as a whole, and their education in the Western school is seen as something useless. Baako in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* is an example. The only thing which some Francophones expect sometimes from the Western school is scientific knowledge and technological power. *Ambiguous Adventure* displays these aspirations. School is perceived as the means by which the Diallobe can learn how to join wood to wood and build strong houses by the application of technological power.

The Western school in Francophone Africa is not an institution which is complete, authoritative and reliable. Emphasis was laid on literacy only, and there was not any strong religious philosophy sustaining the school. In such a context, the

schoolteacher is an ordinary fellow who did not interact with the people around him, with the exception of the pupils to whom his duty was to impart literacy and numeracy, in a way which Paulo Freire would term “the Banking System of Education”, where learners are seen as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. As a result, the school teacher need not be given respect, depending on the prevailing situations. Camara Laye 's father walks to the school and molests the headmaster without being scared:

And he hit out his fists; but although he was stronger, he was fat and his fat impeded rather than helped him; and my father, who was thin, but active and supple, had no difficulty in dodging his blows and setting about him in no uncertain fashion. My father got him down on the ground and was punching him for all he was worth: I didn't know what might have happened if the teachers had not dragged him off (pp.76-77)

A close examination of the Africans' attitude towards the Western school in the Anglophone novel reveals certain characteristics which do not exist in the Francophone novel. The image in the Anglophone area is a completely different one. Very few points of similarity exist between these two attitudes.

The Anglophone African and the Early Days of the British Education System

The Anglophone novels do not associate the Western education with any romanticism, or nostalgia. This point constitutes the essence of the difference between *The African Child* and Munonye's *The Only Son*. Both novels present the African woman, struggling to ensure her son's education and upbringing in the traditional African context. They oppose the idea of sending children to the Western school. Both women have an excessive attachment to their son. But *The Only Son* exposes a straightforward unfolding of Chiaku's task, whereas the story of the frequent separations between Laye and his mother contains much idealization, romanticism and nostalgia. The poem on the first pages of *The African Child* and the dedication of

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

the book by the author to his mother illustrates that attachment and nostalgia.

Holistic African Personality and Tireless Quest for Material Comfort

The thorough depiction of the various African traditions in the Anglophone novel does not serve the same purpose as the portrayal of African values in the Francophone novel. The Anglophone novelist does not aim at expressing any regret for a beautiful and altogether better past, as his Francophone counterpart has been doing. The Anglophones' target is to present the real face of their society to the outsider. The sessions of initiation songs, dances, wrestling matches, shooting contests and hunting parties, organized by the children in *The Only Son* are to be associated with the sociological purpose which Achebe and Munonye want to give to their works.

The quest for Western education in the Anglophone novel is guided by an omnipresent and clear aim: to succeed in life and live comfortably. The Anglophones see in the Western schools a very efficient way to make it in life. Both parents and children are animated by this conviction. Hence, their huge efforts to have access to the Western school. Munonye's *Oil Man of Obange* is a perfect and blatant exposition of the struggle against all sorts of obstacles in order to enjoy the benefits of the Western school. Jeri Oko and his wife Marcellina devote their whole lives to palm oil trade in order to get enough money for their five children's school fees. The whole family lives in abject poverty in order to guarantee the education in the Western school. Jeri's attire and the state of his body convey the hardship which the man willingly embraced, hoping that his wards will enjoy the privileges of the new school in exchange:

He wore a black pair of shorts which were too big, with the result that much of his thighs were exposed and, also, he had to secure the dress to his waist with a banana string. His body was bare from the waist upwards. His hairy but narrow chest danced to the

palpitations of his heart while his shoulder blades showed conspicuously. Again, Jeri rubbed the palms together, spread them out before him and stared at them for some time. They were creased and scarred, especially at the base of the fingers where nearly all sensation was gone now. They told a story: two years of riding up the hills and down the slopes. It was the pressure of the load he carried on the bicycle that had reduced the palms to that state (23).

