A Transnational Reading of *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*, *The Dark Child*, and *Ambiguous Adventure*

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Introduction

This thesis provides a transnational reading of three major African literary texts: Camara Laye’s *The Dark Child* (1954), Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* (1962), and Kadiatou Diallo and Craig Wolff’s *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean* (2003). These three works of literature, written by major West African authors, share significant transnational themes related to identity, culture, and group relations from many parts of the world. In each of the texts, the main characters migrate to a Western country and, as a result, undergo a profound shift in identity. Each of the young men initially perceives himself solely within the bounds of his local community but gradually comes to view his identity from a transnational perspective. The main characters’ relationships with their community play a significant role in shaping their interactions with the outside world. As such, the relationship between the characters and communities mutually shape their views on the relationship between the local and the global and the related notions of tradition, modernity, and culture. Within each of the texts, the authors highlight their recognition of a world that has become increasingly transnational and assert that those populations living in historically subordinated areas of the world would like to participate and be recognized in this global world. These populations want to participate in an increased two-way transnational exchange of ideas while, at the same time, summoning the Western world to have respect for difference.
A Synopsis of *The Dark Child, Ambiguous Adventure, and My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*

In his 1954 autobiographical work, which was written in French and translated to English as *The Dark Child*, Camara Laye traces his development as a young man in colonial Guinea, his relationship with his parents, his experience attending a French school in Conakry, the capital city, and eventually his departure for France to continue his studies. As the novel begins, Laye recounts his early memories of life in his hometown of Kourroussa and his visits to his grandmother in the small village of Tindican where he stands out as a city child among country children, yet feels very connected and blissfully happy on his visits there. He details his evolving and complex relationship with his parents and examines many formative experiences through the lens of the effect they had on those relationships, including observing his parents in their roles in the community, learning about their totems, and finding their ties changing due to major life events, which he describes in great detail, such as his circumcision and studies. Throughout Laye’s experiences, issues of tradition and modernity, family, community, and global experience are explored in depth from his perspective. The novel was written during his time in France, and as such, Laye carries a nostalgic tone throughout the story. He reminisces about cultural practices in which he delighted as a boy, but fails to comprehend them because it was not until his removal from home that he thought to question their significance. The novel, at the same time as examining large-scale issues related to colonialism, globalization, tradition, and education, provides an enlightening account of Laye’s individual experiences and explores his mental transition from a young boy completely immersed in his own community and local life to a young man faced with the challenge of learning who he is anew in relation to a larger, transnational community.
In his 1962 novel *Ambiguous Adventure*, an English translation of the original French *L’aventure ambiguë*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane tells the story of Samba Diallo, a character whose experiences are closely based on those of Kane. Samba grows up among the Diallobé society, leaves to study in Paris, and returns a changed and distraught young man. As a child, he studies at the Koranic school, where he is recognized by his teacher as a remarkable student. Samba is exceptionally devout to his religious studies and is a serious and pensive boy who has an unusual fascination with death, lending an existential quality to the novel. He stands apart from his classmates partly because of his serious nature and partly because of his status of belonging to a family of village nobility. His uncle is the chief, and his older cousin, known as The Most Royal Lady, have strong influence over village opinion. The people of the Diallobé are in a state of decline and “there are more deaths than births” due to the lack of a sustainable infrastructure (Kane 31). The French colonizers are willing to teach the Diallobé how to “join wood to wood” but require that they send their children to the French schools, where they will be trained not just in technical knowledge, but given an entirely Western education (Kane 10). The prospect of a Western education, however, makes the leaders of Samba’s village worry about the threat to their religion, which forms the core of their lives and lifestyles. They worry that their children will not be able to resist indoctrination. Because of Samba’s devotion to their religious beliefs, they feel he would be best suited to study at the French school and gain the knowledge necessary for them to sustain life without his faith suffering. They eventually decide, therefore, to send Samba to study in Paris. In Paris, Samba develops acquaintances with a young French woman who is an advocate of Marxism, as well as a family from Africa who has been living in France for many years. Despite Samba’s best efforts, he finds himself questioning his beliefs and eventually withdraws from the position he has been informally assigned as negotiator between Western
materialism and Southern or Eastern spiritualism. He finds himself a changed person and returns home ashamed. The novel ends with Samba’s vision going black after an argument with a man known by the villagers as “the fool,” resulting from Samba’s refusal to pray. In the final chapter, however, Samba is greeted by a voice, which complicates the interpretation of his refusal to pray and adds to the ambiguous nature of the novel.

*My Heart Will Cross This Ocean* is the personal memoir of Kadiatou Diallo, an American immigrant from Guinée-Konakry, who told the story in response to the Western media’s portrayal of the death of her son Amadou Diallo. Kadiatou told her story to Craig Wolff, a journalism professor at Columbia University, who transcribed the narrative into English and co-authored it with her. As this narrative, which was first published in 2003, suggests, Kadiatou’s son Amadou was killed in 1999 by New York City police officers while standing outside of his apartment building in the Bronx. The officers were part of a street crime unit, which used racial profiling as one of its techniques for catching criminals. On that night, four plain clothes officers fired 41 shots at an innocent man, striking him with 19 bullets and killing him instantly. Thereafter, Amadou was tagged repeatedly in the media as the “unarmed West African street vendor,” a label which deeply troubled his mother because it implied that his normal state was armed, marked him as somehow different and expendable, and it stole his story. For Kadiatou, this memoir is an attempt to give back Amadou his story by going far back into their family history to reveal Amadou’s roots and the life that he experienced before coming to America to save up money and go to college. Much of the descriptions center on Kadiatou’s experiences growing up in a wealthy family in a politically unstable climate within a patriarchal society. She details her complex relationship with her father, her early marriage, the challenges she faced as a young mother far away from her family, her travels, and later, her experiences branching out as a
business woman. Throughout the memoir she paints a complex and vivid picture of Amadou’s family history and privileged place in society that provided a level of accuracy and humanity that the Western media failed to convey. By following the detailed travels and migrations of Kadiatou and Amadou, the readers are confronted with the ways in which the mother and son’s transnational experiences shape them as individuals. The book raises many important questions and points about living in a transnational world, and provides a brilliant example of a transnationally constructed and focused text. As such, all three works of literature raise important questions about existence, identity, culture, and change in a transnational world.

By analyzing the three novels through a transnational perspective, the goals of this thesis are to demonstrate the relevance of transnationalism in literary study, to highlight the significance of these three works and their authors, and to illustrate that the ideas they bring up are essential to understanding the experiences of those living outside of the West as well as our own experiences in an increasingly transnational world. This thesis will provide an example of how a productive transnational reading might be conducted and suggest the necessity of incorporating more literature from other areas of the world into Western literature departments.

The first chapter provides an overview of transnational theory and methodology, highlighting key critics and ideas. The second chapter examines the individual transnational transformations that take place in the main characters in each of the three works of literature. This chapter tracks the development of each of the characters’ perspectives, from the time they are initially immersed in their local life as children to their migrations, noting the influences and factors that shape their transitions both before and after their travels. The third chapter explores the role of the transnational individual within the home community and the way that the individual and community mutually shape ideas about other areas of the world and transnational
phenomena, particularly those related to the local and the global, tradition, and modernity, and culture. By examining these concepts within the contexts of the novels, multiple overlaps and divergences appear in various forms as a result of the individual experiences, circumstances, and interactions of the individual and community.
Chapter I: Defining Transnationalism

Transnationalism has emerged as a new area of study, particularly within the past twenty years, with a growing presence in literature departments. Transnational scholars study how various groups, movements, religions, and other phenomena exist and function beyond the confines of national borders. As Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt note in the introduction to their 2008 anthology, *The Transnational Studies Reader*, “Studying contemporary social dynamics by comparing experiences within or across presumably bounded or closed societies or social units—whether they are localities, regions, nation-states, empires, or world systems—necessarily comes up short” (1). In addressing this issue, William I. Robinson (1998) argues that we need to move beyond national or cross-border focus and “shift” our main attention “from the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis to the global system as the appropriate unit” (562).

Khagram and Levitt argue that the goal of transnational theory ought to be to “uncover, analyze and conceptualize similarities, differences, and interactions among trans-societal and trans-organizational realities, including ways in which they shape bordered and bounded phenomena and dynamics across time and space” (11). While some scholars examine transnationalism from a strictly social or economic position, most consider the way that the two interact and mutually shape each other. In one of the most groundbreaking works related to transnationalism, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy challenges the notion that culture is synonymous within national borders or racial or ethnic definitions. He attempts to “rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora in the western hemisphere” by proposing a new framework for considering the role of blacks in shaping a modernity that resists both nationally-based and ethnically-based models of culture (17). Arjun
Appadurai (1991) has proposed that the modern world consists of flowing and interacting “global ethnoscapes,” which is a term that he defines as “the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live” (50). According to Appadurai, “tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (50). He argues that this movement of groups across borders has increased as a result of the mass media and personal experiences of friends and acquaintances allowing more people throughout the world to “consider a wider set of ‘possible’ lives than they ever did before” (54). Aihwa Ong has proposed a related notion in her book, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), in which she examines “the economic rationality that encourages family emigration or the political rationality that invites foreign capital” as well as “the cultural logics that make these actions thinkable, practicable, and desirable, which are embedded in the processes of capital accumulation” (5). In this rationale, she develops the notion of flexible citizenship which, she argues, is a result of “cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (6).

Transnational connections have become more apparent in recent years due, in large part, to the phenomena of globalization. But it is important to note that globalization and transnationalism are not the same. Michael Kearney (1995) makes an important differentiation between transnationalism and globalization by stating “Transnationalism overlaps globalization but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in a global space, transnational processes are anchored
in and transcend one or more nation-states” (273). As such, the transnational processes examined in the novels are linked to and occur in many ways due to globalization.

In a similar vein, Victor Roudometof (2000) argues that certain theoretical premises ought to be put in place in order to accurately connect the concepts of transnationalism and globalization. Roudometof outlines the relationships between the two notions as necessary considerations by

- first, connecting the emergence of transnationalism with the global nationalization of the world over the last few centuries;
- second, tracing the implications of this process for diasporic communities by suggesting that these communities develop new connections to a nation-state;
- and, third, *arguing for autonomy of the transnational field in order to effectively examine the interplay among competing identities.* (386)

Most transnational scholars include these considerations when making a linkage between transnationalism and globalization and consider transnational connections to be results of processes of globalization. One major factor in the connection between transnationalism and globalization is the growing influence of these concepts on higher education. As the field of transnationalism has gained increased interest, it has begun to appear as an area of study in various branches of academia, including literature departments. In 2010 Paul Jay published, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies,* in which he examines the increasing presence of transnational theory in the study of literature. In the book, Jay outlines many of the main debates among transnational scholars and demonstrates how those theories can be applied to relevant works of literature. He notes:

- This new work is collectively engaged in a sophisticated and multifaceted exploration of how literature across historical periods reflects—and reflects on—a multiplicity of
differences grounded in personal, cultural, and political identities across locations where
the boundary lines between cultures, races, genders, classes, and sexualities are much
more porous than were heretofore acknowledged. (91)

Given its focus on examining various social categories across or regardless of borders,
transnational theory often lends itself well to colonial or postcolonial literature. Although there
are many other works of literature that would not fall under those categories, such texts could
still be analyzed from a transnational perspective. Transnational studies share a relationship with
postcolonial studies, whose position in literary studies has already been strongly established.
While the two perspectives share some significant similarities, there are important variations
between them. In order to highlight how a transnational reading varies from a postcolonial
reading, it is necessary to situate colonialism and postcolonialism in relation to globalization. I
tend to agree with Jay’s definition of globalization as “a significant acceleration of forces that
have been in play since at least the sixteenth century and that are not simply Western in their
origin” (33). Therefore, regarding the notion that one must take a postcolonial or globalization
studies perspective when studying literature, Jay writes:

> Understanding that globalization is not just a contemporary phenomenon, but that it has a
> long history that incorporates the epochs of colonization, decolonization, and
> postcolonialism, can help us deal with the complexity of literary and cultural productions
> that take each of the polar positions. Globalization can provide a comprehensive
> historical framework through which we can analyze more carefully forms of political
> colonization and cultural syncretism created by the long history of cross-cultural contact.

(51)
Here, Jay suggests that rather than considering globalization as distinct from colonialism, decolonization, and, postcolonialism, transnational theory situates those experiences in relation to the factors that have contributed to globalization. Similarly, Susan Koshy posits, in “The Postmodern Subaltern: Globalization Theory and the Subject of Ethnic, Area, and Postcolonial Studies,” that post-colonial studies and transnational studies enhance one another. She writes:

I would contend that, on the one hand, transformations in the subject of ethnic, area, and postcolonial studies calls for new paradigms to understand changes in power and inequality in the contemporary world, but that on the other hand, the new understandings produced by these fields are critical to the creation of a ‘thick’ globalization theory, because these epistemologies in conjunction with the insights of globalization theory can lay the groundwork for the creation of transnational literacy. (118)

Koshy ultimately argues here that transnational and postcolonial theory can benefit one another by adding more layers to their inquiries. With that in mind, this thesis will examine the transnational identities of the major characters in *The Dark Child, Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*. The thesis will analyze the characters’ transition to a transnational mindset, their interactions with their communities, and the ways in which they envision the future in an increasingly globalized world, not by disregarding their colonial and postcolonial experiences in favor of an approach that considers patterns of globalization from an overly generalized perspective, but rather from an angle that situates the characters’ experiences in relation to the processes of globalization.

As transnational theory is increasingly applied to the study of literary works, certain themes and issues emerge as common topics of inquiry. Transnational theory often examines issues related to identity, culture, economics, tradition, modernity, power, political and social
movements, and other flows and connections that emerge beyond the confines of the nation-state. Many scholars have theorized the effect that transnational experiences, including immigration, migration, travels, education, contact with technology, and personal relationships have on individual identity. For example, Ulrich Beck (2000) observes:

> As more processes show less regard for state boundaries—people shop internationally, work internationally, love internationally, marry internationally, research internationally, grow up and are educated internationally (that is, multi-lingually), live and think transnationally, that is, combine multiple identities into their lives—the paradigms of societies organized within the framework of the nation-state inevitably loses contact with reality. (222)

Many other scholars agree that the nation is not necessarily the most useful lens that allows us to consider the formations and changes in one’s identity. As a result, critics have offered theories on how people combine various identities in a transnational context. Homi Bhabha, for example, in his 1994 book, *The Location of Culture*, posits that individuals form a hybrid identity as a result of transnational experiences. He argues that this hybrid identity is located in the “in-between” spaces that are separate from, yet connected to the identities associated with their home country and host country. He explains, “These ‘inbetween’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2). Within this space, individuals navigate which of the various aspects of their former selves and new experiences to include or exclude in order to create a hybrid identity.

