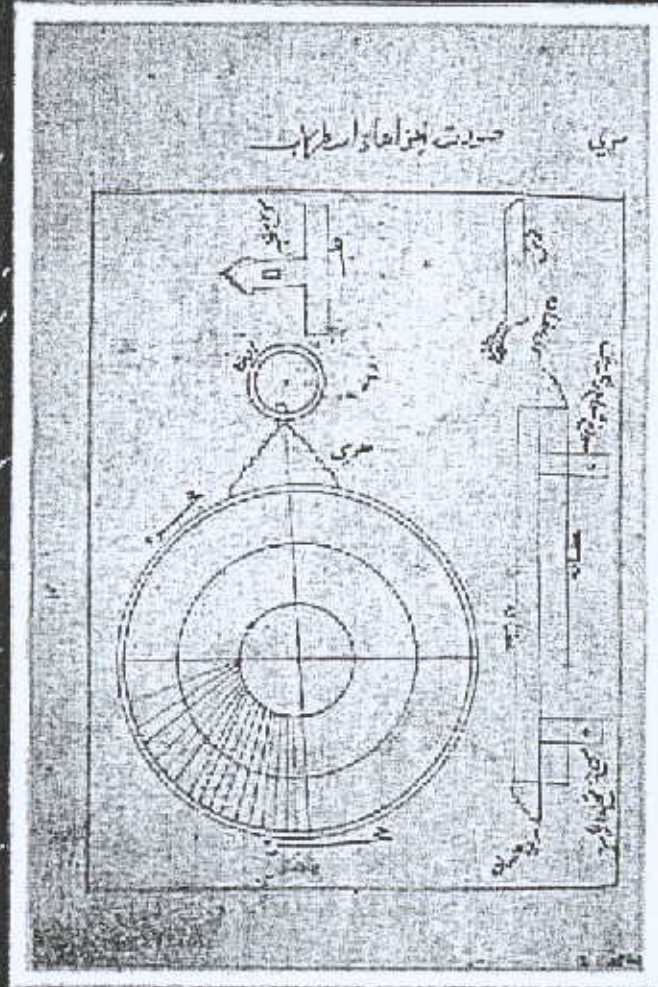


ISLAM HADHARI

BRIDGING TRADITION AND MODERNITY



EDITED BY
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The Clash of Cultures: A Study of Muslim Literary Reaction to Western Domination

Hassan A. El-Nogay

The theme of cultural clash between East and West (or alternatively, North and South) in Muslim fiction emerged as a result of the Muslim World's socio-historic and political encounter with the West at the turn of the previous century. This study attempts to analyze this theme in two novels from the Muslim world. As far as content is concerned, my approach will be of a socio-historic nature. After establishing the significance of this theme, I plan to closely examine the central characters in these novels by exploring their variety of attitudes towards Western civilization and Western culture. I will also try to examine the impact of Western domination on Islamic societies not only in socio-historical and political aspects of life, but also in the realm of thought.

The imposition of European colonialism on Africa and Asia led many Africans and Asians to lose confidence in their culture and values. The long period of subjugation to Western rule led to a great cultural shock in the Muslim world. The reaction to this shock in the Muslim world in general and in the Arab world in particular, has taken many forms. In both political and cultural arenas, the reaction has not been directed solely towards the West. The Muslims began to look back at their own culture, asking how much, if at all, it contributed to their subjugation and defeat.

The present study will consider the various views on this problem expressed in Muslim fiction, and the ways in which these views are related to the socio-historic realities in the Muslim world. The goal of this study is to arrive at a critical interpretation of the ideological solutions (if any) proposed by the writers whose works are under investigation. These works are: (1) Yahyā Haqqī's *Qindī Umm Hashīm* (*The Saint's Lamp*) (2) Mamūd Kānī's *Ambiguous Adventure*.¹

In trying to analyze content in these novels, I closely examine the central characters in these works and explore the variety of Muslim attitudes towards Western civilization and Western culture. I also hope to determine whether there is a contradiction between the literary creation of these writers and the socio-historical realities of the societies which they describe. A very heated debate is still going on in



Manuscript page of a Sufi text, likely a *Maqāmāt*, from the ISTAC Manuscript Collection.