Jeri's wife Marcellina dies because of poverty. All the tiny bits which the palm oil trade generates are used to pay the school fees and a simple cut on the leg which could have been easily treated medically gets infested and kills the woman:

But soon, she began to complain and groan again. Then Onugo went and assembled the younger children - Anto and the twins -and sent them on a vague errand to her house. Experience had taught her that the worst and final sally of a fatal disease usually came after a break, like a cunning enemy who takes his adversary unawares. The sun was still setting when it came. "What's wrong, Marcellina," Jeri panted. "Look after the children ". Those were her last words to him (54).

The children are also fully involved in the quest for Western education. They become worried when Jeri takes a long time to return home with the proceeds of the palm oil sale. They mount guard at the gate of the compound, waiting impatiently for their father:

Early the next morning he set out for Otta. When dusk came Mica and Lu, went to the approach and begun pacing up and down as if they were on guard duty. Celia was the first to return to the house in despair. Mica followed. Lu remained until darkness

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

had set in and shapes started to loom at a distance.
"What could be keeping Papa so long?" he sighed,
pouting, and scratching his head for the fiftieth time
(12).

The zeal which the children have for the Western school stems from their desire to acquire literacy and numeracy, but also from the desire to succeed in life, to be "a big man". The advantages which Ibe perceives in Nnaana's departure to Ossa, to live with the priests and attend school, in *The Only Son* is that Nnaana will one day return to Nade "a big man"(150).

The struggle for Western education in the Anglophone novel is also generated and sustained by the relationship between the poor class and that of the rich people. The class of the poor and the illiterate struggle to attend the Western school in order to raise their standard to that of the high class, which is much envied but also hated by the underdog, because of its sharp differences, its bourgeois and exploitative manners. According to Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, admiration and contempt explain the low class's quest for Western education:

The peasant always thinks that at least one of his sons could become an intellectual (especially a priest), then becoming a gentleman and raising the level of the family by facilitating its economic life through the connections which he is bound to acquire with the rest of the gentry. The peasant's attitude towards the intellectual is double and appears contradictory. He respects the social position of the intellectuals and in general that one state employees, but sometimes affects contempt for it, which means that his Admiration is mingled with instinctive elements of envy and impassioned anger (Hoare 1971 :14) .

The attitude of the rich people of Otta, in *Oil Man Obange* plays an important role in Jeri Oko and his family's quest for Western

education. The city stands on one side, and Jeri and his family are "hinterland fellows":

They were a terribly proud lot -the people of Otta. In particular, they despised people of the hinterland, and not without good reason. First, the hinterland fellows whether they came from the dry hills to the left or from the wooded valleys to the right spoke a coarse, nasal dialect that was quite offensive to the Otta ear. This contrasted sharply with the light, easy, and musical, speech from Otta lips - so light indeed that it was said you couldn't hold a native of Otta down to an oath as his speech did not come from as far down as his heart. Second, the hinterland was as yet an undeveloped area, with very high hills and steep valleys, and too many ant-hills; where for lack of spring water the inhabitants drank floodwater and bathed their bodies only once a while; and where dangerous animals were still in firm control. Then, the hinterland was as yet largely a pagan world, the few churches there being of quaint origins. (48).

The Anglophone novels do not contain the fundamental, philosophical or metaphysical issues raised about death, life, power, and the other questions raised in *Ambiguous Adventure*. The Anglophone novel which deals with Western education treats that theme only, without raising certain queries which are typical of a human mind in which uncertainty, incomprehension and non-satisfaction still prevail. Frantz Fanon (1952:43) a Francophone writer himself, refers to the perpetual question which is always on his own face:

" je ne sais pas, mais je dis que celui qui cherche dans mes yeux autre chose qu'une interrogation perpetuelle devra perdre la vue; ni reconnaissance, ni haine. / "I do not know, but I say that whoever expects to see in my eyes something different from a