Interestingly, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc (1994) state: “While we speak a great deal in this book about transnationalism as processes and of the
construction of identities that reflect transnational experience, individuals rarely identify themselves as transnational” (263). Instead of thinking of transnational identity as a label or identifier associated with a particular group or place, this thesis will focus on transnational identity more along the line of the ideas of Appadurai and Kwame Anthony Appiah, who both theorize transnational identity to some degree as a state of mind. Building on Benedict Anderson’s conception of the nation as an “imagined community,” Appadurai, in his 2003 article, “Disjuncture and Difference,” theorizes transnational connections as “imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated persons and groups spread around the globe” (31). By his definition, the connections between transnational individuals exist as a perception of similarity or solidarity based on social connections that exist beyond national borders. The use of the word “imagined” indicates that the connections take place on a cognitive level rather than in a physical space. Similarly, Appiah, who outlines his ideas on cosmopolitanism in his 2007 book of the same name, theorizes cosmopolitanism as something that “shouldn’t be seen as some exalted attainment” since “it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association” (xviii-xix). In his article, “Cosmopolitan patriots,” Appiah asserts, “Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, unlike nationalism, are both sentiments more than ideologies” (619). As far as a sentiment is defined as “a mental feeling,” Appiah’s idea of cosmopolitanism as a form of transnational identity is a way of perceiving oneself and one’s associations in the world. As such, transnational identity, as posited in this thesis, is a way of mentally perceiving oneself outside the bounds of one’s locality or nationality and the resulting feelings and shift in worldview and relationship with the home community or nation emanating from such perception. Whereas the concept of identity,
generally speaking, can be based on a large variety of factors, such as religion, culture, family, and nation, and can remain grounded solely in one’s immediate social circle and experiences, transnational identity specifically takes into consideration the broadening of one’s perspective to consider one’s role in the world and connection with others regardless of nationality or geographical location. As such, anyone, from anywhere in the world, outside of or within the West has the potential to obtain a transnational perspective.

In addition to the theme of identity, this thesis will also closely examine transnational issues related to the local and the global, tradition, modernity, and culture. Various scholars have theorized the relationship between the local and the global. Ulf Hannerz, for example, in “The Local and the Global: Continuity and Change,” theorizes the links between the local and the global when he writes: “[M]uch of what goes on locally is what we describe as ‘everyday life.’ And if again we must try to be more specific about what this is, we might say that it tends to be very repetitive, redundant, an almost endless round of activities in enduring settings” (245). Adding to his arguments, Hannerz writes: “What is local also tends to be face-to-face, in large part in focused encounters and broadly inclusive relationships” (246). He defines the global in a somewhat more opaque fashion by representing it as “what has been local somewhere else” (247). Hannerz’s definition of the local is centered on the patterns and features of the physical places where individuals have the majority of their daily interactions. Places outside of that sphere are, for the individual, the global. While making a distinction between the local and the global, Hannerz complicates the notion that the two can be fully separated. He notes:

In identifying the typical components of localness, we may also come to realize more clearly that they are not all intrinsically local, linked to territoriality in general or only some one place in particular. That connection is really made rather by recurrent practices
of life, and by habits of thought. And if somehow these characteristic features of local life become differently distributed in the social organization of space, so that for example everyday life is less confined, or those ‘real’ experiences with a full range of senses are spread out more equally over some number of places which thus approach the qualities of ‘home,’ then the one and only local would appear to be a rather less privileged site of cultural process. (246)

Here, Hannerz indicates that local processes are not always separate from other localities and many times come into contact with the global sphere. Therefore, he does not view the local and the global as completely distinct entities.

Most recent theories of globalization are in line with the views of Hannerz. Taking Hannerz’s idea a bit further, Michael Kearney theorizes the relationship between the local and global as intrinsically linked due to globalization. Kearney writes: “Globalization as it is used herein refers to social, economic, cultural, and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them, such that attention limited to local processes, identities, and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local” (273). Kearney’s statement echoes that of Hannerz since he also argues that the local and global share complicated connections. Kearney’s statement, however, carries broader implications. Whereas Hannerz differentiates between local and global processes while at the same time noting an overlap, Kearney argues that it is impossible to analyze one without considering the other.

In many cases, the local and the global are considered in relation to tradition, particularly cultural tradition, and modernity. Although these concepts are sometimes discussed in opposition, more scholars are urging against falling into polarities when examining issues related to tradition and modernity. Kwame Gyekye, in Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical...
Reflections on the African Experience (1997), says, “modernity is not entirely antithetical to, or irreconcilable with tradition, inasmuch as modernity contains many of the elements of previous cultural traditions” (273). Transnational scholars, instead, are engaged in complicating these notions and their relationship to one another. Bhabha notes that the manner in which scholars consider tradition, modernity, and culture is shifting due to transnational theory, noting: “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds of cultural comparativism—are in a profound process of redefinition” (7). He goes on to say, “I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities” (7). As Bhabha suggests, the connections between communities, culture, tradition, modernity, and the outside world are incredibly complex, but transnational theory is attempting to navigate that complexity.

Taking all of these ideas into consideration, transnationalism is most often described in terms of flows which do not necessarily take the nation-state into consideration, or at least do not take it as the primary framework for relations or study, but instead explore the connections themselves—whether they be cultural, economic, political, social, religious, or otherwise. At the same time, transnational theorists generally do not dismiss the concept of the nation-state, as most agree (as I do) that many patterns which exist in the world today are still largely grounded in nationality or nationalism. Instead, transnational theory attempts to uncover the relationships between various spheres of thought and existence—from the individual, to the local, the regional, the nation-state, and the global—and determine how various phenomena exist in relation to or outside of those spheres. As such, transnationalism is not, in itself, inherently positive or
negative. Transnationalism can refer to anything from women’s rights and movements to criminal networks.

There are certain arguments to be made, however, that considering occurrences or artifacts, whether they be social movements or works of literature, from a transnational perspective can lead to positive and enriched understandings of oneself and others in a world that is more closely connected than ever before by technology, economics, and certain forms of popular culture. Yet, obtaining a transnational perspective does not necessarily always overlap with a feeling of solidarity with others around the globe and an appreciation (rather than a fear) of differences. But this solidarity can be a result of the process in many cases. Considering a transnational identity can have some very positive attributes on an individual. Moreover, as noted before, having a transnational perspective is primarily a mode of thinking, and as such, it is possible for anyone to consider connections, from the individual to the global, from that perspective. In this sense, a transnational study and the development of a transnational perspective are most often associated with travels and migrations but can also exist in those persons who have always remained in one locale as a result of technology. In addition, transnationalism can emerge from a person’s interactions with individuals who have traveled or migrated or by studying literature, as this thesis highlights in particular. Transnational theory is extremely relevant to a variety of works of literature—colonial, postcolonial, or otherwise. *The Dark Child, Ambiguous Adventure,* and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean* provide particularly fertile grounds for studying transnational issues related to identity, tradition, culture, and modernity. Not only do these novels’ main characters experience travels that lead them to undergo transnational shifts in perspective, but the authors employ certain methods that influence readers to develop a more transnational mode of thinking.
While the scholarship on the three works of literature ranges vastly in themes and perspectives, there is a lack of analysis of the books from a transnational perspective. There is very little scholarship on *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*, and that which does exist is mainly in the form of book reviews. Most reviews, such as those by Angela Ards (2003) and Vanessa Bush (2003), praise Diallo and highlight the major themes in the memoir as representing Diallo’s struggles as a woman, her overwhelming love for her son, and Amadou’s tragic death and inaccurate portrayal in the American media. Ards’ review is more specific, arguing that Kadiatou is fighting for a voice for both her son and herself (52). In “Representations: Memoirs, Autobiographies, Biographies: West Africa” (2011), Babacar M’Baye and Meltem Oztan write about the book in terms of the ways it “portrays West African Muslim women who suffer from clashes between tradition and modernity and attempt to break free of restrictive traditions that regulate their behaviors and prevent them from fulfilling their full potentials.” In her article, “What then is the African American,” Violet M. Showers Johnson references the portrayal of Amadou’s shooting in the media, noting the headlines which highlighted his immigrant status and “represented not an attack on immigrants, but a continuing pattern of the historical racist assault on black Americans,” which is precisely what Kadiatou attempts to correct in *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean* (90). Ida E. Lewis discusses Amadou’s case in an article entitled “Diallo: A Case of Racial Mythology,” arguing, “For hundreds of years racial mythology has governed the way the white American collective thinks about people of color: less-than-human, childlike, savages, derelicts, and most of all, dangerous” (7). As this article was published before the trial’s verdict and before the novel was written, Lewis addresses Kadiatou’s faith in the justice system with skepticism while at the same time expressing faith in the possibility of changing racial mythology, saying “the potent attitudes of hate and distrust could be turned on their head
to refute the very myths they now sustain” (7). This is exactly what Kadiatou attempts to do in writing *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*. Each of these articles and reviews focus more specifically on Kadiatou’s experience as a woman in a traditional, Muslim culture and Amadou’s tragic and violent death, both of which deserve significantly more scholarly attention. Although those themes will be noted in the discussions of the memoir throughout this thesis, the primary focus will be on Amadou’s life. This thesis will examine Amadou’s worldview and perception of himself as a transnational individual, his relationship with his family and community and perspectives of the relationship between the local and the global, tradition, modernity, and culture, and ultimately, what his story can teach readers about living in a transnational world.

*The Dark Child* has been written on more extensively. When examining the novel, scholars have primarily focused on the colonial backdrop of the story, the significance of the novel as an autobiographical work, and the portrayal of Laye’s relationship with his parents. In their scholarships, Alioune Sow and Roger A. Berger have both focused on the autobiographical aspects of the novel. Sow argues, in “Political Intuition and African Autobiographies of Childhood,” that the autobiographical significance of the novel is directly tied to Laye’s engagement with the historical period in which he wrote it (498). In “Decolonizing African Autobiography,” Berger instead focuses on Laye’s individual negotiation of his historical moment in order to challenge the notion that African autobiography must always speak for a group (32). While their autobiographical significance is certainly worth noting, this thesis will focus on the autobiography’s significance in terms of the overlap of literature with real-world transnational flows and shifts.

Rather than focus on genre, a few scholars have examined the family relationships within the novel. For example, Deborah Weagel (2009) and Roosevelt Williams (1994) have both
written about Laye’s depiction of his mother and relationship with his mother in the book. Other scholars have examined the novel in terms of its exploration of identity. But, rather than stressing transnational identity, they have focused on masculinity or Laye’s evolution from a child to an adult. For example, Jarrod Hayes (2008) examines the idea of male identity in *The Dark Child*, categorizing the novel as a sort of “male colonial Bildungsromane” where the central theme of the novel is Laye “becoming a man and his apprenticeship to masculinity” (224). Robert Philipson (1989) instead focuses on the novel’s description of Laye’s transition from a child to an adult, which he argues occurs at the point when “the child realizes that others besides the parent or the parents’ community have a decisive influence on his life” (79) and that “childhood and the colonized state are both something to be outgrown” (80). Also basing her arguments in post-colonial theory, Wendy Belcher (2007) explores *The Dark Child* as a work of colonial resistance and highlights Laye’s development of rhetorical strategies for resisting colonization, noting that he purposefully uses flattery and compliments to trap his colonizers and “make the powerful feel the consequences of their exercises of power” (70). Somewhat related to one of the topics in this thesis is Paul Bernard’s “Individuality and Collectivity: A Duality in Camara Laye’s *L’Enfant noir,*” in which he states: “Laye’s ability to leave his own society and to return to it via his memories suggests that his upbringing oriented him to the collective unit as well as to the outside world” (313). The majority of these arguments are strongly based in post-colonial theory. This thesis will attempt to add an additional layer to these discussions by examining issues of identity, the individual and the collective, and group relations in terms of transnational flows and the history of globalization.

Just as with *The Dark Child*, when writing about Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*, scholars most often examine the novel through a post-colonial lens. J.P. Little (2000) has written about
the novel as an autofiction and proposes that Samba’s experiences reflect those of Kane but that he distances himself from the character in order that Samba may speak for an entire generation (74). Emily Pederson Carson, in “A Return of Existentialism into Postcolonial Theory: The Case of Cheikh Hamidou Kane,” (2000) focuses instead on the existential aspects of the novel, attempting to demonstrate “new perspectives on the African writers who found their voices at the height of Sartrean thought in the 1940s and 50s” (145). Other critics have examined issues, such as identity, that are more closely related to this thesis. Victor Carrabino (1987), for example, has examined *Ambiguous Adventure* in terms of Samba’s search for individual identity and ancestry in order to better understand his position in the changing world (65). Omar Sougou (2002) has argued that Samba resists hybridity and is trapped between his own traditional, spiritual culture and Western materialist culture (216). In addition, several scholars have written about *Ambiguous Adventure* in terms of the importance of religion as a theme. In “Islam and Infrastructure: A Reading of Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*,” Iheanacho A. Akakuru examines the novel as a reflection of “the pivotal position of the Islamic faith as informing ‘ideology’ or as the vision of the world the novel proposes to the reader” (106). Joyce Block Lazarus, in her 2004 article “Islam and The West in the Fiction of Cheikh Hamidou Kane,” says that Kane “contrasts the modern Western world, with its scientific and technical achievements, with Islamic Africa, with its spirituality and harmony with nature,” but argues that Kane does not present them in strict opposition as others have suggested (179). Whereas these authors all offer relevant points regarding Samba’s shift in religious perspective, this thesis will specifically link his changed religious beliefs to his transnational shift in identity.

In addition, some scholars have compared *The Dark Child* and *Ambiguous Adventure*. For example, in her article, “Reactions to Western Values as Reflected in African Novels,” Ella
Brown argues that in *Ambiguous Adventure*, the “question is whether or not to admit Western influence in the country” (216), whereas in *The Dark Child*, the author is more interested in how he assimilates Western culture into his own (217). More recently, in 2011, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi represented *The Dark Child* and *Ambiguous Adventure* as examples of the way that African literature is becoming transnational by obtaining a more prominent place in the study of world literature (24). Yet there is no work of scholarship that has compared *The Dark Child*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*. Furthermore, there is a lack of scholarship on the presence of specifically transnational themes in these individual works. Whereas the majority of scholarship on this topic is situated in terms of an East-West or a South-West binary and is written with the nation as the basic unit of comparison, this thesis will examine those ideas through the lens of transnational trends related to globalization. The majority of scholars examine identity in terms of the specifically colonial and post-colonial experiences of the characters without necessarily situating that experience within a transnational context. This thesis will highlight the transnational change in perspective that takes place in each of the main characters, while at the same time considering how their colonial and post-colonial experiences play a role in that transition.
At one point in *The Dark Child*, the author, Camara Laye, pauses to reflect upon the changes that have occurred within and around him from his childhood in Guinea to his studies in France. He writes:

That past is, however, still quite near: it was only yesterday. But the world rolls on, the world changes, my own world perhaps more rapidly than anyone else’s; so that it appears as if we are ceasing to be what we were, and that truly we are no longer what we were, and that we were not exactly ourselves even at the time when these miracles took place before our eyes. (75)

Here, Laye expresses a profound awareness that both he and his perception of the world from his past to his current surroundings have undergone a transformation. Samba Diallo, who is the main character in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* and Amadou Diallo, who is the central figure in Kadiatou Diallo and Craig Wolff’s *My Heart Will Cross This Ocean*, also experience significant transformations due to their transnational experiences. The three characters come from small villages in West Africa where they are initially immersed in family and community life and are gradually exposed to Western education, culture, and practices through their experiences at school and, ultimately, their travels. Their identities are complicated and altered after contact with the West. This change affects every aspect of their lives, from their perceptions of themselves, to their relationship with their families, their homeland, nature, and religion. This chapter will explore how Samba, Laye, and Amadou undergo changes as individuals due to their transnational experiences, how elements of such international processes are both shared and unique, and how the three figures ultimately view themselves by the end of
the novels. Each of these characters undergoes a significant change in self-perception after their migrations, but the way that each of them approaches their new identity and reacts to it is different in significant ways, as a result of their unique circumstances, attitudes about life, and the goals that they or others have set for them prior to their travels.