¹ *Yahyā Haqqī* is from Egypt, and Mamūd Kānī is from Senegal.

² In the middle of last century Africa on the Middle East, witnessed by West, East, Europe and North America.

Muslim societies, particularly in North Africa regarding the way in which Muslims can achieve supremacy and catch up with the West. In this respect, the West has posed a great challenge to the Muslims.

However, an attitude of reservation is always present among many Muslims regarding what aspects of Western culture they should emulate. The writers whose works are under investigation here have contributed ideas on this issue. Some of their basic social convictions are the subject of much dispute, as I shall indicate later.

In focusing on this theme as it presents itself in the novels under study, one must from the beginning point out that these novels treat a host of intricate and interwoven themes, and that restricting oneself to this single theme is necessary to limit the scope of this study. When, as an aspect of this theme, we ponder the question of whether the central characters in these novels emerge as representatives of their societies, reflecting specific social dilemmas or simply as individuals from these societies experiencing personal dilemmas, we are in fact delving into the world of meaning in narrative art, which is defined as the outcome of the relationship between the fictional world created by the authors and the real world as it exists.⁵ On another level of meaning we also need to determine whether the main figures in these novels function as representative or illustrative characters, since illustration and representation in narrative art are quite distinct in relation to the issue of actuality. Scholes and Kellogg show this distinction very clearly:

Illustration differs from representation in narrative art in that it does not seek to reproduce actuality but to present selected aspects of the actual, essences retrievable for their meaning not to historical, psychological, or sociological truth but to official and metaphysical truth. Illustrative characters are concepts in anthropoid shape or fragments of the human psyche masquerading as whole human beings. Thus we are not called upon to understand their motivation as if they were whole human beings, but to understand the principles they illustrate through their actions in a narrative framework.⁶

Before we try to determine whether the above description of illustrative and representative characters applies to any of the main figures in these novels we need to examine the social and cultural forces shaping them, as well as their individualistic traits and qualities as related in these narratives. Doing so enables us to determine whether the conflicts arise from a disturbed collective conscience or merely reflect

⁵ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

personal peculiarities and aspirations.⁵

Ambiguous Adventure is divided into two uneven parts.⁶ The first part traces the life of Samba Diallo (the central hero), who comes from the Diallobé noble ruling family; from the time he is six years old until he finishes secondary school and is ready to leave for France, where most of the second part takes place.

It is in the Diallobé communal environment that Samba Diallo is raised. Among the people who contribute to shaping his character is Thierro, the Qur'anic school teacher, who represents the spirit of the Diallobé, and has the most impact upon Samba. From around the country of the Diallobé, families send their children to the teacher commending for the honor of his teaching them. It is up to the teacher to accept or reject whomever he chooses from among the children. However, in the case of Samba, the teacher personally requests the boy's family to allow the boy to be one of his students. Thus Samba Diallo is brought to the teacher, who takes possession of both his soul and body. The teacher's exterior harshness towards Samba, coupled with his unexpressed love for him, is part of an initiation process after which, the teacher hopes, the boy will emerge more prepared to undertake the unique role that awaits him.⁷

Now it was true-though he fought against the feeling-that he loved Samba Diallo as he had never loved any disciple. His harshness toward the boy was in ratio to his impatience to rid him of all his moral weaknesses, and to make him the masterpiece of his own career. He had educated and developed numerous generations of adolescents, and he knew that he was now near death. But, at the same time, as himself, he felt that the country of the Diallobé was dying from the assault of a stranger come from beyond the sea. Before departing this life, the teacher would try to leave to the Diallobé such a man as the country's great past had produced.⁸ (p. 23)

It is, then, the aim of the teacher to deliver to Samba the mystic wisdom that seeks the eternal happiness of the spirit and to teach him how to live with death and how to die. However, in her arguments with the teacher, The Most Royal Lady (the

⁵ I do not treat conflict as an element of fiction. I use conflict here to refer to the struggle that takes place within an individual or society, causing disharmony and disturbance of peace of mind. In this study I use David Kumar's methodology of analyzing the journey motif. Please check his article titled "Journey as Metaphor in African Literature," *African Literature Studies: The Toronto School/Post-Freeman*, Stephen Arnold (ed.) (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1985), pp. 189-215. However, for the sake of brevity, *Ambiguous Adventure* will be referred to simply as *Ambiguous*. In this study, quotations from the English translated sources will have their page references at the end of the quotation.