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

perpetual interrogation will lose his sight; neither
gratefulness, nor hatred"

The Anglophone novelist treats the theme of Western education in a manner which is as uncomplicated as possible. *The Only Son* and *Oil man of Obange* do not contain the nostalgia which is present in the Francophone novels under study, because in Anglophone Africa a lot of effort was made towards the integration of the Western school. African languages were often used as a medium for the transmission of knowledge. Joseph uses Ibo words in the English vocabulary lesson: "Lion is agu" (Ibid: p.122)

In the Anglophone novel, school is an institution, which commands respect and authority, because of its organic nature. Gramsci (1971: 6) designates by organic any institution which is the result of the normal development of a previous institution, in the course of time. The organic intellectual is also the product of such a natural development in a social class, in Gramsci's view:

Intellectuals in the functional sense fall into two groups. In the first place there are the "traditional" professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical formations. Secondly, there are the "organic" intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.

The school teacher in the Anglophone novel is therefore an organic intellectual, whose efficiency does not lie only in his task or profession in the classroom, but rather in the "organic quality" or [organista] of his work, his degree of connection with a fundamental

social group (12), the community of parents and children around him. In *Oil Man of Obange*, the teachers come to Jeri's house, to help him solve the financial difficulties compelling his children to remain at home:

They were seated on one side of the living-room. At the opposite end, Jeri sat up on his couch, leaning against the wall. He offered them kola which they readily accepted, to Mica's surprise, and ate slowly as if they were pitying the substance. (121)

The great help the teachers bring to Jeri is in one of them's acceptance to accommodate one of the children, to provide all the boy's needs, and pay his school fees:

"Well..." said the one who was Lu's class teacher, looking at the headmaster for encouragement, which he got by the wink of the latter's eyes. "Do you think you can send one of the children to come and stay with me? Jeri stared at the teacher, his eyes wide-open with curiosity."In that case, he will be responsible for the child's fees and clothing and other things," the head teacher quickly enlarged. They allowed some interval of silence. "Do you understand us well?"

"I do."His voice, low and candid, bore a cadence of relief.

"And what do you say in reply?" the headmaster went on.

"Or perhaps he would like to take more time to consider the proposal, "the third suggested. "There's very little to consider in it, teacher ", Jeri said (124).

In *The Only Son*, Joseph arranges for Nnaana to go and live with a white Reverend Father, when the boy's mother leaves the family, and goes to remarry. The teacher takes upon himself to accept the orphan in his house, before the departure to Ossa:

"Master, you told me to see you today," he said.

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

"Oh yes, I've not forgotten, "Joseph replied. "It's about Ossa, isn't it?"

"Yes, Master."

"Right. I'll speak to father when he comes. "

"Yes, Master." He almost exclaimed.

"You don't know yet when your mother will leave?"

"No, Master."

"If she leaves before then, you can come over here and stay."

"Yes, Master. Thank sah, master."

Joseph got him to tidy up his language before he could leave the house (pp.134-135).

Joseph insists on meeting Nnaana 's mother, in order to inform her of the decision to send her child to Ossa. During the interaction, Chiaku notices that her son is being taken good care of, by the teacher:

"Tell her there's something important I want to talk to her about." He consulted. "She says she will not come, Master, and that you had better come out here. "Joseph took nearly a minute to make up his mind.

"Tell her to wait there; I am coming." he was out in a matter of minutes.

"Are you Nnaana's mother?" asked he with a tolerant smile on his face.

"I am," Chiaku replied. Surprisingly, she appeared well -disposed.

"I've never met you before."

"That's true."

"As you can see for yourself, your son is all right."

"I've already noticed that," Chiaku acknowledged. "He looks healthy and happy, for which I must thank you."

"Your words are those of a sensible woman."

"I only stated the fact. It's very kind of you, stranger that you are in our land, to take him on and look after him like your own brother "(141).