In *The Dark Child*, Laye’s profound shift in consciousness emerges as he tells the story of his childhood as a young man studying in France during his twenties. Initially he is immersed in his family and community life, and their immediate surroundings, cultures, and day-to-day practices, religious and otherwise, form the basis of his identity. As a boy, Laye is delighted in taking part in the village life of his hometown, which is saturated with spirituality, hospitality, and cultural pride. He loves to watch his father smelt gold in his workshop and admires his mother’s authority in the village. As a child, he feels completely connected to his family and community and does not perceive a life outside of it. Saskia Sassen (1998) asserts that a “radical form assumed today by the linkage of people to territory is the unmooring of identities from what have been traditional sources of identity, such as the nation or the village” (76). The importance of place of origin in a person’s identity is apparent in *The Dark Child* where Laye’s experiences as a child in Kouroussa, a larger village in Guinea, provide the physical, cultural, and spiritual basis for his identity formation. However, as *The Dark Child* suggests, new places are also important in an individual’s identity formation. As he begins to have experiences far outside of Kouroussa, it becomes evident that Laye is slowly undergoing the process of unmooring his identity from his local village. His first experiences outside of Kouroussa are in the nearby village of Tindican where he went during his visits to his grandmother’s home in the countryside. There, he perceives a distinction between himself and the local children of the village. While they all interact with him in genuine and friendly ways, these children perceive Laye as a “city”
boy, influencing the protagonist to perceive the other lads as “county” children. Laye says, “I was near them, part of them, I was not entirely one of them: I was a schoolboy on a visit; how gladly I would have forgotten that fact” (Camara 62). This moment is Laye’s first awareness of himself as somehow distinct from those around him. Despite his recognition of himself as defined, in a sense, by his own local and geographical community, Laye still feels very connected to the people and way of life in Tindican. His desire for that connection and participation arguably allows him for the first time to unmoor his identity from his local community to the extent that he perceives himself in a participatory role outside his community in the most immediate sense. The unmooring process is gradual and continues throughout the novel. The fact that he embraces both his life at home and his life in Tindican is one of the factors that influenced him to leave his native village and travel much farther into the world.

Laye’s process of unmooring his identity from his local community continues as he gradually comes to perceive a world beyond his immediate region and begins to visualize himself in a life outside of his local arena. Arjun Appadurai, in “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology,” observes: “More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of ‘possible’ lives than they ever did before” (54). Appadurai suggests that certain factors increasingly allow individuals to imagine “possible lives.” He says: “One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives…Important also are contacts with, news of, and rumors about others in one’s social neighborhood who have become inhabitants of those faraway worlds” (54). Although mass media does not have such an evident influence on Laye, contact with those persons, particularly one of his uncles, who have traveled far outside of his region, plays a significant role
in bringing the possibility of travel outside his community into his psyche as a real option.

Speaking of his uncle, Laye says:

He had no taste for farming and was rarely seen at Tindican. He led a roving life, and we knew where he was only by chance or when he made one of his infrequent visits. He had a taste for adventure. I saw him only once. He had returned to Tindican, and though he had been there only a few days, he thought of nothing but leaving it. I remember him as a most attractive man who talked a great deal. Indeed, he never stopped talking, and I never wearied of listening to him. He told me about his adventures, which were strange and bewildering, but which opened undreamed of vistas to me. (49)

His uncle’s stories open up a whole new world of possibilities for Laye. For the first time he is intrigued by places outside Kouroussa and Tindican. Prior to hearing his uncle’s stories, his dreams did not extend very far outside his local community. But imagining his uncle’s travels and adventures allows him to dream of new places and possibilities. Considering himself in the world outside of Kouroussa becomes a new part of his imaginings. For example, during the day of the harvest, another of Laye’s uncles asks him if he is daydreaming. Thinking retrospectively about this moment, Laye says: “It was true that I had been day-dreaming: my life did not lie here…and I had no life in my father’s forge. But where was my life? And I trembled at the thought of the unknown life ahead of me” (60). Here, Laye is aware of his future self outside of his community but, as of yet, has no real connection with a place, people, or culture outside of this society. The process of unmooring his identity through an envisioning of various possible lives for himself is the beginning of a mental transition which continues throughout the novel.

Eventually, Laye decides to travel to Conakry, the capital city of Guinea, to study at the technical school. As he moves outside of his local sphere, he begins to perceive a change within
himself. After leaving Kouroussa to study in the city, Laye spends the night with an uncle who lives in a westernized house. He writes: “That was the first night I passed in a European-style house. Was it the unfamiliarity, or the humid heat of the town, or the fatigue of two days in the train that kept me from sleeping?” (147). His first experience being this far removed from his family and community leaves Laye feeling uncomfortable. Whereas he previously was only able to envision the world outside his community, he is now capable of being in contact with it and must navigate what that means for his identity. Laye’s awareness of his changing identity begins almost immediately after leaving home. He writes: “I missed Kouroussa. I missed my little hut. All my thoughts centered on Kouroussa. Once again I saw my mother and my father, my brothers and my sisters, my friends, I was in Conakry and yet I wasn’t. I was really at Kouroussa. But, no—I was in both places. I was ambivalent. And I felt very lonely, despite the affectionate welcome” (148). Here, he is clearly undergoing a mental transition of his perception of self. He is still mentally engaged with his previous life in Kouroussa but he will now be participating in new patterns and places, which leads him to feel split. He says that this dilemma makes him feel “ambivalent” and “lonely” (148). Not being able to fully mentally engage with one place or the other makes him feel isolated. Yet he says, “I was in both places” (148) suggesting that his mixed feelings of inclusion and exclusion leave him confused.

Various scholars have offered theories regarding the shifts in identity and self-perception that occur when Blacks come into contact with the West. For example, Vilashini Cooppan (2005) has built on previous theories of double consciousness, such as those by W.E.B. Dubois, who originally theorized the concept as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (871). According to Du Bois, “One ever feels his two-ness” (871). Cooppan proposes
double consciousness as an attempt “to understand race, nation, and globe in terms of the quite different spatiotemporal plot of simultaneity. Race and nation, nation and globe are in this sense not constituted ‘before’ or ‘after,’ ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ each other. Rather, they coexist in a mutually sustaining fluctuation between seemingly opposed yet secretly conjoined states of being” (316). Here, Cooppan complicates the idea of two distinctly split forms of consciousness, which is relevant to the manner in which Laye’s self perceptions manifest. Although the school Laye attends is in Guinea, it is a French school, run by Western school officials. In addition, there is a greater degree of Western influence in Conakry than in Kouroussa. Attending the French school causes Laye to begin to perceive himself and his local way of life through the eyes of Westerners, at times noting the way that some Westerners would be skeptical or dismissive of certain local beliefs and traditions. At the same time, he is does not adopt those views, clearly indicating a distinction between his own self perception and the way he imagines some Westerners view him. His narrative style indicates the manner in which he is constantly negotiating these perceptions. In addition, Laye’s perception of his self as an identity that is being split and eluding definition is amplified when he leaves for France. He writes: “No, I do not like to remember that parting. It was as if I were being torn apart” (187). While living in Conakry, he was still surrounded by family and individuals with similar religious and cultural practices. Leaving for France, Laye knows he will be completely isolated from his former community and way of life and has no idea what to expect and what effects this separation will have on his identity. In addition, Camara’s decision to write about his past experiences in Guinea from his position in France in his twenties clearly demonstrates his split consciousness but, at the same time, presents a complicated picture of the manner in which he is constantly negotiating the way his perception of his past experiences shape how he views himself at present.
and, likewise, how his present perceptions affect the manner in which he conceives of his past self. Rather than branching off into two separate identities, past and present, there and here, Laye is in a constant interaction between the two poles, making the construction of his transnational identity be an evolving, shifting interaction. This conception of identity as a fluid consciousness lends support to the idea that a transnational transformation is primarily a shift in cognition.

As noted, Laye’s transformed identity leads him to reassess not only his present self but also to reevaluate his past identity. One significant way in which he questions his past identity is through an examination of his belief system. Since Laye does not outwardly usually discuss his religion, the reader must infer his beliefs and level of devotion from statements he makes throughout The Dark Child. For example, while describing his uncle, Laye says, “He was a Mohammedan—as we all are, I may add—but more orthodox than most of us” (150). Here, Laye suggests that his religious beliefs are consistent with those of the average practicing Muslim in his Guinean community. He is devout without necessarily being strict. His spirituality is a mix of both Muslim faith and local religion, which incorporates totems, mixtures, and particular types of blessings which are considered to have protective properties.

In order to gauge the extent to which Laye’s beliefs have changed throughout the novel, one must closely examine his sparse retrospective comments throughout the book. For example, in thinking back about his mother’s visit to the marabouts, or religious leaders, so that they can pray for her son to succeed at the school in Conakry, Laye states: “Was I especially superstitious at that time? I do not think so. I simply believed nothing could be obtained without God’s help” (166). Laye’s use of the past tense in this passage makes the interpretation of the quotation somewhat ambiguous. He considers the possibility that his belief was purely “superstitious.” Yet
he rejects the notion that faith is superstitious. David Chidester (1996) has written about the way that colonizers and missionaries created a comparative religious discourse which attempted to define African religions as “superstition” in comparison with the “genuine” religion of Christianity. Chidester writes: “indigenous African religion could be dismissed by these Protestant comparativists as superstition, magic, worship of the dead, and worship of objects” (86). Although Chidester primarily uses the example of South Africa, the basic comparativist mode through which colonizers dismissed traditional religion is applicable to the study of Laye’s attitudes towards traditions.

For instance, although Laye and his community still hold on to many of their traditional spiritual beliefs which are both local and Islamic, the idea that African religion is superstitious in comparison to Western religion is present in his psyche and, to some degree, has led him to question his past beliefs. Although it is clear he questions these core beliefs, he does not indicate that he has rejected them. In other parts in the novel, he indicates that he still holds on to his faith. For example, thinking back on a strange and seemingly miraculous incident from the past, he writes:

And today, now that I come to remember them, even I hardly know how I should regard them. They seem to be unbelievable; they are unbelievable. Nevertheless, I can only tell you what I saw with my own eyes. How can I deny the testimony of my own eyes? Those unbelievable things. I saw them. I see them again as I saw them then. Are there not things around us, everywhere, which are inexplicable? (69-70)

Here, he acknowledges that he has witnessed occurrences that strictly defy “rational” thinking. Yet he still believes and accepts that some things are unknown. More significantly, he somewhat breaks down the comparativist opposition between African and western religions by asserting
that believers everywhere have faith in the unknown or the unexplainable, and therefore, that one particular faith cannot be dismissed as less valid than another. So although his cultural beliefs may have been challenged, Laye is mostly comfortable with accepting the unknown.

As *The Dark Child* ends before Laye reaches France, it is difficult to gain a sense of how he perceives his new transnational identity. The opening quotation of this chapter, where Laye reflects upon how he has evolved as an individual, how the world has evolved, and how he perceives his relationship to the world at the time of writing the novel, provides insight into how he views his transformation. Although he notes that his transformation may be more rapid than others, Laye discusses his awareness of a shift in collective terms. He says: “we are ceasing to be what we were, and that truly we are no longer what we were, and that we were not exactly ourselves even at the time when these miracles took place before our eyes,” (75). Here, Laye not only expresses his awareness of a change that has occurred within himself as a result of his travels, but situates this experience within a global context. He observes that the “world rolls on, the world changes,” which is a statement that indicates his recognition of a large globalization bringing about transnational connections and patterns to the life of the individual (75). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha alludes to this globalization when he writes: “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (2). Here, Bhabha puts forth a conception of transnational shifting of identity which is applicable on individual, communal, and global levels. Bhabha is theorizing precisely what Laye experiences and senses by the end of *The Dark Child*—an increasingly globalized world that leads to transnational connections and perspectives that are built upon differences between individuals and groups and which must be examined and navigated in order to produce new meanings and
identities. As such, Laye’s past and present experiences not only shape his present identity but also his perceptions of himself throughout his life. Therefore, Laye’s awareness of himself as a transnational individual manifests itself as an awareness of connections with the global world that he builds outside of his original community.

Laye frames the passage about his awareness of his identity transformation within a reflection about not knowing his totem, which is a term that refers to an animal that is assigned to individuals in his culture as a traditional symbol of good luck and protection. Describing his reliance on a totem, Laye says, “Yes, the world rolls on, the world changes; it rolls on and changes, and the proof of it is that my own totem—I too have my totem—is still unknown to me” (75) raising some important questions about the manner in which he views his future self, particularly with regard to reincorporation into his community.

Much of the scholarship on reincorporation is focused on specific case studies, and there is a need for more research that will produce a general theoretical framework for discussing this process. Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld (2004), who have compiled an anthology of stories of migrant return suggest a reason for the difficulty in creating a conceptual framework for return. According to these two critics, “return as an analytic category differs from notions such as globalization and transnationalism, which are universal categories. Return, in contrast, is situated in particular events and experiences” (3). At the same time, Long and Oxfeld provide conceptions of return that are applicable to Laye. For example, they note that “returns raise concerns about the continuity of ethnic identities and boundaries across generations” (5). The two critics also note that these concerns initially arise in imagination since “They [individuals] anticipate, plan, long for, and/or fear the return, but the physical act itself remains a future possibility” (7). Laye is aware that his shift in cognition has placed a space between his
community and him. At the same time, there are indications that he not only believes he will be able to reincorporate himself into life at home, but he looks forward to this experience. For example, his use of the phrasing “still unknown” (75) indicates that he believes it may still be possible for him to discover his totem. Therefore, although he certainly feels as if he has lost time, knowledge of particular cultural customs, and the ability to regain the home experiences he has missed, he believes it will still be possible for him to actively participate in his community life when he returns to Kouroussa. His experiences in school and abroad have caused his reminiscences about certain events and traditions, such as the night of Konden Diara—a night when boys in Laye’s culture undergo a ritual trip into the bush to conquer their fear, which is a lesson deemed important for them as they grow into young men—to be less imbued with wonder and to be shaped by the way he imagines those outside his community would perceive the ritual, yet he still values these traditions for their ability to connect members of the community and pass important life lessons through generations. Therefore, although his nostalgia indicates his awareness that he cannot regain certain aspects of the past and that it would no longer be possible for him to perceive himself strictly within his local sphere, he stops short of feeling that he cannot reincorporate his native society and believes that some of his lost pieces of cultural knowledge and participation can be regained.

In Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*, Samba Diallo goes through a similar shift of identity by developing a transnational perspective about his self. Like Laye, Samba is immersed in his village and religious life as a young boy. He is from a family of nobility and is recognized as notably devout to his Islamic religion. The teacher at the Glowing Hearth, the Koranic school where Samba studies as a boy, favors the lad for his devotion to his studies, despite earnestly
wishing to view all of his pupils equally. Describing the teacher’s thoughts about Samba, Kane writes:

What purity! What a miracle! Truly, this child was a gift from God. In the forty years he had devoted himself to the task—and how meritorious a task it was!—of opening to God the intelligence of sons of men, the teacher had never encountered anyone who, as much as this child, and in all facets of his character, waited on God with such a spirit. So closely would he live with God, this child, and the man he would become, that he could aspire—the teacher was convinced of this—to the most exalted levels of human grandeur.

(5)

The teacher hopes that Samba will continue his religious studies at the Glowing Hearth and grow as a spiritual leader. As a child, Samba has the same hopes. Samba’s identity is strongly grounded in his religion and community. Lori Peek (2005) notes that “certain individuals and communities highlight and develop religious identities as opposed to other forms of personal and social identity such as race, ethnicity, or nationality,” and discusses various theories that suggest why that is true in some cases (218). Peek broadly outlines certain explanations that recognize “the functions that religion plays in society” (219). She states: “In addition to meeting spiritual needs, membership in a religious organization offers many non-religious material, psychological, and social benefits, including community networks, economic opportunities, educational resources, and peer trust and support” (219).

Samba and his community provide a very clear example of a case where religion forms the basis of identity. For the Diallobé people, religion is tied in to all of the aspects of their lives—their education is based on Koranic studies, their social interactions are often based in religious and philosophical discussions, and even their primary motivation for working and
making money depends on their ability to survive and continue to pray and worship. Their religion forms the basis of their collective identity and bonds them together in all aspects of life. Growing up among the Diallobé, Samba’s identity is strongly grounded in the community and the belief that religion is the foremost factor by which the society defines itself. Therefore, as a child, Samba does not perceive himself outside the community and its spirituality. He desires to stay in the Glowing Hearth and develop his identity in the school, and does not initially imagine that there could possibly be a different life path for him.

As a child, Samba only has an awareness of being a member of his community, studying at the Glowing Hearth, and fully expecting to remain and grow as a part of local life. However, as a result of Western pressure to send young men to the French schools, and the dire need of the Diallobé people to learn new skills that will allow them to create a sustainable infrastructure and preserve their life, culture, and spirituality, Samba finds himself in the middle of the struggle between the spirituality of the South and the materiality of the West. What Samba does not realize immediately is that his devotion to the Koranic scripture is so deep that the adults in his native village believe he would be the least likely person to let Western influence shake his religious faith if he were sent to the French school to learn the technical knowledge necessary to maintain their physical beings. Since they strongly believe that their child’s faith is unbreakable, Samba’s family eventually decides to remove him from the Glowing Hearth to send him to the French school.

Upon being removed from the Glowing Hearth, Samba begins to sense the conflict in which he is involved, but he cannot articulate it yet. Kane writes, “Samba Diallo had a vague prescience of the importance of the problem of which he was the centre” (35). Initially, Samba’s understanding of his internal struggle occurs on a visceral level, as a feeling of discomfort
resulting from the budding awareness that he may be obliged to leave his family and community to go to an unknown place. Sassen’s notion of “unmooring” one’s identity from his or her local village as the first step to perceiving oneself as a transnational individual is applicable to Samba’s self-transformation though his experience is somewhat different from Laye’s. Samba’s identity, originally based entirely in his village, undergoes a gradual unmooring, which, prior to even taking the form of a concrete thought, occurs in the form of a discomfort caused by the vague awareness at some level of his consciousness that his future may not lie within his original community. Although he does not yet have any specific vision of himself in the future, realizing that it may take a different course from that which he had envisioned leaves him feeling upset and fearful. As his vague sense of future separation takes a more distinct shape when he realizes that he will be studying at the French school, he begins to recognize that he will be obliged to live outside of his community and that he will have to part with the teacher to whom he is deeply attached. Whereas Laye feels torn between two paths, Samba feels obligated to a greater degree to take a path which he does not choose but instead has been laid out by his colonizers. Walking on a strictly dictated path makes Samba’s identity transformation an uncomfortable and unwished experience that he goes through more for obligation than a choice.

However, like Laye, Samba eventually crosses the boundary between imagined and actual experience and feels himself changing due to his contact with the West. Initially Samba’s contact with the West is limited to his study at the nearby French school, but the novel rapidly moves ahead to his study in Paris, accentuating the change that takes place within Samba. The initial effect of Samba’s study in France on his identity takes the form of an emerging doubt about his ability to carry out the role assigned to him by his community. Samba’s doubt becomes evident in a conversation with a friend of his, Lucienne’s, family during which he says, “You
know, the fate of us Negro students is a little like that of a courier: at the moment of leaving home we do not know whether we shall ever return” (Kane 100). Assuming the role of a courier, Samba takes on the responsibility to carry messages from the West to his native community. He is responsible for bringing back information on how to sustain the Diallobé. But he also has the daunting task to bring home other observations that he has made about Europeans while, at the same time, keeping the core values of his community intact.

What is of interest here is that Samba’s uncertainty about whether he will be able to carry out his task indicates a change in his perception of himself. Whereas his main distress upon leaving his family was physical separation, he gradually comes to feel a mental separation due to his changing identity. Initially, he had no doubt that he would return to his homeland because he never wanted to leave it. Now, he gradually begins to doubt his ability to carry out the task of returning home with only selective and incorporated knowledge and, therefore, no longer has any idea what direction his future self will take. Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) propose a distinction between “ways of being” and “ways of belonging” in the process in which transnational individuals navigate their various social fields (286). The two critics define social fields as “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed” (286). They indicate that “ways of being refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions,” whereas “ways of belonging refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group” (287). In a sense, Samba’s task was to participate in ways of being without engaging in ways of belonging, at least with regard to his core belief system. Samba attempts to function in French society without letting the experience have an effect on his identity but is
unable to do so. While he does not necessarily adopt Western values in place of his own, his contact with the West leads him to question beliefs that had previously formed the basis of his identity. He does not feel a sense of belonging to French society. Yet he is not able to simply go through the day-to-day motions there without allowing that experience to affect his worldview and self-perception. Arguably, he is trapped somewhere in between two modes, and as such, feels isolated from both his home and his current surroundings, a feeling that is amplified as the novel continues.

As Samba interacts with new people, cultures, and educational institutions, he struggles with his task to maintain cultural and religious authenticity. Despite his efforts to hold onto his faith while studying in France, he has serious doubt regarding his fastidious religious upbringing. One of his first realizations that he is beginning to falter in his faith comes at a point in the novel where he thinks of prayer and life in opposition to one another, and is immediately troubled that the thought crossed his mind. He meditates:

> It is, in any case, an idea that has evolved. I mean to say, an idea that marks a progress in precision over my previous state of mind: it distinguishes; it specifies. There is God and there is life, two things not necessarily intermingled. There is prayer and there is combat. Is this idea right? If I listened to that man sleeping more and more profoundly within me, I should reply, No, this idea is even mad. (86)

This passage reveals Samba’s awareness of his changing mental state. He is aware of an evolution in his thought, one in which God and life, previously inseparable in his mind, diverge into two separate entities. The reasons for his shifting attitude toward religion are twofold. Peek notes that “[e]very society and culture includes points in life and development when rites, rituals, institutional expectations, or regulations cause individuals to reflect on their behavior and
identity” (227). Peek goes on to say that college is often one of those times for self-reflection. Samba experiences this self-reflection since he comes into contact with new ideas, theories, cultures, and belief systems on a daily basis, which causes him to reflect upon his own. However, the reason for coming into contact with Western philosophy and ideology are due to his colonial context. Had he not been obliged to leave for France, his studies would have continued among the Diallobé people, who are constantly pondering their faith, and any period of personal reflection would have likely been resolved with this community’s intact faith.

In France, however, Samba feels as if his former self is falling asleep and his attempts to awaken are increasingly futile. For example, one evening, Samba forgets to pray and “had to disturb his rest to get up again and pray” (Kane 112). Previously, prayer and spirituality were so integral to his identity and life that he did not have to consciously attempt to bring them to the forefront of his mind. Now, prayer has become a task for which he must make an effort to perform it. In response to these types of transgressions, Samba prays to God, “I beg Thee, do not allow me to become the utensil which I feel to be emptying itself already” (112). Samba’s religious doubt complicates his already conflicted identity—he is aware that his belief is slipping away. Yet he feels powerless to effectively resist this alienation.

The conflict of Samba’s religious identity is an illustration of a more generalized conflict that he faces—that in which he realizes his entire identity has undergone an unwanted change. Samba reflects this change in the following passage of *Ambiguous Adventure*:

> It may be that we shall be captured at the end of our itinerary, vanquished by our adventure itself. It suddenly occurs to us that, all along our road, we have not ceased to metamorphose ourselves, and we see ourselves as other than what we were. Sometimes
the metamorphosis is not even finished. We have turned ourselves into hybrids, and there we are left. Then we hide ourselves, filled with shame. (100)

Although the change takes place gradually, Samba’s awareness of it occurs suddenly after the transformation is already complete. His response to the change is continued isolation because he is ashamed of becoming a “hybrid” person. Scholars have offered various ideas regarding the processes by which shifts in identity lead one to become “hybrid.” Hybridity is not inherently positive or negative but can be perceived as either depending on the circumstances surrounding one’s transformation to a hybrid identity. For Samba, the experience of becoming hybrid is one he views in a negative light. Keri E. Iyall Smith notes that the word “hybrid” was “initially a term of derision” (4). Although she bases her argument on another novel written around the same time period when *Ambiguous Adventure* was published, Iyall Smith’s explanation for the reasons behind this derision of hybridity lends some clarity to Samba’s shame of becoming hybrid. She writes that those with hybrid identities “are not seen as individuals, but as a particular type that is a combination of the stranger’s identity and the local identity” (4). In the essay entitled “Globalization as Hybridization,” Jan Nederveen Pieterse similarly explores the historical basis of hybridity as a negative conception. Nederveen Pieterse states: “[H]ybridity functions as a negative trope, in line with the nineteenth-century paradigm according to which hybridity, mixture, mutation are regarded as negative developments which detract from prelapsarian purity—in society and culture, as in biology” (327). Both of these points help to explain Samba’s conception of hybridity and his shame of having a hybridized identity. Samba wants his identity to remain static despite his new experiences and outside influences. Instead, he has incorporated some of the “stranger’s” identity into his own and brings that back to his community. Illustrating Nederveen Pieterse’s representation of hybridity as a detraction, Samba
is upset by his mixed identity not just because he has compromised the purity of his local identity, but because he regards this fluidity as a condition that takes away the beliefs and worldview he previously valued. Samba perceives hybridity as an identity that detracts him from the collective value system of his Diallobé community. Not having been able to achieve his goal of keeping his communal belief system pure and unaltered, Samba feels like a failure.

Whereas Laye observes the changes taking place in him, while at the same time examining how he might reincorporate the new facets of his experience into his former way of life, Samba does not view reincorporation as a possibility. He considers all the ways he has changed—experiencing a shift to a hybrid identity, being plagued by religious uncertainty, and perceiving himself to have failed at his task—and feels that he will now be very different from the family and community members that he left behind. As mentioned, Long and Oxfeld observe that migrants imagine returning home before actually doing so. They write: “Imagining return is often an emotionally charged experience, becoming more so as it is imminent. In order to return, people analyze the potential consequences (such as the degree of danger, financial viability, and reception) and confront strong emotions” (7). A large part of Samba’s distress results from imagining his return home. It is not just the fact that he has changed that leads him to feel unsettled, but that he believes his changes will be a disappointment to those he has left behind. Long and Oxfeld assert: “Because return may introduce new social divisions, some villagers are apprehensive about the role of visiting kin in their community” (11). It is precisely Samba’s awareness that a social division between the members of his community and him leads him to feel isolated. Thus the reason that he feels “vanquished” by his travels is because his identity has been altered to the point that he does not view reincorporation as a feasible process.
Samba’s awareness of his transformation eventually leads him to feel so far distanced from his former self and community that he refuses to acknowledge the role that has been assigned to him in the process of determining the balance between the material and spiritual worlds. After being in France for some time, he receives a letter from the chief of the Diallobé, his uncle, informing him that the community has decided to send the children to the European school. The chief laments this decision in the following passage: “Today everything fled and crumbled around my immobility, as the sea does along a reef. I am no longer the point of reference, the landmark; I am the obstacle which men walk around in order not to hit” (110).

The chief’s distress at the issue of sending the Diallobé children to the French school does not affect Samba in the way it should impact him given his noble position within this community. Rather than sharing in his uncle’s distress, Samba thinks, “What have their problems to do with me? I have the right to do as the old man has done: to withdraw from the arena of their confused desires, their weaknesses, their flesh, to retire within myself. After all, I am only myself. I have only me” (112). This reaction illustrates Samba’s transition from thinking collectively to reflecting individually about his identity. A few critics have written about the challenges of negotiating individual and collective identity. Cigdem Kagitçibasi discusses how “individualism has been the hallmark of European social history” (4), whereas, “social morality, underpinning a collectivist worldview” is the foundation of “eastern religions and philosophies” (5). Samba’s identity was initially built around a similar collectivist perspective of social and moral responsibility. But his time in the West has led him to adopt a more individualistic perspective. He now views the dilemma that was once his and his community’s as the sole problem of the society. In Samba’s case, obtaining a transnational perspective, in the sense of perceiving himself outside his community and considering his connections with the outside world, has left
him feeling confused, questioning, and conflicted. That is because his overall analysis of those considerations is that he does not relate on a deep mental or spiritual level to people in France, yet he has questioned his beliefs enough to feel isolated from his community. He has been unable to find a successful way to maintain his identity and his faith and (filled with shame and the inability to figure out a way to balance the desires of the material and spiritual worlds), he withdraws into himself. When he returns home, his feeling of shame and isolation is only exacerbated.