⁶ The 30th Harlowe Prize, *Ambiguous Adventure*, with an afterword by Samba Diallo, London: Heinemann Publishers, 1970. Samba Diallo. All further page references are to this edition.

mind of the Diallobé) believes that such an approach to the education of the young generation in her country would only consolidate the presence of the colonialists:

...Most Royal Lady, that was a chief, your father, who showed to me to me the interpreter of the Book-how a man should die. I should like to transmit this boon to his little nephew.

I revere my father, and the memory you have of him," the Most Royal Lady responded, "but I believe that the time has come to teach our sons to live. I foresee that they will have to do with a world of the living, in which the values of death will be scoffed at and bankrupt.

No, Madame. These are the ultimate values, which still have their place at the pillow of the last human being. You see that I am injuring the life in your young cousin, and you take a stand against me. For me, however, the task is not agreeable, or easy. I beg you not to remind me, and to leave its firmness to my hand. After this deep wounding, from a hand that is fatherly, I promise you that this child will never wound himself. You will see from what stature he too will dominate life, and death" (pp. 27-28).

Despite his obvious insistence on the education of Samba, the teacher is quite confused when the Diallobé people and leaders seek his advice as to whether or not they should send their children to a foreign school. Indeed, the whole question of their defeat has driven him to continuous thought and meditation. He truly believes that Muslims are the only people left who adhere to monotheism. At the same time he is not sure that they have been defeated because they are materially weak. It is Samba Diallo's father who says:

...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 deflected... (p. 10).

When the school principal says that "it is also true that the spirit runs great risks when the hand is too strong," the teacher's answer is:

Perhaps it is better so? If God has assured their victory over us, it is

Anthropology, p. 10.

apparently because we, who are His zealous, have offended Him. For a long time, God's worshippers ruled the world (p. 11).

Thus, the teacher earnestly seeks to win substance from his disciples because he believes that their defeat is by reason of weakness of faith and that the only way to strengthen this faith again is by the retirement of the spirit. Practiced on Samba Diallo, this philosophy has an astonishing impact. The boy has demonstrated a great love and desire for learning the Word and pursuing the path that leads to spiritual happiness and satisfaction. His passionate love for death-meditation and his obsession with eternal life after death has, given his age, terrified those close to him among the elders of the community. He is discovered lying asleep embracing the grave of Old Ralla, a relative of his, in the cemetery. The news is brought to the Most Royal Lady, the sister of the chief of the Diallobé, who immediately goes and fetches her cousin Samba. As a result of this incident, and also because of her strong belief in the values of living and in material power as a defense against colonial aggression, she is able to enforce her opinion against that of the teacher and the chief of the Diallobé and thus send Samba Diallo to the Western school now planted on Diallobé soil. Her philosophy is well explained in her conversations with both the chief and the teacher. The fact that she is successful in deciding for her community on such a confusing issue indicates not only the perplexity and indecisiveness of the populace and leadership of the Diallobé, but also the strength of character and leadership qualities with which she is endowed. She says:

Our grandfather, and the chief of the country with him, was defeated. Why? How? Only the newcomers know. We must ask them; we must go to learn from them the art of conquering without being in the right. Furthermore, the conflict has not yet ceased. The foreign school is the new form of the war which those who have come here are waging and we must send our elite there, expecting that all the country will follow them. It is well that once more the elite should lead the way. If there is a risk, they are the best prepared to cope successfully with it, because they are the most firmly attached to what they are. If there is greed to be drawn from it, they should also be the first to acquire that. This is what I wish you to say, my brother. And, since the master is present, I should like to add another word: Our determination to send the noble youth to the foreign school will never be followed by the people unless we begin by sending our children there. So I think that your children, my brother, as well as our cousin, Samba Diallo, should start the procession (pp. 37-38).

Yet the Most Royal Lady's decision is not based on love for the foreign school.