These teachers' work is the link between the child's environment and the values, which the teacher represents and propagates. This harmonious relationship eliminates the distance between education and instruction, as Gramsci put it:

In the school, the nexus between instruction and education can only be realized by the living work of the teacher. For this he must be aware of the contrast between the type of culture and society which he represents and the types of culture and society represented by his pupils , and conscious of his obligation to accelerate and regulate the child's formation in conformity with the former and in conflict with the latter (Hoare:36).

The Anglophone novel presents the Western school and the African traditional manners as two entities which all have their own efficiency and relevance. The Western school is associated with the written word which has its importance. The African mother's life is associated with many habitual gestures which do not require the use of writing or any specifically western object, but which guarantee the normal life process in the African family. Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* exposes Mr. Okwonko's reverence for the written word and the mundane things in his wife's room, with equal attention:

“The result of Okonkwo's mystic regard for the written word was that his room was full of old books and papers - from Blackie 's Arithmetic which he used in 1908 to Obi's Durrell, from absolute cockroach-eaten translations of the Bible into the Onitsha dialect to yellowed Scripture Union Cards of 1920 and earlier. Okonkwo never destroyed a piece of paper. He had two boxes full of them. The rest were preserved on top of his enormous cupboard, on tables, on one corner of the floor.

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

Mother's room, on the other hand, was full of mundane things. She had her box of clothes on a stool. On the other side of the room were pots of solid palm-oil with which she made black soap. The palm-oil was separated from the clothes by the whole length of the room, because as she always said, clothes and oil were not kinsmen, and just as it was the duty of the clothes to try and avoid oil it was also the duty of the oil to do everything to avoid clothes (pp.115-116).

The teacher in the precolonial Islamic society possesses these characteristics of an organic person. The Koranic school master in *Ambiguous Adventure* is entrusted with the task of molding the young generations who must grow up fitting in the Islamic social structure. The master takes his work to heart, and devotes his whole life to his profession. He is always at hand, to be consulted by the Diallobe. Samba Diallo on the contrary undergoes the Western influence, through his education in the French school, in Diallobe land and in France. He ends up as the antithesis of the master, as an alienated and displaced person. He cannot fit in the society he was living in, before he enrolled in the Western school. He never attained any integration, and could not find his bearing, up to the end of the novel. This non-organic characteristic of the French school is ultimately perceived by Camara Laye, during his university studies years, in France. The novelist realizes that his mother's reservations and skepticism, towards the Western school were genuine and relevant. The disillusion lands on the young student, who can but acknowledge his mother's power of analysis which perceived very early the alienation aspect of the French school. This explains the dedication of the work to the writer's mother.

The Western school in the Anglophone area is an institution, which tries to be integrated, and close to the Africans. No sacrifice is made to God in order to succeed in school--the area of fear and the unknown-- as it is noticed in the Francophone novel. This difference is due to the difference in religious beliefs between Islamic West Africa and the traditional Iboland, but also to the fact that the

African felt no terror in the Western school in Anglophone areas. The Anglophones saw in that institution a reliable means to achieve material success in life. A minority among them preferred to educate their children in the traditional way, and such persons see in the Western school an institution which should not be attended because it takes the children far from their ancestors' ways, and extinguishes the authentic values of the African society. These persons oppose the Western school openly and use all possible means to prevent their children from joining it. Chiaku for instance resorts to supernatural means in order to turn her only son's mind from school, and school children's friendship:

In the morning she had left the yellow chalk on the bed, under the mat. She removed it now and returned to the parlor. There she drew a wavy line along the outer fringe of the floor. She did that with both relish and devotion. She had faith in the charm-absolute faith which left no room for doubt." The villain will not come again", Chiaku said in her mind. "This has done it." The line was thin she must economize on the chalk (78).