Amadou’s experiences in My Heart Will Cross This Ocean provide some significant contrasts to those of Samba and Laye in terms of the way in which one comes to have a transnational identity. Amadou was born in a small village where he spent the first few years of his life. But, unlike the other characters, he travels throughout many different countries in Africa and Asia. Amadou has spent much of his life living in various locales of what Saskia Sassen calls “the global grid of cities.” Sassen defines the “global grid of cities” as “a world-wide grid of strategic places, from export-processing zones to major international business and financial centers. We can think of this global grid as constituting a new economic geography of centrality, one that cuts across national boundaries and across the old North-South divide” (72). Amadou’s parents are both in the business of trade and travel extensively and live in large cities that would be considered as part of the global grid of cities such as Monrovia and Bangkok. Although their reason for traveling is economically based, living in places on the global grid provides social exposure to a vast variety of individuals and cultures from all around the globe. Sassen writes: “The space constituted by the global grid of cities, a space with new economic and political potentialities, is perhaps one of the most strategic spaces for the formation of transnational identities and communities” (76). Growing up in various localities and countries, Amadou
already perceives himself as a transnational individual prior to leaving for America. Whereas for Laye and Samba, leaving their homes for the first time initiates a transnational transformation of identity, Amadou’s transnational identity is has already been developing throughout his childhood and teenage years. Therefore, his experiences in America continue to add new layers to his transnational identity rather than to provoke the beginning of an identity transformation. For example, His mother writes: “Amadou belonged to many places, and he knew about the places he had not yet seen. That had been my goal in sending him to the best school in Bangkok that I could afford, but I was not entirely prepared for the outcome, that he would want to venture out and embrace new experiences” (Diallo and Wolff 202). Amadou’s desire to study elsewhere comes from both within and outside of himself. His studies ignite his interest and curiosity in new places, particularly America, and he is aware that traveling there to experience American life firsthand is not unfeasible for him. Therefore, his decision to leave for America to work and study does not pose a conflict of identities for Amadou since he regards this journey as an experience that adds new layers to his identity.

The way Amadou perceives transnational connections and experiences is consistent with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s conception of cosmopolitan identity in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006). Appiah writes: “People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life” (xv). Even before leaving for America, Amadou views himself and the world through a cosmopolitan perspective and, once there, he incorporates his new experiences into a diversified and expanded worldview. The description of Amadou as he leaves for the airport to travel to America captures the way that he embraces differences and
influences from various parts of the globe. Diallo and Wolff write: “Amadou wore black jeans, a dark pullover shirt, and a light brown jacket. He carried Le Sait Koran, brown-covered with raised gold floral trimming, a biography of Martin Luther King, and a navy blue suit in his suitcase” (204). Even before leaving for America, Amadou has incorporated many elements from around the world into his daily existence. His choice of clothing and books indicate influences from Africa and the West. He has adopted a physical style and a mode of thinking, in which he combines various elements from different societies and cultures. Moreover, Amadou does not allow his studies or thoughts to be bound by national, racial, religious, or other borders, but instead selectively places value and interest in specific items and ideas. As such, Amadou does not view studying from various perspectives to be contradictory or threatening but, instead, regards them as complements which broaden his perspectives. He views the development of his transnational identity much as Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004) theorize this concept when they write:

Once we rethink the boundaries of social life, it becomes clear that the incorporation of individuals into nation-states and the maintenance of transnational connections are not contradictory social processes. Simultaneity, or living lives that incorporate daily activities, routines, and institutions located both in a destination country and transnationally, is a possibility that needs to be theorized and explored. Migrant incorporation into a new land and transnational connections to a homeland or to dispersed networks of family, compatriots, or persons who share a religious or ethnic identity can occur at the same time and reinforce one another.” (284)

Like a few other transnational scholars, Levitt and Schiller do not view maintaining identities that span various locations, ideologies, and cultures as contradictory processes. Whereas both
Samba and Laye view their home communities and the culture, religion, and values they grew up with to be contradictory, or at the very least, marginalized by the dominant culture of their new surroundings, Amadou is much more comfortable with his transition and does not view his life in Guinea to conflict with his experience in America. He feels that he has a greater degree of choice, both in his decision to travel in the first place and his freedom to choose on a daily basis what elements of his new experiences to incorporate into his worldview and self perception and what to dismiss.

Amadou’s cosmopolitan perspective is further illustrated by the strong connection he immediately feels with other people living in New York City upon arriving. Diallo and Wolff write: “Amadou walked out into the center of what he had imagined, New York. He noticed the buildings and shops and billboards, but they did not impress him. These he had seen in Bangkok and Singapore. There was, he believed, in the faces of the people and the way they moved, a shared feeling that there was no other place they would rather be” (210). Rather than feel excluded or conflicted, Amadou feels a connection with the people in New York. He believes that they are cosmopolitan individuals and that many of them have, like him, come there to establish an independent living, seek opportunity, and experience the varied culture and history of the city. Amadou is an example of what Sassen describes when she writes: “[T]hrough immigration a proliferation of originally highly localized cultures now have become presences in many large cities, cities whose elites think of themselves as cosmopolitan, as transcending any locality. Members of these ‘localized’ cultures can in fact come from places with great cultural diversity and be as cosmopolitan as elites” (75). For Amadou, New York is just another city on the global grid on which he has lived for most of his life. In terms of his perception of himself as a cosmopolitan individual, he recognizes that he is on equal footing with every other
cosmopolitan New Yorker regardless of origin or economic status. The transnational connection he feels with his new home does not pose a conflict for him since it does not interfere with his connections to Guinea. He embraces his new experiences without fearing to lose his former relationships.

One illustration of Amadou’s ability to balance the various realms of his identity is exemplified by the continuation of his religion devotion. Amadou does not view western cultures and religions as a threat to his religion, but instead studies them as a tool to better understand Americans and his own beliefs. Diallo and Wolff note “He read many books about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. He read Guidelines for Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims, and while praying, he listened to taped translations of the Koran, some in English, some in French” (216). This description of Amadou’s religious and socio-political studies illustrates the different elements that make up his worldview. Amadou studies positions of both the West and the South, where one finds both Christians and Muslims, in order to learn how to negotiate a balanced and productive relationship with the West.

Furthermore, Amadou’s religion provides a connection between other members of the immigrant Diaspora in New York and him. Violet M. Showers Johnson provides an example of the way that some African immigrants utilize their religion to forge stronger transnational ties. Although she uses the example of Senegalese immigrants, her idea could be related to Amadou’s experience in America. Johnson writes: “In their new home it is instrumental in shaping solid transnational identities that connect the Senegalese Americans with the homeland and other Senegalese communities in the diaspora” (96). Rather than viewing the experience of living, working, and studying abroad as a threat that can separate him from his religion and community in Guinea, Amadou, like some other immigrants, use religion as a tool to build stronger ties
between those at home and in Guinea. For example, his father “often told Amadou that he was proud of his son for maintaining his prayers” thus strengthening their bond, despite their distance (213). In addition, in America, the storeowner of the shop where Amadou works provides him with a space to pray “which he did between aluminum shelves stocked with cases of Pepsi, Canada Dry, SlimFast, and Hawaiian Punch” (217). There is no explicit mention of the shop owner’s religion, since the reader only knows that the merchant is a Pakistani man. Since Islam is the main religion practiced in Pakistan, the fact that the Pakistani man allows Amadou to practice it in his shop provides an example of religion as an element that forges connection and mutual respect between people.

In a similar vein, Amadou shares other common features with other members of his transnational community that reinforce his connection to home while at the same time helping him relate to his new experiences. Having a group to whom he can relate and compare his process of identity negotiation allows him to feel less isolated in America. For example, when describing the other Guineans with whom Amadou lived in New York, Diallo and Wolff write:

He and the others made for a tight band of friends. If one came home from work early, he made sure there was a warm plate waiting for the others. In the evening, they kept their doors open, always happy to receive the others. Theirs was a communion rooted in a sense of triumph for having made it to New York, constant fatigue from their long working hours, and a lingering, gray sadness for the people they had left behind. (212)

This passage illustrates the feeling of community that Amadou shares with those who also have comparable transnational experiences. Like Laye and Samba, Amadou misses both his family and home country; but he feels much more comfortable in and connected to his new country than they do. Amadou feels a sense of belonging that neither Samba nor Laye experience in the same
way. As a result of these factors, Amadou is able judge and moderate various influences on his identity from within a hybrid community resulting in a uniquely fluid identity. Ulrich Beck argues that “individuality is a result of overlaps and conflicts with other identities. For each individual this is a creative achievement” (225). Beck’s use of the terms “individuality,” “creative,” and “achievement” cast a positive light on a process of identity shift which would necessarily fall short in explaining the transnational and hybrid identity of someone like Samba, who found the process of identity transformation to be painful and unwanted. However, when it is applied to an individual like Amadou, who has more choice in the negotiation of his own future, obtaining a transnational identity is a sort of positive achievement. Amadou ultimately views having a transnational perspective as an enhancement rather than a detraction of identity.

At the same time, despite the fact that Amadou cultivates a rich, layered, and cosmopolitan identity for himself, he is faced with the fact that others do not necessarily view those characteristics as being the primary factors that define him. Although there are many Americans who themselves have cosmopolitan, transnational identities and are accepting of others regardless of race, religion, or other factors, problems still arise when some individuals stereotype and define others inaccurately and unfairly based on race. Amadou finds that some perceive him in a manner in which race subsumes both his African identity and transnational identity. Johnson describes this predicament as being a common situation that Black immigrants face when they reach the United States. She argues that Blacks in America, regardless of their origin, are perceived by some by the “master status” of race, by which she means that race is perceived as the primary and defining factor above any other attribute (77). Johnson notes: “[T]he diasporic transnational identities created are situated in the master status and, in apparent or subtle but significant ways, are shaped and reshaped by it” (79). For example, Amadou is
warned by both his roommates and uncle about racial profiling, which must have had some effects on his psyche, despite the fact that he expresses his confidence in American justice. What is illustrated in the memoir, perhaps more than the implications that “master status” has for the formation of his own identity, is the way that this belief shapes the manner in which others perceive Amadou. Amadou is killed by police officers in front of his own apartment without provocation. The police officers look at him first as a black man, whom they associate with crime, violence, and fear, and not with the true identity of this immigrant—who was a kind, ambitious, and hardworking young man. Therefore, despite the fact that there has been progress with regard to overall perspectives on race and other perceived differences between individuals, situations such as Amadou’s murder demonstrate the need for continued effort to change the way that some people form ideas about race and identity. Considering the transnational connections that all individuals share is one way to facilitate positive growth.

In conclusion, each of the major characters that come from The Dark Child, Ambiguous Adventure, and My Heart Will Cross this Ocean takes a unique path along transnational identities which are influenced by their goals, attitudes, and relationships with family, community, and outside influences. As children, each of the characters are completely immersed in the day-to-day cultural, religious, and familial practices of their villages. Yet, as they grow up, these characters are gradually exposed to a world outside their own and begin to realize that they will be compelled, by varying factors to have relationships with it. All the characters experience an unmooring of identity from their hometown and step in a process of identity change that transforms them into transnational individuals. Each of the characters begins to imagine himself outside of his local community and envisions various possible lives for himself. As each of them travels outside of their communities, they are faced with shifts in identity, including a double
consciousness and some form of hybridization. Where their identity was initially bound by their local settings, each of them eventually develop a transnational perspective in which they view themselves in relation to members of various parts of the globe and consider the relationship between individuals and groups on a large scale.

The conclusions of each of the texts demonstrate not just the characters’ varying abilities to adapt to and come to terms with their transnational identities, but the problems that can arise when others, both strangers and their families and communities, fail to recognize or accept their identities. Laye, in the end of the novel, is left in a state of suspended uncertainty. Upon leaving for France, the director of the school in Conakry presents Laye with a map of the metro. After he receives the map, Laye tells himself, “But the map meant nothing to me. The very idea of the métro was extremely vague” (Camara 187). At the novel’s end Laye is left only with his vague guide—the map—which he must, both literally and symbolically, begin to decipher and use to navigate his life in France. All he feels certain of is that he will have to adapt and accommodate to French society.

Unlike Laye’s, Samba and Amadou’s fates are incredibly tragic, though for different reasons. Both of their stories end in death though, I would argue, on the most basic level, the reason for these deaths is because others could not recognize or accept the new identities of both Samba and Amadou. The latter was killed by police officers who marked him as “other” and defined him as a threat, utterly failing to recognize him as a human being with a strong connection and loyalty to New York and many shared connections. The person who killed Samba has somewhat less clear motives. But regardless of whether Samba was killed by the fool or himself, the reason is due to an inability to accept that his beliefs are no longer completely assimilated with those of the Diallobé. In Cosmopolitanism (2006), Appiah observes this
conflict between identity and acceptance while at the same time hinting toward a path of recourse. He writes:

Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations to others (or theirs to us) they often have a right to go their own way. As we’ll see there will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There’s a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge. (xv)

With that idea in mind, perhaps each of the stories suggests that negotiating a transnational perspective is neither inherently positive or negative but depends upon the circumstances in which one is compelled to perform this negotiation. At the same time, developing a transnational perspective has the potential to lead to very positive understandings of one’s connections with others. However, the failure of others to recognize and accept the identity of the immigrant, particularly Amadou and Samba, indicates the necessity of fostering increased understanding among those with different cultural, religious, national, and other backgrounds. Ultimately these stories suggest that, in an increasingly globalized world, where individuals from extremely diverse backgrounds are constantly coming into contact, there must be a balance between learning about others, considering connections, and respecting differences in order for individuals to interact productively in a transnational world.
In *My Heart Will Cross This Ocean*, Kadiatou Diallo and Craig Wolff sum up the important role that people who leave their communities to travel or migrate abroad play in shaping the worldview of those within their original community. They write:

When a young person leaves home in Guinea, he becomes the setté. He is the explorer and the envoy, carrying the family name to unseen places. In villages, towns, and cities, too, they will talk about him, imagining his triumphs and new riches. On his return, they will gauge his manner of speaking or of entering a room, the ease of his walk, perhaps a satisfaction that shows in his eyes, to determine if his travels have given him the bearing of a successful man. Beyond his conquests, they will wait for the tales he will carry back. Even the man who has not filled his pockets with gold can still be a witness. For years he can tell people what happened when he finally stepped onto strange land, what surprised or scared him, lifted or saddened him, what he has discovered for them. Amadou was the setté for his brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, and for me, who anticipated a magnificent return.” (4-5)

An individual’s experiences in a new place, where he or she will live among people who practice different cultures and lifestyles, shape the way that his or her family and home community perceive the outside world. At the same time, the values, beliefs, and practices of the community shape the individual’s perception of the outside world. As such, the relationship between an individual and his or her community forms an important basis for how each party situates their beliefs and attitudes regarding the relationship between the local and the global, tradition and
modernity, and concepts related to culture, such as authenticity, assimilation, hybridity, and homogenization.

In *The Dark Child*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*, the main characters, Laye, Samba, and Amadou each have different experiences as young men, which play major roles in the manner in which they approach their contact with the outside world later on. By being instilled with certain values and views of the world outside their communities as children, the characters are more or less likely to embrace their travels. In addition, each of the communities understands that the travels of one individual has broad implications for the entire community. By examining the communities’ reactions to the main characters’ migrations within each of the novels, it is possible to trace the communities’ perspectives regarding the relationship between the local and the global and to identify how these perspectives shape their views on the relative merits of tradition and modernity, particularly with regard to one’s difficult attempt to maintain traditional culture or allow some degree of hybridization in a transnational journey.