She, in fact, has expressed her deprecation for it, a feeling I believe shared by the Chief, by Samba Dialla's father (the Kujin), and by the Qur'anic school teacher (Thierno) himself.¹⁰ The historical situation, however, leaves the Diallahs with two choices. Either they attempt to remain themselves and, thus, face the possibility of being slaves on their own land in which ease change might even be forced on them, or endeavor to maintain some kind of harmony between African spiritualism and Western materialism on their land. But the Most Royal Lady presents what seems to me to be a third radical "western" way:

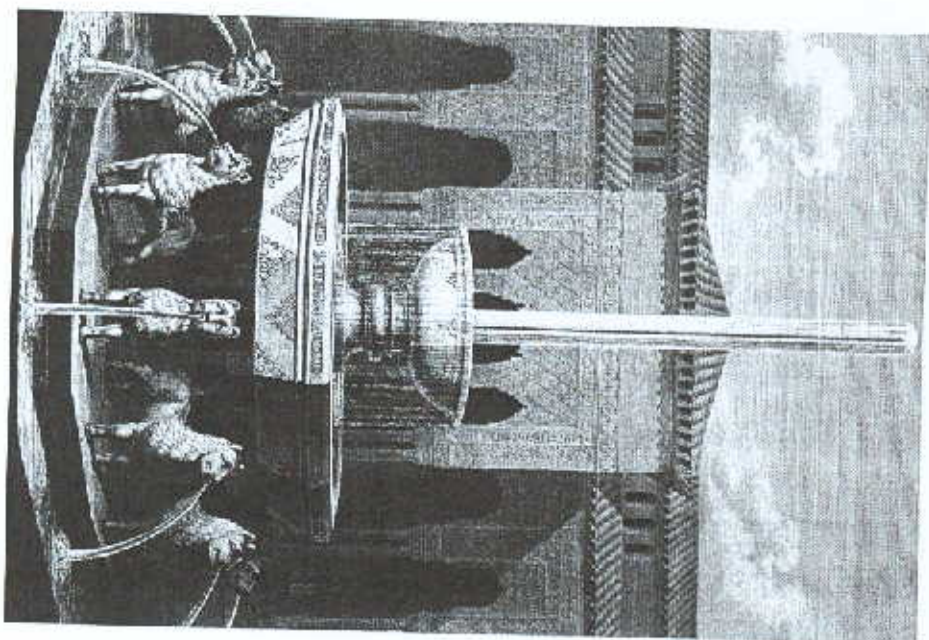
The school in which I would place our children will kill in them what today we love and rigidly conserve with care. Perhaps the very memory of us will die in them. When they return from the school, there may be those who will not recognize us. What I am proposing is that we should agree to die in our children's hearts and that the foreigners who have defamed us should fill the place, wholly which we shall have left free (p. 46).

To Thierno, his country's contact with the West is contact with a materialistic Godless culture that is too involved with the immediate and sensual. He does not think that Western materialism will live in harmony with African spiritualism. Yet he recognizes the material might of the West and even considers it important for God worshippers:

...It is certain that their school is a better teacher of how to join wood to wood, and that men should learn how to construct dwelling houses that resist the weather. ... We must build solid dwellings for men, and within those dwellings we must save God (p. 11).

However, the teacher, who represents a conservative Muslim Africa, does not accept the materialism within the foreign school, the materialism that comes from without Africa. He wants Samba to be taught, according to custom so that boy will remain himself without any cultural or spiritual cross-breeding. To the teacher, Samba must remain a gourd whose vocation is to stick lovingly to the soil. The question that concerns Thierno is that of how the Diallahs can fulfill their material needs through foreign education and culture while preserving their tradition. To him, one cannot learn it's without forgetting the other.

If I told them to go to the foreign school, they would leave 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? (p. 34)

It is in this environment that Samba Dialla is raised. He absorbs the values of his people and lives them to the maximum degree possible. Not only does he memorize the word of God by heart, but he tries to live it in his actions. Yet practical necessity compels this society to its search for the secrets of Western power not only to send its children to the foreign school, but also to send any of its people to France on a very

risky mission. In one of the touching moments in the book, Sem'ia Diallo cries and sobs when he goes to say goodbye to the Qur'anic school teacher and his disciples. Nevertheless, Samba is able to suppress his personal desire to stay in the Qur'anic school and hence, he internalizes the problems of his people. The conflict, to him, now becomes an inter-personal (social) one. This mission of his in France is for the sake of his people.