The "good" and calculative organization of the Western school in the Anglophone area can be perceived through the special strategy which consisted in getting people in the church first, in order to initiate them to the Western conception of the world, then to introduce those new Christians to school. This resulted in an entire possession of the African whose mind, soul, and body were then possessed and controlled by the Westerner. Chiaku refers to this process of appropriation of the African which is carried out in Iboland by the Westerner's ally. She designates the latter in these terms: "he has already removed the kernel; let him now remove the shell" (150). The impossibility for all other forces to stop the Western school in its establishment and its growth accounts for the defeat of those who are hostile to the new institution in the Anglophone novel. The fruitlessness of many years of opposition to the Western school is clearly expressed by Chiaku, after her only son Nnaana also joined, in spite of his mother and uncle's opposition.

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

The widow sees in her son the one who let loose the swarm of bees which stung her for years (150).

In the Anglophone areas, the Western school drew its stability and power of influence from the strong Christian background which sustained it. By opposition to the French who did not replace Islam by any strong and well-established Christian tradition-due to French secularism- the British attributed much power and value to the church which had always been the twin sister of the school. This development of the church also gave a lot of strength to the school. *Oil Man of Obange* exposes an illustration of the prestige and sovereignty of Christianity in Iboland. A student's success depends mainly on his performance in Religious Studies. Mica prepares for the entrance examination to the College of the Blessed Trinity, mindful of that fact:

He read the catechism book more than any other, sometimes reciting a whole passage to himself, eyes closed and forehead wrinkled. Nobody could pass the examination who failed to obtain a pass in Religious Knowledge. "Not even if he had two-hundred per cent in every other subject ", the headmaster had warned. And you could not be admitted into any one of the good secondary schools (to which category the government-owned ones did not belong) unless you had a credit in that subject (144).

Special schools are erected and given a lot of prestige, and their aim is simply to impart Christian faith and education. The College of the Blessed Trinity belongs to the class of these schools:

"College of the Blessed Trinity was founded in the year 1930...its aim is to give a sound Christian education to children it is open to boys who have passed their Standard Six examination and such boys must also be of good character " (146).

The crystallization of so much importance on Christianity could but result in religious bigotry, and the traditional African ways and beliefs were systematically branded, not as second class or inhuman, but rather as pagan ways and sinful. The hunting sessions which constitute important activities in young boys' education are proscribed for school children, and classified as a sin. Ibe voices this mentality which characterizes the church and the school in *The Only Son*: "No. Master says that it's a sin; we mustn't take part in dances" (71). These words are not wasted on Nnaana who joins the school some days later, and becomes a more efficient sin hunter. The boy perceives all non-Western practices as sins. A family friend sends her daughter with food to the boy's mother. The boy sees in this simple and ordinary gesture a dual sin:

The pots were still where Ego had kept them-close to her feet. Nnaana turned his back abruptly on the two sins: a pagan feast and a naked female. He stood there silent for some time; then he walked out of the house, a sullen look on his face (115).

The boy carries his judgment further to the use of herbs for disease treatment. When Oji endeavors to treat his nephew's swollen hand with tender roots and fresh leaves, the boy brushes his uncle's efforts aside in this statement: "That thing you've just done is not good" (23). He displays his bigoted Christian view when the uncle decides to use an egg, to complete the nursing:

"I will not," said Nnaana firmly, and he stood up as if in readiness for an encounter." I will not let you people spill an egg on me." "Why?" Oji asked. "It is a sin." He stepped sideways, away from them. "You would rather die?" "Yes; let me die instead", replied he with the spirit of a martyr. "You might as well go and bring a dibia with painted eyelids "(pp.128-129).

This full approval of the Western school in the Anglophone novel does not mean that the children were treated exceptionally gently in school. Lashes were part of school life, to such a point that even

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

young children who had never stepped into any school compound knew that pupils were mercilessly beaten. Frank and Fred, Jeri's little twins who are yet to start school imitate the way teachers lash pupils. Their senior sister surprises them beating cassava saplings and talking to them, as if they were pupils, in *Oil Man of Obange*:

And a few minutes later, she heard what sounded like an explosion. She listened more intently; and then, she observed that the explosion was preceded each time by the swish of a cane. Her anger swelled. "You didn't come to school yesterday, beast!" That was Fred's voice. "And you over there, you were rude to your mother." That was Frank's. The swish and explosion became continuous (pp.61-62).