Whereas many scholars have studied the concepts of the local and the global, tradition and modernity, and cultural authenticity and homogenization in terms of binary oppositions, I provide a close transnational reading of *The Dark Child*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean* in order to demonstrate that these concepts cannot be broken into neat, polar categories. I argue that such concepts can be used to develop a more nuanced position regarding their interactions. Laye, Samba, and Amadou all play an important role in navigating the balance between the local and the global, the merits of upholding tradition versus the benefits of embracing various forms of modernity, and the degree to which they and their communities view globalization as a threat to their culture.
In *The Dark Child*, Camara Laye navigates the complex relationship between his local community and the outside world. Before considering specific examples, it is necessary to define the concepts of the local and the global. In the introduction of their book *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power* (2001), Thomas Callaghy, Robert Latham, and Ronald Kassimir note how, during the 1990s, scholars often positioned the local and the global into distinct polarities. The critics state: “Typically, the local is either a discrete element within that global range or simply a site or phenomenon subject to global forces that are external to it” (6). The critics observe, however, that more recent scholarship has begun to identify the true complexity of the relationship between the local and the global. What they are interested in, they say, are “the rich kernals of specific junctures joining diverse structures, actors, ideas, practices and institutions with varying ranges in a common social and political frame” (6). This complexity is exemplified in *The Dark Child* in the reactions of Laye’s family and community to his decisions to travel progressively farther from home—first to Conarky and then to France. Their reactions range from enthusiasm to reluctance and raise a variety of questions about the relationship between the local and the global. The way his community reacts is an important lens for viewing the interactions between the local and the global and the related notions of tradition, modernity, and culture because the community forms the basis for these constructions. Ulf Hannerz, who has examined the relationship between the local and the global notes this relationship:

Moreover, it is in the face-to-face, and what will turn out to be everyday, contexts that human beings usually have their first experiences. If we accept that they undergo a sort of continuous cultural construction work, whatever materials are put into place early will presumably have some influence on what can be assimilated later on. (246)
Laye’s family and community express complex feelings concerning his travels but are generally supportive about them. His father, for example, tells him, “I knew quite well eventually you would leave us. I knew it the very first time you set foot in school. I watched you studying with such eagerness, such passionate eagerness!...Yes, since that day I have known how it would be. And gradually I resigned myself to it” (Camara 182). Laye’s father initially wants him to remain local but is open to the idea of seeing him enter the global sphere. His father, like the majority of Laye’s close family members and friends are supportive of his studying outside the traditional community and view the relationship between the local and the global as somewhat fluid.

Along those lines, certain transnational scholars, such as Arjun Appadurai have cautioned against romanticizing the concept of pure tradition, arguing that there can be no such thing as purely local cultures. For example, in his article “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology,” (1991) Appadurai states: “Once again, we need to be careful not to suppose that as we work backward in these imagined lives, we will hit some local, cultural bedrock, constituted of a closed set of reproductive practices, untouched by rumors of the world at large” (60). Appadurai’s argument suggests that there cannot necessarily be anything that can be defined as strictly local and that there has always been some degree of interaction between societies. Appadurai’s thesis finds resonance in Laye’s community which is made up of various cultural and religious forces. Even before they are faced with the prospect of their child’s travels, the members of his Laye’s community have always incorporated ideas of an external origin into their own. For example, although they are practicing Muslims and their children attend a Koranic school, the community members also practice forms of traditional religion, such as their belief in totems and their use of potions for various protective properties. As they
recognize themselves as a community made up of various local and global interactions, the members view Laye’s travels as a continuation of their interactions with the outside world and process of navigation. Therefore, Laye’s community regards his opportunity to study in France positively as an opportunity for both his community and him to grow. They realize Laye’s journey will have implications for them. As Hannerz notes, it may not be “entirely predictable or entirely unpredictable who will turn out to set meanings acquired from afar in local circulation” (248). As such, Laye plays the role of the “setté” which is referenced in the quotation at the opening of this chapter, since he will be the person through which his community will come into closer contact with the global world.

Yet not everyone is happy about Laye’s travel abroad. For instance, Laye’s mother has feelings about his travels which counter the enthusiasm of other characters in The Dark Child. She views the relationship between the local and the global as one of resistance. When Laye tells her about his decision to leave, she lashes out against him and the Western school officials. She laments: “What are they thinking about at the school? Do they imagine I’m going to live my whole life apart from my son? Die with him far away? Have they no mothers, those people? They can’t have. They wouldn’t have gone so far away from home if they had” (Camara 184). She feels that the family is the most basic unit of the local and that the preservation of a close-knit family structure is incredibly important. She believes that the school officials must have fundamentally different values that lead them to be devoid of feeling for their own family ties or anyone else’s in order to encourage a young man to leave his mother—a value she does not want to permeate her local sphere. In his essay “The Global in the Local,” (1996) Arif Dirlik writes: “The local is valuable as a site of resistance to the global” (38). Laye’s mother feels that by preserving the basic elements of the local—notably the family structure—she can resist the
outside imposition. Unlike many members of the community, her basic desire is for the two worlds to remain separate in fundamental ways.

Examining the reasons for the majority of Laye’s community members’ embrace of his transnational journey, however, raises some problematic issues about the formation of their attitudes regarding their relationship with the outside world. For example, during Laye’s sendoff, several Griots [traditional poets, historians, and storytellers] sing to him: “Verily thou art as wise as the White Man. In Conakry thou shalt take thy place even among the most illustrious” (Camara 143). Their statement that Laye is as “wise as the White Man” is a troubling illustration of the way that colonizers spread the idea of white superiority—in this case intellectual superiority—and how that idea was sometimes accepted and perpetuated during the colonial era. By accepting the notion that being like the white man is a noble goal to achieve, Laye’s community is, to some degree, participating in the subversion of its traditional values. Néstor García Canclini alludes to this phenomenon when he writes: “The survival of popular culture is often attributed to simple resistance based on tradition. A more nuanced understanding of the process by which popular culture negotiates its position leads to a more decentered and complex vision of how hegemony is allied to subalternity in the practices of power” (343). So while the community is largely supportive of Laye’s travels, a part of its motivations stems from the colonizers’ hegemonic practices which have led the Africans to accept the notion that adopting certain Western modes will enhance their society. The hegemonic practices influence Laye’s society to believe that its local way of life is not as good as the collective “white man’s,” and to hope that having one of their members who has experienced the outside world can bring something back to them.
Hannerz, like other scholars, has noted how the local is often overly romanticized, and asserts that “the global sometimes has to be brought down to earth, the local has to be brought up to the surface, to be demystified” (247). While it is sometimes the case that authors and critics place an over-emphasis on the possibility of finding the purely local, there are also instances, such as that of Laye’s community, where societies themselves place the idea of the global in a somewhat superior position. For example, Laye notes multiple times throughout the novel that the careers that are only obtainable through study in the outside world are more highly regarded than those, such as laborers and harvesters, which can be gained only within the local sphere even though those jobs are necessary for the sustenance of life, and therefore, essential (153). The community’s perspective on the relationship between the local and the global is extremely complex because, despite certain instances of evident hegemonic influence in the formation of its attitudes, there are other indications that the society’s members can quite clearly see how they can benefit from certain physical comforts that contact with the global could provide them. While they are satisfied with many aspects of their local life—such as their abundant food, reverence for certain individuals, and respect for certain proud and fascinating trades such as that of a goldsmith—they still desire to improve their situation where possible, primarily in a material sense. As such, those characters in *The Dark Child* who embrace Laye’s travels are also those who are comfortable with an intermediary position between preserving tradition and embracing modernity. As Kwame Gyekye notes, in scholarship about African cultures, tradition and modernity are often discussed as polar opposites. He notes:

The polarity derives from a different sense given to the notion of the traditional—depicted by sociologists and anthropologists as agrarian, prescientific, resistant to change and innovation, and bound by the perception of its past. By contrast the modern is
defined as scientific, innovative, future oriented, culturally dynamic and industrial and urbanized. (217)

Gyekye goes on to challenge the notion of tradition and modernity as polar opposites. One can further challenge this binary by closely examining the manner in which the characters in The Dark Child approach various aspects of tradition and modernity in ways that reveal a much more complex picture of the interaction of the two concepts. Much of the novel is focused on the customs and traditions of Laye’s family and community. The customs of harvesting, sharing meals, giving gifts, and the rituals surrounding circumcision all play a prominent role in the novel. By focusing on these aspects of his young life, Laye makes it clear how important certain traditions are in his community. At the same time, many of the characters in the novel embrace participation in certain aspects of modernity. For example, when Laye is initially discouraged with his studies in Conakry, his uncle encourages him to continue and stresses the value of a technical education. Laye’s uncle says: “A technician is not necessarily a manual laborer. And, anyhow, there’s more he can do. He’s a man who directs others and knows how things should be done. He can turn his hand to anything should the need arise” (Camara 154). Here, Laye’s uncle insists that having technical knowledge and versatility will be an asset for his nephew, implying that the child will be able to participate in modernity and bring certain aspects of modernity to his community. Illustrating the local sphere’s reliance on the global sphere, Dirlik argues that the local is a valuable site of resistance “only to the extent that it also serves as the site of negotiation to abolish inequality and oppression inherited from the past, which is a condition of any promise it may have for the future” (38). Individuals members, such as Laye’s mother, who resist contact with the global world are certainly not attempting to perpetuate any inequalities of the past, but instead are attached to the preservation of traditional values. Laye and other
members of his community, however, view his travels as a mode to participate in certain aspects of modernity, and in a sense, abolish inequality and level the playing field between their colonizers and themselves by obtaining the skills to take greater control of their own livelihoods and become more prosperous.

Like his uncle, other members of Laye’s family and community do not necessarily view tradition and modernity in opposition to one another but rather regard them as two entities which coexist and influence each other. This philosophy is consistent with the ideology that Gyekye describes as follows:

It may be said from the point of view of a deep and fundamental conception of tradition, every society in our modern world is ‘traditional’ inasmuch as it maintains and cherishes values, practices, outlooks, and institutions bequeathed to it by previous generations and all or much of which on normative grounds it takes pride in, boasts of, and builds on. The truth of the assertion that every society in the modern world inherits ancestral cultural values implies that modernity is not always a rejection of the past. (217)

Along those lines, many community members do not view embracing certain benefits of modernity as a rejection of their traditional and cultural heritage but instead feel that the two parts can be linked. For example, when making the final decision that he will allow his son to travel to France, Laye’s father says: “This opportunity is within your reach. You must seize it. You’ve already seized one, seize this one too, make sure of it. There are still so many things to be done in our land…Yes, I want you to go to France. I want that now, just as much as you do. Soon we’ll be needing men like you here…May you not be gone too long!” (182). In this sense, Laye’s father welcomes the opportunity to have certain modern amenities and technologies although his traditional way of life is sustainable and comfortable. Yet such ease with one’s
way of life should not lead critics to romanticize cultural autonomy. Paul Jay argues that at times the degree of interest some scholars pay to the idea of preserving tradition comes not from local societies, but the West. He states:

With respect for cultural autonomy, no matter where we come from or what our cultural roots, we also need to guard against insisting that whole regions of the world, and their sometimes impoverished populations, must preserve their traditional economic and cultural characters and resist accommodation with a global economy and the cultural changes it brings simply because we in the West enjoy their traditional economic practices or what their way of dressing, eating, or making music represent. (49)

*The Dark Child* provides a counterpoint to hegemonic essentializing of traditions. While the enthusiasm of the community’s reaction to Laye studying abroad is the result of hegemonic practices, the statements of Laye’s uncle and father illustrate that they recognize certain benefits of modernity and would like to share them. While it wants to improve its material conditions, Laye’s community is not in a dire situation since it enjoys a great abundance of food and other basic life necessities. Most of the members of the community desire a balance between the two and do not feel that entering into the global sphere and embracing certain aspects of modernity is a threat to the preservation of their traditions.

Another example in which Laye attempts to create a balance between tradition and modernity is in his discussion of his friend Check’s illness. In this instance, Laye bridges the opposition between traditional and modern medicine by representing both healing practices as equally important. Check becomes seriously ill and his mother initially consults a traditional medicine man. When his condition continues to decline after repeated efforts by the traditional medicine man, Check goes to a hospital where a Western doctor attempts to treat him. While
thinking back about the experience, Laye writes: “I don’t know whether Check had any real confidence in the medicine men. Probably not. By now we had spent too many years in school to have real faith. Yet our medicine men are not mere charlatans. Many of them have great knowledge and can effect real cures” (176). Although Laye expresses a certain degree of doubt in the abilities of the traditional medicine when compared with “modern” Western medicine, he is not dismissive of traditional medicine. As he points out, the medicine men are knowledgeable and successful in many cases (176). It is implicit in his statement that both traditional and Western medicines have value and legitimacy and that each has something to learn from the other. Ultimately, neither doctor is able to save Check, and therefore, the limitations of each medical practice become evident. Through Check’s death, Laye suggests that there does not have to be a choice between the tradition and modernity.

Laye’s point of view about healing methods participates in conversations about medical practices. First, his recognition of the value of some forms of traditional medicine is consistent with new research that suggests that there are many forms of Eastern medicine that are proven to be extremely effective, despite the fact that Western medicine is most often credited with having a strong scientific basis. Many researchers are beginning to study and draw from Eastern medicine, and traditional medicine (which is often referred to as alternative or homeopathic medicine) is gaining more attention and widespread usage. Sixty years after Laye showed that traditional medicine is important, scholars now give serious attention to this healing practice. In his book Disease and Medicine in World History (2003), Sheldon Watts notes: “The orthodox biomedical press tells us that 20 percent or more of the population in Britain—including educated, middle-class persons—currently make some use of alternative medicine. In the US the figure is said to reach 40 percent” (138). Yet, while it demonstrates how Eastern medicine is
gaining more popular usage, Watt’s argument points to a discrepancy in access to medical choices. Whereas many people in the West can pick and choose between Eastern and Western medicine, those outside the West often do not have the same access. Watts addresses this inequality when he notes the “huge disparity in the health status of different human groupings in the world today” (1). Therefore, the real issue about health is not that individuals prefer modern medicine over traditional medicine but that they usually have no access to these healing practices.

As noted, Laye’s community is somewhat interested in incorporating certain aspects of modernity into its own traditional systems. But this community is also interested in learning the social and cultural aspects of Western life and is not opposed to incorporating some of those ideas into its local sphere. Even Laye’s mother, who strongly opposes his relationship with the global world, does not mind compromising certain traditional and cultural forms and embracing a degree of hybridity as long as the traditions she considers fundamental stay in place. The relationships between tradition and culture are close and many scholars have theorized them. Gyekye, who poses the question, “Is tradition distinguishable from culture?” offers a particularly useful interpretation of these connections (218). He provides a basic definition of tradition as “anything that has endured through generations” and notes that cultural values which persist over time can be considered traditions (219). At the same time, Gyekye argues that each generation determines the aspects of their cultural traditions that they will reject or preserve. He says that it is “this critical reinterpretation and reevaluation that will also lead to the euphoric affirmation of the abiding worth of what can truly be acknowledged as positive features of the values of a cultural tradition” (Gyekye 263). Along those lines, although Laye’s mother is unwilling to
compromise certain aspects of tradition, she does not mind altering a few customs. Laye discusses how his mother alters his hut in an attempt to keep him close to home. He writes:

Each time I went home for my vacation I found my hut newly plastered with white clay.