Ismaïl, the protagonist in Haggi's *The Saur's Lamp*, bears certain similarities to Samba Diallo. Like Samba he comes from the traditional peasantry and thus a conservative background. It is in Cairo, particularly in the district of al-Sayyida Zaynab, one of the most traditional parts of the city, that Ismaïl receives his solid religious grounding.¹¹ In this religious atmosphere, which is not devoid of superstition and spirit worship, Ismaïl learns the whole Qur'an by heart. Among the various influences around Ismaïl, religious life in the Square of al-Sayyida Zaynab becomes integral. The Saur's focus becomes the people's feasts and the calls of the muezzin their only clock.¹²

Afraid of the mockery of his age-mates, and knowing that pursuing a religious education would not lead to a materially satisfying career, both al-Sayyida Rajah and his son agree on the secular (foreign) school as the choice for Ismaïl. Therefore, it is decided that upon finishing high school, Ismaïl should go to England to study ophthalmology.

If the defeat of the Diallohé is the driving force behind Samba's journey to the West or behalf of his people to smoothe the secrets of Western power, Ismaïl's motive in his mission to England is mainly to satisfy a personal conflict. It is made clear from the beginning of the narrative that the pursuit of secular education, both within and without Egypt will enable Ismaïl and his family to attain material progress and prosperity, which are central to their well-being. The significance of this decision will be fully explored a little later.

The journey undertaken by the protagonists in these novels serves a host of purposes. On the thematic level, it expands the narrative in each book and hence provides more space for the exploration of the major theme. In this way, the journey to the West also provides an opportunity for character growth and change, since new situations and challenges face the central characters in their land of foreign sojourn. All of this in the end heightens the impact of the cultural confrontation in a very dramatic manner.

As an initiation and rite of passage, the journey also firmishes the protagonists

¹¹The same el-Sayyida Zaynab is "Haram Hashim," a mosque in Alexandria referred to as the "great mosque of the Egyptian Mubarramat."

¹²Like Haggi's *The Saur's Lamp* and *Other Stories*, 1990, and into: M. M. Rindouf (Ed.), *1991*. Arabic Translations Series, vol. 1, pp. 22, 23. All footnotes refer to this edition.

with a chance (at least in a theoretical sense) to cope with or resolve their conflicts, be they personal or inter-personal. Literally enough, at the same time that these characters strive to regain harmony and peace for themselves or their societies in the land of foreign sojourn, another alarming process takes place. This new atmosphere in which they find themselves equips them with the advantage of looking back at their societies from afar, perhaps for the first time. It enables them to compare two distinct value systems, neither of which may be absolute or perfect. The situation, in which the protagonists' cultural assumptions are held in check, lead them either to reaffirm or to reject some or all of their cultural values. Added to this, new situations and conflicts emerge and the protagonists' handling of these challenges in some cases have a tragic, lasting impact, as we shall see later.

One striking literary characteristic is observed as these protagonists finally settle in the land of foreign sojourn. It is then that the narratives begin to be overpopulated by Western female characters. Except for a few minor male characters whose presence is necessary only to reveal and expose the main characters in these narratives, there is a noticeable absence of fully developed white male characters who could help in the dramatic intensification of the main issue which these works address.

Ambiguous, however, emerges as devoid of the literary clichés that distinguish the other work. There is no conventional romance with a white woman, nor is there any hint of racial prejudice in the book. The story shows that Samba Diallo is attracted to two young women, I neenne—the white French girl and Adèle—the African girl whose family has chosen France as a domicile. However, despite I neenne's moving glances and shy touches, she and Samba remain friends. Yet her friendship with Samba reflects a clear philosophical encounter, since she believes in Marxism as a suitable solution to the special problem of the African peoples. As for Adèle, we learn that her African beauty awakens certain emotions in Samba's heart. Although this attraction to Adèle drives him to walk her arm in arm in the quays of Paris, we learn that his feelings are not revealed to her. Instead, these hidden feelings of guilt are ultimately suppressed by Samba, who calls himself "Mbaru," a slave name his family had used to shame him with when he indulged in bad behavior. The fact is, throughout the story, Samba does not exhibit any personal dreams or ambitions. Even at the moment of his crisis in France—a time that even arouse nostalgia—he never shows any signs of homesickness or a yearning for reunion with his African community. Such expression of individual needs and desires may undermine the novel's limited philosophical intent. Indeed, "Kane admits his readers only to those carefully constructed details that set forth his version of the hero's crisis of conscience."¹³

¹³William I. Griffin, *William Blake's New: The Language of the Poet's Self*, *Princeton University Press*, 1982, p. 82.