Intersection between the Francophone Side and the Anglophone One: Shifting the Poles between the Centre and the Periphery

Both Francophone and Anglophone novels are involved in the task of replacement of values, or the process of shifting the poles, in order to place the down-trodden African values to the place where they really belong. That task is more preponderant in the Francophone novel, since more distortion of values was done in Francophone colonies, compared to the Anglophone territories. The Anglophone's willingness to embrace Western education at all cost also means an acceptance to enter alienation.

Ambiguous Adventure discloses real cases of reversal of values between the African and his colonizer. Semba Diallo and his father, the knight, blow into smithereens the myth of superiority which had covered the Westerner for centuries. Jean, a French boy reveals his intellectual inferiority in front of Semba Diallo, in a conversation:

"Ah, they have been talking to you about me ... A Diallobe ... Well, my family, the Diallobe, belong to the Diallobe people. We come from the banks of a great river. Our country is also called the Diallobe. I am the only one from this country in M. N'Diaye's class. They take advantage of that to joke about me.

"If you are a Diallobe, why didn't you stay in the Diallobe country?"

"And you, why did you leave Pau - area in France?"

Jean was embarrassed (59).

The French boy ultimately places himself, with his father and the whole white race on a lower level, below the Diallobe people:

"He is a big man, your father. He is a bigger man than mine."

"Yes, he is a very big man" (59).

The spiritual practices of the African are also raised, and they fascinate the Westerner. The French boy is caught, watching Samba Diallo praying to God in a fervent way. The white boy cannot but admire such a situation in which a very young African is communicating and interacting with God, after the uneducability and lack of spirituality of the African had been established by Western Modernity and its racist theories:

Jean did not know how long he remained there, held fascinated by Semba Diallo weeping under the sky. He never knew how much time was consumed by this pathetic and beautiful death of the day. He only regained consciousness of his surrounding when he heard the sound of footsteps not far away (60).

The terror which the outsider -Westerner- spread upon Africa is now experienced by the descendant of the Westerner, and it emanates from pacific Africans. Jean's night was full of fear, after he had left Semba Diallo and the knight:

That night, thinking of Semba Diallo, he was overcome by fear. But that had happened very late, when everyone had retired and Jean was alone, in his bed. That twilight's violence and splendor were not the cause of Semba Diallo's tears. Why had he wept? For a long time the little boy was haunted by the two faces, of the father and the son. They

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

continued to obsess him, until the moment when he sunk into sleep (61).

The African values which had been classified as inferior are brought to the same level with the Western ones. All differences between the African pre-colonial philosophical beliefs and the Western philosophy are eliminated. The Western opinion finally allies itself to the spiritual way which is also the African one, in a search for coherence, as the knight put it in *Ambiguous Adventure*:

Les pensées... Hmm...Pascal. Of the men of the West, he is certainly the most reassuring. But he is distrustful even of him. He had doubted. Exile had known him too. It is true that he came back afterwards, running. He wept, sobbing, over having gone astray, and he called upon the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" against that of "the philosophers and scholars." The road of his return began like a miracle and ended like an act of grace. The men of the West know less and less of the miracle and the act of grace....(96)

The reconciliation of the mentalities of the hitherto "Centre" and Periphery" is finally achieved, as Semba Diallo states it: "The masters are in agreement. Descartes, as well as the teacher of the Diallobe, as well as my father - they have all experienced the irreducible inflexibility of this idea" (104). He finally excludes all the differences or oppositions between the African tradition which is one of the spirit or faith, and the European one which is characterized by the preference for technological achievement: "There is no antagonism between the discipline of faith and the discipline of work. The death of God is not a necessary condition to the survival of man "(104).The 'Centre' means 'Western values' and the 'Periphery' refers to 'the Others', the 'non Western', 'the uncivilized' in Post-colonial Studies.