My mother could hardly wait to show me the improvements she had made from year to year. Originally it had been like the other huts, but gradually it began to acquire a European look. I say ‘began to,’ for the resemblance was never exact. Yet I was keenly aware of the changes, not only because they made the hut more comfortable, but even more because they were tangible proof of how much my mother loved me. (Camara 169).

Laye’s mother continuously adds European features to his traditional hut because she hopes that westernizing her son’s space at home will influence him to remain in his village rather than travel farther away to Europe. She has no issue with altering physical culture in order to preserve a traditional value that she holds dear—that of the family structure. Since she views the hut as a physical matter, rather than an object that has spiritual or emotional significance, Laye’s mother is willing to compromise her views about tradition by altering the dwelling. The story of the hut is a compelling example of the way that culture is related to power, which is a connection that Dirlik describes as follows: “The local, however, also indicates fragmentation, and given the issues of power involved, political and cultural manipulation as well” (28). Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc (1994) echo this relationship by saying: “Bounded concepts of culture, whether signaled by the rubric of tribe, ethnic group, race, or nation, are social constructions. They are reflective not of the stable boundaries of cultural difference but of relations of culture and power” (267).

A similar example of the relationships between culture and power is apparent in the way in which Laye’s mother views his studies abroad as a Western exertion of strength. By being
willing to alter certain traditional and cultural aspects, she is attempting to seize some of the power of the colonizers in order to achieve what she wants the most, which is for her son to remain at home in Guinea. She is willing to transform physical culture, something she deems less important than other types of tradition, such as a close family structure. She is willing to compromise certain aspects of tradition to gain power in ways that are more important to her.

Consequently, Laye enjoys the comforts of his hut and views his mother’s efforts to please him as “tangible proof of how much my mother loved me” (170). However, while he appreciates “her modest imitations of European comforts,” Laye does not believe that an imitation, no matter how well intentioned, of European aesthetics is enough to keep him from bridging the gap between simulation and reality by experiencing Europe for himself when the opportunity presents itself (170). His mother is later heartbroken to find out that her compromises are not enough to keep Laye at home. When she realizes that there is nothing she can do to make her son stay at home, she feels powerless and defeated. At this point, she is willing to assimilate and wishes for her family to accept Laye’s transnational experience.

_Ambiguous Adventure_ is consistent with _The Dark Child_, because it is also a book in which attitudes of the members of Samba’s community towards their son’s travel abroad are similar with those of Laye’s community towards his transnational journey. The two communities have similar feelings about travel although their desire to keep their society isolated from the outside world stems from different reasons. In each case, they feel that contact with West, which is a term that Hannerz defines as “what has been local somewhere else,” will threaten certain core values of a society (247). It is the imposing nature of the West, as a faction of the global, that makes contact with the global seem threatening. The threat would not be as great and the reactions to them would be different if Africans were to come into contact with the global
without fearing to lose all their ties with their local communities. In Samba’s case, it is not so much the family structure as the religious beliefs and practices that his community fears to lose. They only view allowing one of their own to live outside of the local arena as a last resort when their entire livelihoods are at stake, as Samba’s father suggests in the following statement:

We have nothing left—thanks to them—and it is thus that they hold us. He who wants to remain himself, must compromise. The woodcutters and the metal-workers are triumphant everywhere in the world, and their iron holds us under their law. If it were still only a matter of ourselves, of the conservation of our substance, the problem would have been less complicated: not being able to conquer them, we should have chosen to be wiped out rather than to yield. But we are among the last men on earth to possess God as He veritably is in His Oneness…How are we to save him? When the hand is feeble, the spirit runs great risks, for it is by the hand that the spirit is defended. (9-10)

This passage shows that Samba’s community is willing to allow only a limited degree of contact between the local and the global by sending Samba to France, since they hope that this travel would help them preserve their physical beings and their beliefs. Unlike a few of the leaders in Laye’s community, those in Samba’s community reject the idea of the superiority of Western education. They believe that they possess within their local community true knowledge of the relationship between man and nature and only consider Western education as a last option to preserve their lives so they may continue to worship God. They privilege the local over the global, and as far as their beliefs and traditions are concerned, wish to keep them separate. Perhaps they would be more open to the idea of a greater degree of contact between the tradition and modernity if they felt that the West would respect their beliefs and not attempt to replace
them with new ones. As their chief sums it up in the following statement, the Diallobé understand that contact with the West will have serious consequences on their society:

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

This quotation forms the basis of the novel. The community fears that it cannot have material comfort and preserve its spiritual beliefs in its present form. Yet it must decide whether to allow the global (the West) to influence the local (the Diallobé society). Faced with this excruciating dilemma, the leaders of Samba’s community realize that they would like to experience enough of the material benefits of modernity to survive, even if they widely reject outside groups impeding upon their cultural traditions, religion, and language. As Kane notes, “the people of the Diallobé were each day a little more anxious about the stability of their dwellings, the unhealthy state of their bodies. The Diallobé wanted more substance…” (29). The Diallobé people are concerned about the physical sustainability of their community, and as such, would like have access to modern medicine and infrastructure. In this manner, modernity is a means of preserving tradition. Along those lines, Canclini notes: “Instead of the death of traditional cultural forms, we now discover that tradition is in transition, and articulated to modern processes. Reconversion prolongs their existence” (342). Samba’s family members realize that compromising certain traditional values and institutions will allow them to prolong others. They want Samba to stay at the Koranic school. But they recognize that by sending him to the Western
school to gain the technical knowledge that they need to survive physically, they are preserving and prolonging their religious traditions which they value above anything else.

However, unlike Laye and his family, who, for the most part, view his studies as a means of acquiring new information while preserving what he has learned before he left for France, Samba’s community views the conflict between tradition and modernity as a struggle in which the existence of one could lead to the end of the other. The following statement by Samba’s cousin, The Most Royal Lady, echoes this sentiment:

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. What I am proposing is that we should agree to die in our children’s hearts and the foreigners who have defeated us should fill the place wholly, which we shall have left free. (42)

The Most Royal Lady, like the rest of the community, would prefer to be allowed to live in a completely localized fashion. Their physical needs and the means through which they must obtain the knowledge to sustain themselves, however, prevents them from doing so. Unlike Laye’s community, which has no problem with compromising certain aspects of tradition and culture in order to preserve others, and in some cases embrace global contact, Samba’s community is extremely hesitant to assimilate into any aspect of European culture. While they don’t presume that there can be no negotiation, selections, valuing, and inclusions between cultures, as is indicated by their belief that Samba, the most devout student, is best suited to resist the threat of indoctrination, the Diallobé view the threat of assimilation to be extreme and fatal if all their children become exposed to Western education.
The Diallobé’s fear of Western education reflects their apprehension towards cultural homogenization. This concern is evidenced as Samba’s father reflects upon the decision to send his son to the European school and considers the implications that increased contact with the outside world will have on his local individuality. He contemplates: “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” (63). Here, Kane warns against cultural homogenization by wondering whether one can preserve tradition and be transnational at the same time. He cautions readers against permitting a large-scale hybridity, since passively embracing external values may lead one to lose one’s culture, unique individuality, and local cultural traditions. Paul Jay notes this predicament by stating: “Economic development is tied to investment in a global economy, but that economy also brings with it a potentially homogenizing, westernizing set of cultural forces that threaten both the economic and cultural autonomy of the nation-state” (48). This dilemma is precisely what Samba’s father fears—that the Diallobé will not be able to partake in the economic benefits of modernity without being forced to accept particular practices or patterns that conflict with their traditional and cultural systems. Various scholars have shown how globalization creates serious issues around cultural autonomy. For example, John Tomlinson (1995) criticizes those who assert that the main threat of homogenization is sameness, and instead argues that the real problem “is the shift in the locus of control of cultural patterns from a local to a ‘decentered’ global space. It is in this process—a function of ‘capitalist modernity’ rather than simply of the capitalist market—that the threat to cultural autonomy lies…” (896). Laye’s community values cultural and religious autonomy. But
it recognizes that at present, despite the historical presence of colonizers, its members still possess control of their own belief systems. What the Diallobé fear is not sameness, but losing control of being the own producers of their cultural and spiritual traditions.

Another scholar, Khachig Tölöyen (1991) proposes a view of globalization which envisions localities as heterogenous sites of negotiation of cultures. He suggests that in a globalized, transnational world, “This vision of a homogeneous nation is now being replaced by a vision of the world as a ‘space’ continually reshaped by forces—cultural, political, technological, demographic, and above all economic—whose varying intersections in real estate constitute every ‘place’ as a heterogeneous and disequilibrated site of production, appropriation, and consumption, of negotiated identity and affect” (234). Although Kane fears homogenization, he does not caution against interaction with outside groups even if he warns against allowing oneself to be “encompassed.” Like Tölöyen, Kane views the local as a site of negotiation where the threat of cultural homogenization ought to be moderate. Even if they seem to view Western education as an evil from which they should be isolated, Samba’s community is open to the exchange of ideas.

Whereas Samba’s community overwhelmingly believes that allowing their local sphere to come into increased contact with the global would lead to a decline of their traditional culture, Amadou’s society does not consider Western influence as a detriment. In My Heart Will Cross this Ocean, Amadou and those around him embrace transnationality and certain forms of hybridity as positive attributes. There are various factors that lead to the different ways in which My Heart Will Cross this Ocean represent Western influence in positive ways. By the time Amadou left for America in 1996, the situation in much of West Africa had changed from what it was in the 1950s when Kane and Camara wrote their novels. By the 1950s and 60s colonization
ended in most African countries. Yet certain effects of the system still lingered and remained in other forms of dominance. One of these forms was the limited resources that later compelled many Africans to emigrate abroad, especially to the United States where they were expected to assimilate to American culture. In “Globalization and Culture: Three Paradigms,” Jan Nederveen Pieterse observes: “If colonialism delivered Europeanization, neocolonialism, under US hegemony delivers Americanization” (313). As the following discussion suggests, the attitudes of the generations of Kadiatou and Amadou towards the United States dismantle the representation of the West as a hegemony that always oppresses African immigrants. Unlike their predecessors, Kadiatou’s and Amadou’s generations were very, and many times, more comfortable with embracing the West and interacting with the global world and often found ways to navigate questions related to tradition, modernity, and culture. Diallo and Wolff note how earlier generations of Kadiatou and Amadou’s family who grew up during the same time as Laye and Samba’s parents did, placed a higher value on keeping certain aspects of their local communities separate from the West (11). Throughout the memoir, the authors demonstrate an interesting evolution in attitudes toward Western education and migration over the course of several generations and suggest possible reasons for the shifts in attitudes towards the global world. Early in the book, Diallo and Wolff describe how, during the 1930s, the generation of Kadiatou’s grandparents reacted to the French colonial order that each family send one of their boys to the French school. At that time, Kadiatou’s grandparents were particularly troubled by the idea of Western education, partly because it was not a choice, but rather, a system of cultural assimilation that was imposed upon them. Diallo and Wolff write:

Great imagination swept through Guinea in this time. The other families in Diontou noticed my father’s long absences and whispered that the French had stolen him in the
middle of the night. The women in the village visited with my grandmother and told her a plot was afoot to control their minds. The kidnapping of her Amadou was just the beginning. The French knew that the children were the wealth of the families…It was one thing for the French to hold sway over the banks and far-off houses of government in the big cities, but the men’s voices took on great dread when they talked about their traditions, their language, their children. These, the men said, were beyond trespass. (10-11).

Kadiatou’s framing of this passage speaks both to how deeply the fears about the French education ran through her grandparents’ community, but also how she views those fears from her position in the present. Despite the fear of the community, Kadiatou’s grandparents decided to send her father, also named Amadou and “the one with the sober eyes,” to the French school because “perhaps, my grandfather believed it was not a bad idea for just one of them to know what was happening in the school, to see life in another village” (12). Her grandparents viewed the outcome of Western study as a major threat to their autonomy, one which has the potential for weakening, wiping out, or replacing their religion, culture, and language. Like Samba’s parents and Laye’s mother, Kadiatou’s grandparents view the local as Dirlik depicts it—a site of resistance (35). Although their community desired to maintain a separation between the local and the global in order to preserve those traditions, Kadiatou’s grandparents, especially her grandfather, also saw a certain value in attempting to understand what was being taught in the Western school, and therefore saw a degree of contact as permissible in order to gain that insight.

Having grown up surrounded by traditional Guinean culture, food, religion, and family structure, Kadiatou realizes that the worst case scenario—that in which their traditions are completely wiped out—has not taken place to the extent it was feared. In fact, her father does
not resent his own experience of studying at the European school, and instead wants his children to continue in the same educational tradition. He says to his daughter Kadiatou: “This is a different time for girls. You have school ahead of you and a modern way. That’s what I want for you, like my father did for me” (54). Kadiatou grows up in a world where she is aware of Western influences, at school and elsewhere, alongside her own traditional culture and is able to distinguish between them. Kadiatou’s ability to select values from multiple cultures allows her to enter the global world and be a member of the transnational community that opposes binaries. As Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih note in the introduction to their book *Minor Transnationalism*:

> What is lacking in the binary model of above-and-below, the utopic and the dystopic, and the global and the local, is an awareness of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national borders. All too often, the emphasis on the major-resistant mode of cultural practices denies the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples. (7)

What Lionnet and Shih suggest here is relevant to the evolution in thought throughout generations of the Diallo family and mirrors the evolution of theoretical development on the subject. Without dismissing the major resistant perspective through which previous generations of Kadiatou’s family viewed contact with the outside world, Kadiatou and Amadou have been able to utilize their agency to negotiate cultural and traditional forms and practices while taking part in certain aspects of modernity. Therefore, throughout *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*, there is a conflict between tradition and modernity and some indications of a resolution of tensions within Kadiatou and Amadou’s family and community. Their experience in Guinea is one in which they are largely immersed in traditional culture but have a clear awareness of
Western influences and artifacts. As they begin to travel around Africa and Asia, Kadiatou and Amadou see examples of more evident cultural hybridity in the world.