Once in France, Samba Diello finds himself experiencing a split between his mind and his spirit. Consequently, he undergoes an upsetting struggle to preserve his spiritual unity. This is a particularly agonizing process, given Samba's cultural upbringing in which there is no room for doubt in matters of faith. Contrary to this is the West's educational and cultural philosophy. Built around skepticism, this philosophy does not take religious faith for granted. Thus, God, who is so central (as the main source of guidance and salvation) to the existence and well-being of Samba's world, is not perceived as such by Western culture, which views the material universe as the source of knowledge.

In this intense environment that seeks knowledge only in an empirical world, Samba uses his religion not only as an affirmation of his Diallohé spirit, but also as a shield for spiritual survival.¹⁴ He begins to show fear of the outcome of his ambiguous adventure to the West. When asked what he will do in his country upon finishing his studies, his metaphorical answer expresses doubt about whether he shall return home at all:

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 (pp. 112–113).

As the struggle between the mind and the spirit as roads to salvation heightens within Samba's psyche, he begins to have hope in the ability of reason to take him back to his previous unquestioning faith. Ultimately this struggle leads Samba to a crisis of a dual complexity, as he himself notes:

I am not a distinct country of the Diallohé facing a distinct Occident, and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave with it by way of counterbalance. I have become the two. There is not a clear mind deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange name, in distress over not being two (pp. 150–51).

The cultural hybrid quality which Samba now acquires makes him somewhat similar to Adele; who is a mulatto. But Adele's hybrid physical characteristics do not reflect an affirmed cultural hybrid nature. The encounter with Samba, and the shy conversations she has with him, awaken some suppressed feelings she has never had

the chance of discussing with anyone before. In addition to her expressed complaint to Samba about the acidity of her environment and what she believes is the strange nature of the white people around her,¹⁵ perhaps unconsciously she yearns to end her present self exile, which had not been the case for her great-great Muslim grandfather, who was enslaved, baptized and planted against his will on Western soil. Hearing Adele's expression of hatred of Westerners, Samba begs her not to feel thus. Yet he utters the harshest words in the entire book about Westerners:

... they intruded themselves, and undertook to transform me in their image. Progressively, they brought me out from the heart of things, and escorted me to live at a distance from the world (p. 160).

The irony is that at this critical moment in the life of Samba, this innocent young girl looks to him to help her understand things and people and show her how "to go back to Africa." When she asks him to deliver her from her anger and teach her "to penetrate to the heart of the world" (p. 160), she is shocked and saddened by his reply: "I don't know whether one can ever find that road again once one has lost it" (p. 160).

The emotional suffering that follows this answer forces Adele to head for home. Weeping silently beside him on the train ride to her home, Samba envisions the phantom of the teacher to which his imploring thoughts are addressed:

"Master, what is left for me? The shadows are closing in on me. I no longer burn at the heart of people and things" (p. 161).

Samba Diello's father (the Knight) asks him to discontinue his studies and come back immediately because, to the Knight, the preservation of his son's faith is more important than the pursuit of study that will even increase his cultural alienation. He believes that his son betrays his faith mainly because he fails to remember God by his thoughts and actions, by body as well as by mind.¹⁶ To the Knight, in the gap between mere philosophizing and the observance of religious practice, lies the core of his son's plight. Belief that is not supported by action is an empty claim that may not withstand the test of time and history. His son must come home, since he abandons God by not being able to create a balance between the two elements of faith, because he fails to find "the road to the mosque" (p. 161).