Beyond this overlapping of the values of the centre and those of the periphery, we have a domination of the hitherto centre by the periphery. The Islamic authorities of the Diallobe accept the

new school and add it to their tradition .The Islamic classes schedules are revised in order to allow parents to send their children to the new school too. Another point which reveals the superiority of the periphery over the centre is the provenance of the one who detains knowledge. The young African who finds himself in France for university studies is implored by Westerners, willing to learn from him. Semba Diallo is asked to teach how "to penetrate to the heart of the world "(160), because he comes from a continent where one can acquire the ability to understand as Adele put it:

"I have never been in Africa, and I should so much like to go there," she said" It seems to me that if I were there I should learn very quickly to "understand" things as you do. They must be so much more true, seen like that " (Kane: 155).

Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* is concerned with cultural nationalism. The novelist embarks upon an ideological, emotional and mental return to his sources. This work which he dedicates not to his mother alone, but to mother Africa, is Laye's way of expressing the true image of his society to the whole world: the empire writes back as Postcolonial scholars put it.

The attention with which the Anglophone novelists present the various" rites de passage "and other folkloric activities of their society is an efficient contribution in the process of "shift of poles", for the annihilation of the colonial-made centre and periphery.

Francophone and Anglophone novels analyze the position and the value or symbolism of Reading and Writing, in the context of the post-colonial discourse. They were means of communication, and affiliation. The Anglophone novelists expatiate on this aspect since the Western school attendance was greater in their area. In *Oil man of Obange*, Jeri's children have been experts at reading and writing letters. This skill puts the children at a high level of communication. The Obange people admire these children who can write to policemen, to the owner of the school, and even to the Queen of England (92). The African is encouraged in this process of affiliation. School children are introduced to spelling contests in *The Only Son* . They ultimately develop a lot of interest for the game,

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

and proceed to adopt it to the Ibo context, with the introduction of fines like coconut and groundnut to be paid by the losing side. The African is constantly being pulled by the forces of the Western “centre”, and this situation is identical to Jeri’s attempt to free himself from the spider’s web in *Oil Man of Obange*. This scene is a powerful symbolism which perfectly captures the binary between the centre and the periphery and the centre’s strong desire to win at all cost:

He leaned with his back against the tree. Spider’s webs caught his head. He tore them off instinctively. They gripped his hand instead, with that cold and creepy persistence which irritates even the most patient and sober. Jeri tore with his left hand too, but the webs caught that one also. The webs were thick there; he must move to the opposite side (184).

The African’s dehumanization and subjugation come from his attempt to mimic the Westerner. This leads the African to associate with the Westerner, to mingle with him and allow himself to be part of the Western entity. The scene of the clouds in the sky symbolizes that and it appears in *Oil Man of Obange*:

The sunset was bright and colorful. Big, red beams stood a slant on a horizontal mound of glowing blue; and all around, purple specks, like pollen dust greatly enlarged, dotted the sky. Carefully positioned below these, small pockets of cloud, of various sizes and hues, followed with a quiet grace. At the base, there came racing one tiny cloud with a tipped front. This last one looked tired and feeble, and seemed to be struggling desperately to find a place for itself in the great flux; it was like a lone stranger, stripped, robbed, deserted, sorrowful, weary (pp.181-182).

Ambiguous Adventure exposes a similar image of mimicry and self-negation and those two notions themselves are at the core of Postcolonial Studies:

At this point of his reflections the knight had something like an hallucination. A spot on our globe was burning with a blinding brilliance, as if a fire had been lighted on an immense hearth. At the heart of this fierce light and heat swarm of human beings seemed to be giving themselves over to an incomprehensible and fantastic mimicry of worship. Emerging from all sides, from deep valleys of shadow, floods of human creatures of all colors were pouring in; and in the measure of their approach to the hearth, these beings took up, insensibly, the rhythm which encompassed them, while under the effect of the light they lost their original colors, which gave way to the wan tint that filled the air roundabout (pp.169-170).