When discussing cultural hybridity, critics are referring to a blending of cultures, or as Nederveen Pieterse synthesizes in “Globalization as Hybridization,” to points of “transcultural convergences” (331). Nederveen Pieterse explains: “Cultural forms are called hybrid/syncretic/mixed/creolized because the elements in the mix derive from different cultural contexts” (332). When describing her experience living in Monrovia with her children, Diallo says, “America was everywhere, from the currency to the racks of Newsweek and Cosmopolitan sold at the cafes to the street names, and the people indulged without self-reproach, at least while I was there” (148). In “Globalization and Culture: Three Paradigms,” Nederveen Pieterse links this type of Americanization and consumption with others term such as globalization and McDonaldization, which he describes as a variation “on the classical theme of universalism and its modern forms of modernization and the global spread of capitalist relations,” and their relationship to “cultural imperialism, in the form of consumerist universalism or global media influence” (313). Nederveen Pieterse raises some important concerns regarding the way that Americanization spreads values of consumption and allows large corporations to profit, often at the expense of individual economics and culture, from the impoverishment of others. Diallo’s description of the manner in which people “indulged without self-reproach,” however, complicates these notions. The conflicts between economic exploitation and economic freedom, cultural hegemony, and cultural hybridity raise important questions about individual choice and freedoms that do not have simple answers.

By the time Amadou leaves for America forty years later in the 1990s, attitudes have shifted significantly from those that were prevalent in his grandparents’ generation. While there
still is hesitation and controversy associated with young adults leaving Guinea, much of comes from the frustration of the youth and adults about the lack of feasible career opportunities and political stability at home. In her essay entitled “What, Then, is the African American? African and Afro-Caribbean identities in Black America,” (2008) Violet M. Showers Johnson notes: “In Africa economic globalization and internal corruption and mismanagement triggered economic crises that prompted mass emigration. Military coups, civil wars, and repressive one-party governments weakened economies further and, in some cases, led to a temporary total collapse of the state” (81-82). Amadou’s case is not as dire as those of other Africans described above, since his immigration to the United States is primarily motivated by a voluntary search for more job opportunities and the chance to branch out independently into the global world. Yet tragedies such as civil wars and persecutions remain part of the occurrences that usually lead many Africans to emigrate to the United States. Yet, due to the increased occurrence of immigration, the desire to keep the local and the global separate (that used to be common among the elders) has weakened among members of Amadou’s generation. In fact, to some degree, migration—viewed as a threat by the generation of Kadiatou’s grandparents—has become a certain intrigue among Amadou and his peers despite the unfortunate reasons that make immigration appear as a more desirable option than staying in a local space. In this vein, Diallo and Wolff note the trend of young Guinean men branching farther and farther from their hometowns in search of opportunity. They write:

The children of the villages came to the towns. The town’s children moved to the city. And then they looked for ways off the continent. Amadou was not alone. Hundreds of young men in the early part of the 1990s left for America. They were the modern
settlers. Their families waited for them to return with stories and riches, and some did. Others came back defeated, or they didn’t come back at all. (202)

Despite the dissatisfaction that their communities somewhat feel about the travels of young people to new countries for opportunity, the young generations are proud and willing to search for jobs wherever they may be. Many adult Guineans approached their travels with less fear than the previous generations had. The fears of Kadiatou’s grandparents, like those of Samba’s community were valid and did materialize in many ways. But the fact that such trepidations did not always materialize to the extent they were anticipated shows that many Africans found ways to harmoniously navigate their new transnational experiences. Therefore transnational experiences that early generations had been able to witness later influenced future generations that also perceived the prospect of studying and traveling outside of their local spheres as important experiences.

In addition, many Guineans were already having transnational experiences through various forms of media and contact with individuals who were from elsewhere or from their own communities or who had traveled and desired to branch out and experience new parts of the globe firsthand. The reason for this difference between generations is, according to some scholars, the acceleration of globalization. Jay, for example, argues that “with the invention and growing sophistication of shipping, railways, motor, and air transport, the time it takes to move across space and time has continually shrunk, accelerating the collapse of boundaries and borders and facilitating economic and cultural globalization” (37). Laye and Samba lived in an era where many of these technologies either existed or were being developed. By Amadou’s generation, the acceleration that Jay notes increased to the point where, “These developments have accelerated with the proliferation of electronic forms of communication, which allows for
nearly instantaneous contact and for commercial transactions that cover the globe while virtually ignoring these nation-state boundaries” (37). Amadou grew up in a world in which instant contact with the global world was available in a variety of forms. He, like other members of his generation, was able to instantaneously connect with those people living in other parts of the globe, and experience the culture and lifestyles of those populations living elsewhere in the world. Incorporating the music, media, clothing, food, and other cultural forms of those from elsewhere in the world, led many Guineans, like Amadou, to develop a curiosity to experience those other cultures firsthand.

Another reason, perhaps, that Amadou is more accepting of the mingling of the local and global is the fact that he travels to America, rather than to France like Laye and Samba, and the relationships between France, Guinea, and Senegal are different from those between the two countries and America. Unlike America, which colonized Native Americans and enslaved Africans, France colonized generations of Africans including the grandparents and parents of Amadou, Laye, and Samba. Since America is therefore more connected to the past than the modern colonial history of Africans, immigrants from Africa tend to see the country in unique ways. Johnson addresses this topic by saying that the different historical pasts between American-born blacks and immigrants lead to different perceptions of race and racism (78). Amadou was well aware of America’s history of slavery and racial injustice, as evidenced by his extensive reading on civil rights leaders. While he was aware of this racism, he, like his mother, did not feel a direct connection to that particular history. As Diallo notes: “The anger expressed by people at rallies for Amadou was built on a history that I did not have and could not know, no more than they could know the specific terror of hiding in a pit, thinking that soldiers with guns and machetes were on their way. But the distinctions in our suffering were based more on fate
than anything else” (247). Amadou and Kadiatou are aware that they did not have a direct linkage to this particular history “through nothing but a slight accident in geography” (247). Moreover, they do not feel a strong personal historical connection to America. Also, Amadou does not have the same type of fears traveling to America that Laye and Samba have about traveling to France. Whereas Laye and Samba expect a large degree of racial division, Amadou anticipates, for the most part, to be accepted and earn success. Johnson observes that, “convinced of their ability to tap into the social and cultural capital that they bring, black immigrants have relished their ability to ‘make it’ in America, the "land of unlimited opportunities." (87). While Amadou is aware that racism is alive in certain forms, he does not seriously consider the type of deadly encounter which he later faces as a real possibility. Diallo notes the tragic irony in the fact that Amadou once told his roommate after being warned of racial profiling that “he trusted the police, that they were not like the border guards and the police in West Africa” (211). To some extent, this perspective of a transnational individual growing up surrounded by people who embrace the interaction of the local and the global, tradition and modernity, and practice various forms of cultural hybridity, leads him to believe that he will gain the same form of acceptance that he exudes. Tragically, Amadou finds himself in a situation where his cosmopolitanism is not reciprocated.

In conclusion, the transnational concepts of the local and global, tradition and modernity, and cultural authenticity and cultural homogenization are often discussed in opposition, but as a close examination of the three works of literature reveals, the distinctions between each of these supposedly polar concepts are not as rigid as they seem. As Hannerz notes, “Perhaps the main point in all of this is that the arrangements of personal interconnectedness between the local and the global are getting increasingly opaque. So many kinds of kinship, friendship, collegiality,
business, pursuits of pleasure, or struggles for security now engage people in transnational contacts that we can never be sure in which habitats of meaning these can turn up, and have a peripheral or central part” (248). Each of the three texts provides an example of the blurred distinctions between the local and the global worlds. Regardless of the attitudes of the individuals from different communities, each story illustrates that there is a large degree of overlap between the local and the global. Furthermore, each person and community wishes to preserve their own local culture and traditions, even if they vary on the extent to which they wish to embrace certain aspects of modernity or other cultures. Exploring these literary texts in conjunction shows that the local and global worlds cannot be considered as separate and examined in simple and polar ways. When considering their complexity, the concepts cannot be applied in a broad and sweeping ways over experiences that appear to be similar on the surface, but may be quite different from each other. Instead, the unique circumstances and situation of each individual and his community provides ground for nuanced meanings and applications of the important concepts of the local, the global, tradition, modernity, and culture.
Conclusion

As the world continues to become increasingly connected and new forms of technology and media appear on rapid basis, communication and travel have become much faster and more accessible, and people across the globe are linked in unprecedented ways. As a result, global economic markets, politics, and social phenomena join individuals from around the globe in complex networks. The nation, which has long served as the basic unit of measure or comparison when considering social and economic trends, patterns, and relationships necessarily comes up short when so many occurrences that fall under these categories blur, transcend, or disregard national borders. One area in which the nation is still often referred to as the primary grounds for comparison and study is in the field of literary studies. Very often, classes are formed around the literature of a particular nationality and draw connections from within the confines of that nation. This mode of viewing literature leaves many important themes unexplored in classic works of literature and also leaves many important and valuable works of literature, including, *The Dark Child, Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean*, largely unknown and understudied. Considering works of literature from a transnational perspective reveals new layers of insight and complicates the seemingly strict distinctions between national, cultural, social, economic, and political trends, and instead, considers the flows, patterns, and connections between them.

Although the pace of globalization has become much more rapid in recent years, it is not a new phenomena, and therefore, transnational theory is useful not just for works of literature written in recent years, but can be applied to many works of literature from the past several centuries. In addition, the application of transnational theory is not limited to works of colonial
or postcolonial literature, although they are often fruitful grounds for transnational concepts, but can be applied to a vast variety of literature written by individuals from anywhere in the world and those from a vast variety of backgrounds. Wherever there are interactions between individuals or groups and conflicts or collapses of time and space, transnational theory can provide a heightened understanding of the factors at work. Transnational theory can open up a broader understanding of identity formation, of relationships between individuals and groups, and of global processes, and as such, is a valuable theoretical framework that ought to be utilized to a greater degree in literary studies alongside other critical perspectives.

It is possible to consider transnational trends, patterns, and relationships from various levels of consideration—from the individual to the local to the global. The texts *The Dark Child*, *Ambiguous Adventure*, and *My Heart Will Cross this Ocean* lend themselves well to a transnational investigation at all the levels of analysis, from the micro to the macro. When considering issues of individual identity, examining these novels from a transnational perspective reveals interesting insights into the formation of a transnational identity. The parallels between certain events in these literary works reveal that developing a transnational perspective can occur in similar stages, but at the same time, the unique experiences of each of the main characters demonstrate the ways in which the process can vary considerably, both in terms of the process by which the character forms his transnational identity and the manner in which he reacts to his changed identity. In each case, the main characters are initially immersed in their local community, and their experiences within their local realm form the basis of their identities. As children, they all envision themselves—past, present, and future—almost solely within the confines of their locale, and they do not give serious consideration to their relationship with the outside world. Through interactions with local community members who have traveled outside
the community, contact with individuals or ideas which originated elsewhere, or exposure to
other forms of contact with the world beyond their communities, each of the main characters
begins the process of unmooring his identity from his local sphere by considering himself, at first
only through imagination, in a life outside his community.

Whereas this ignites curiosity and a desire for travel for Amadou, and to some degree for
Laye, for Samba, this is an incredibly painful and unwanted process. As the characters
physically travel to new places, their shift in consciousness and self perception continues. For
Laye, his travels result in a split consciousness, in which he perceives his identity in terms of his
former self in Guinea and his present self in France and must grapple with the relationship
between the two. This shift in consciousness makes him nostalgic for past experiences that he
knows he can never fully regain. Samba, on the other hand, perceives himself as a hybrid, which
he views in a negative manner—one in which he does not maintain his former identity, beliefs,
and values, but instead, becomes part “stranger”—which leaves him feeling ashamed. Amadou
is a transnational individual prior to his travels, and therefore, he views incorporating his new
experiences into his identity as a positive addition. Studied in conjunction, Laye, Samba, and
Amadou’s experiences reveal general patterns for identity formation and the shift to a
transnational identity. At the same time, their stories also reveal that the process cannot be
boiled down to a simple formula, but instead, is affected by one’s values, worldview, and
perception of the outside world—factors which are shaped to a large degree by one’s historical
moment, family, and community.

The main characters’ identity transformations do not occur in isolation, and instead, the
relationship between the character and his community provides a strong basis for how he
approaches, perceives, and reacts to his transnational experiences. Likewise, the individual plays
an important role in shaping the way in which the community perceives the outside world. As such, the community is an important point of navigation between the individual and the global.

The concepts of tradition and modernity, and within that, debates about cultural authenticity and cultural homogenization are often linked to discussions of the local and the global. Whereas these concepts are often discussed in polarities, transnational scholarship is beginning to highlight a much more complicated relationship between seemingly distinct notions. Each of these works of literature highlights the ways in which the local and the global are not strictly distinct categories, but instead, the global permeates the local and the local affects the global. Because of that interaction, arguments asserting the notion of pure tradition or culture unravel when closely considered in real-world contexts, such as those portrayed in the texts. The texts demonstrate the ways in which tradition and culture have always been constructed, at least to some degree, with outside influences factoring into their evolution. Rather than considering tradition and culture as unaltered, pure, and static, the novels reveal the way that successive generations negotiate and modify traditional and cultural practices and symbols to fit the particular needs of their historical moment. At the same time, the authors raise valid concerns about the loss of cultural tradition and cultural homogenization in an age of modernity. While the authors all wish to engage in certain aspects of modernity, particularly those which provide physical sustenance, health, and infrastructure, they all have some concerns about how modernity is spread in an unbalanced manner, in which the West largely maintains control of the spread of certain types of information and technologies, often sharing them only while at the same time imposing its own values beliefs, and cultures. Kane is particularly concerned about this occurrence, but rather than support stricter distinctions between groups of people, he advocates for a shift to a two-way, balanced transfer of ideas. Camara, although embracing
modernity more broadly, likewise suggests that the North ought to take contributions by the South much more seriously. Diallo demonstrates through her and Amadou’s story that it can, in fact, be possible to preserve tradition and culture while embracing certain forms of modernity, but at the same time, she indicates a need for a respect of certain boundaries and differences. Each of these authors expresses a desire to engage in a dialogue with readers that leads to more equitable contributions and flows from all parts of the world. Circulating these literary works more widely in western literature departments and classrooms is one step toward creating a more equitable flow of ideas. In addition, studying transnational identity formation, patterns, and other phenomena from each level of consideration, from the individual to the global, is a useful lens through which to understand transnational flows. Studying the interactions between the various levels of consideration reveals layers of complexity and demonstrates that people, places, and time do not fall into neat categories, but instead, share important formative relationships with one another. Studying literature from a transnational perspective has the potential to broaden readers’ perceptions of others throughout the world and themselves. In fact, the act of writing this thesis has been very influential in developing a personal transnational identity by allowing me to deeply consider my own relationship with individuals elsewhere in the world, leading me to conclude the importance of spreading ideas and understanding among individuals.

At the same time, these literary texts also reveal the limitations of understanding oneself in relation to a complex world when the biases of some individuals do not allow them to recognize or appreciate the connections they share with those they do not perceive to be similar to themselves, raising challenging questions about the degree to which one ought to be compelled to adopt a particular perspective or permitted to operate under faulty assumptions.
Therefore, considering transnational connections—from the individual to the local to the global—has implications not just for the structure and methodology of literary study, but for opening up the possibility of exploring real-life, current questions of ethics and responsibility related to readers’ connections with individuals across the globe.