It is necessary at this level to make it clear that no radical or stiff delimitation can be made between the Francophone's attitude to the Western school, and that of the Anglophones, because some little degree of similarity exists between the two sides, despite their differences: Just like most of the Anglophones, Laye's father encourages his son to make the most of the opportunity which the West offers. Many people in Obange oppose Jeri's idea of sending his wards to the Western school, in spite of the Anglophone setting and the advantages associated with their education. Chiaku, Idimogu , Oji and Chief Eke are equally against the Western school in *The Only Son* . The organic nature of the British school and its teachers does not completely exclude alienation. The illustration is found in *The Only Son*, with Nnaana's refusal to undergo herbal treatment which in his eyes, is a sin.

Conclusion

This paper has closely analyzed the African's attitude towards the Western school in a number of Francophone and Anglophone

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions... novels. The analysis revealed the salient nuances between the Francophone attitude and the Anglophone one: the determination, conviction and often enthusiasm guiding the Anglophones in their attitude towards the new school. Most of them join it, and few are not willing to. Those who defend the Western school know exactly why they have chosen this position: they want to succeed in life at least at the material and financial level. Those who condemn the Western school are willing to preserve the traditional African values intact from Western influence. Francophone have a different attitude, characterized by doubt or uncertainty. Very few among them accept the Western school as a ground for experimentation, to see whether favors can derive from it. Many hate it because of the brutal nature of French assimilation and the school that came with it. They do not expect any direct material advantage from the Western school. They also want to see if it can provide the spiritual development which its predecessor - Islam - was providing. The destruction of the centre and the periphery, the two pillars of Modern European Imperialism is a task which brings together the novelists of the two sides, the Francophones and the Anglophones.

***Moussa Traoré**, Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast. Email: camillio73@gmail.com

References

- Achebe, C. *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann . 1964.
- _____ *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* . London: Heinemann. 1975.
- _____ *No Longer At Ease*. London : Heinemann . 1960.
- _____ *Things fall Apart* . London : Heinemann . 1958.
- Armah , A . K . *Fragments* .London : Heinemann. 1969.
- Ashcroft , Griffith and Tiffin Helen eds . *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* . London : Heinemann . 1971.
- Azubike , I . F . " John Munonye 's Fiction and the Example of Chinua Achebe : The Anatomy of a Viewpoint." *Dissertation Abstracts International*.45.6 (1983).
- _____ " From Folk to Formal : Education and Adjustment in John Munonye's *The Only Son* ." *World Literature Written in English*.29.1.(1989).
- _____ " Optimism in John Munonye 's *Bridge To A Wedding* . The Anatomy of a Symbol".*Research in African Literatures*.16.1.(1985).525-540.
- Caroll , D ." Camara Laye 's *The African Child* . A reply . " *African Literature Today* . 5 (1971):129-136.
- Fanon , F .*Peau Noire Masques Blancs* .Paris : Editions Du Seuil . 1952.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Pressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman. New York: Herder and Herder.1970
- Hoare, Smith , N.G . eds and trans.*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*.London : Lawrence and Wishart . 1971.
- Kane , C . H .*Ambiguous Adventure* . Trans. Katherine Woods. London :
- King , A .*The Writings of Camara Laye* . London : Heinemann . 1980 .

Traoré: A literary analysis of West African reactions...

Laye , C .*The African Child* .Trans.James Kirkup . Glasgow :
Fontana Books. 1954.

Munonye , J .*Oil Man of Obange* .London : Heinemann . 1971.

_____ *The Only Son* .London : Heinemann . 1966 .

Quason , A .*Postcolonialism . Theory, Practice or Process ?*
Cambridge : Polity Press.2000