The role the Western female plays in the life of the intellectual Arab continues *Lamy*.¹⁷ Ismail, the central character in *Lamy*, leaves his homeland for England (rhapsizing about European women):

Up to that time he had been chaste and had not approached a woman. Indeed, he would be lying if he denied that he was hungry for this dark girl, for all women, and lastly and especially for the women of Europe. (p. 13)

The above quotation is highly symbolic, as we shall see later, not only of Ismail's loss of virginity and innocence through the Western female, but of his entire cultural version that takes place through her as well. Mary, the fellow English student who dies medicine with Ismail, is clearly a symbol of Western civilization; and it is through her that the hero falls under the influence of this civilization:

Through her his laziness and dullness were replaced by activity and self-confidence. She opened up new horizons of beauty before his eyes. She awakened in him the love of art and beauty in music, in nature and in the human spirit (p. 18).

Not only does Mary equip Ismail with a new ideal of beauty, but she causes great transformation in his personality as well. His physical appearance, and his social philosophy of life, dramatically change:

In the past he always looked for something outside himself to lean against, something like religion and tradition, a peg on which to hang his precious coat. But she used to tell him that whoever resorted to a peg would remain all his life a slave to that peg, sitting next to it to keep an eye on his coat. She insisted that one's peg should be inside oneself (p. 19).

The clash between these two different sets of values which the hero experiences is to a noticeable change in his moral, social, and mental attitudes.¹⁸ Eventually, he revisits himself of his religion, replacing it with a stubborn belief in science and soul. This, in turn, has its price; for Ismail suffers from a nervous breakdown, only to be cured later by his "saviour", Mary. However, he gradually frees himself from

the influence of Mary, whom he used to look at as a master. By the time he succeeds in attaining his independent personality, he is neither angered nor saddened when she leaves him for another man of her own country. "Like all artists she was bored with her work once it was finished" (p. 21).

Having completed his medical studies, Ismail now heads for his homeland a different person altogether. He is now obsessed with a new interpersonal conflict. By way of gratitude, he intends to establish a private clinic where he can practice medicine so as to be able to "pay back" his giving family and help them live a comfortable life. At the same time, he is resolutely determined to fight for the liberation of the masses from the superstitious practices of religion. Little does he know that such an enormous, challenging task entails, above all, compassion and an outstanding ability to accept the masses and mix with them in a caring way. Such a requirement cannot be met, given the hero's cultural transformation, especially what Mary taught him--detaching himself from the helpless "scum" and "parasites" of society who can only pull down with them to the bottom of the sea those who extend a helping hand.¹⁹

Thus, like Samba Diallo, Ismail goes home already in conflict with his tradition. Unlike Ismail, however, Samba returns home, shaken, undeterred, confused, and suffering, this time from an agonizing personal conflict. The compromise reached by Demba (the new spiritual leader chosen by the teacher of the Diallobé before his death), and then to the "farcier" one in their leisure hours.²⁰ This compromise, however, does not prevent Samba's tragedy. Having become a cultural halfbreed, he now forgos everything, even how to pray. His theological, emotional, and mental breakdown demonstrates to his people his betrayal of the communal trust placed in him, for which he finally pays with his own life at the hands of the fool.

Like Samba in *Ambégnou*, Ismail loses his faith when he is under the influence of Western culture. His renunciation of his faith and his rejection of his people then go hand in hand. As a consequence, in his homeland he experiences some intense confrontations with his indigenous culture before he finally arrives at a reconciliation. This destruction of Umm Hāshim's lamp, with whose oil his mother used to treat the eyes of his cousin Fuuma, clearly points to his disbelief in the values of his people. But if his people's beliefs are responsible for almost sending Fuuma to blindness, his purely medical treatment causes more complications and leads the poor girl to ultimate disaster. Lacking any kind of communication with his family, and out of his failure to treat his cousin's eyes successfully, Ismail sinks into depression and misery. He comes to roam the streets of Cairo, aimlessly, trying to ease the great discomfort within

¹⁷ According to the title of Phonon's *Two Sisters*, *Lamy* will be viewed as a *Lamy*.
¹⁸ M. Bakhtin, "The Language of Form: Ismail in 'The Egyptian Middle-Class Struggle'" in *The Westward Gaze of Modern Literature*, pp. 157-176, p. 147.

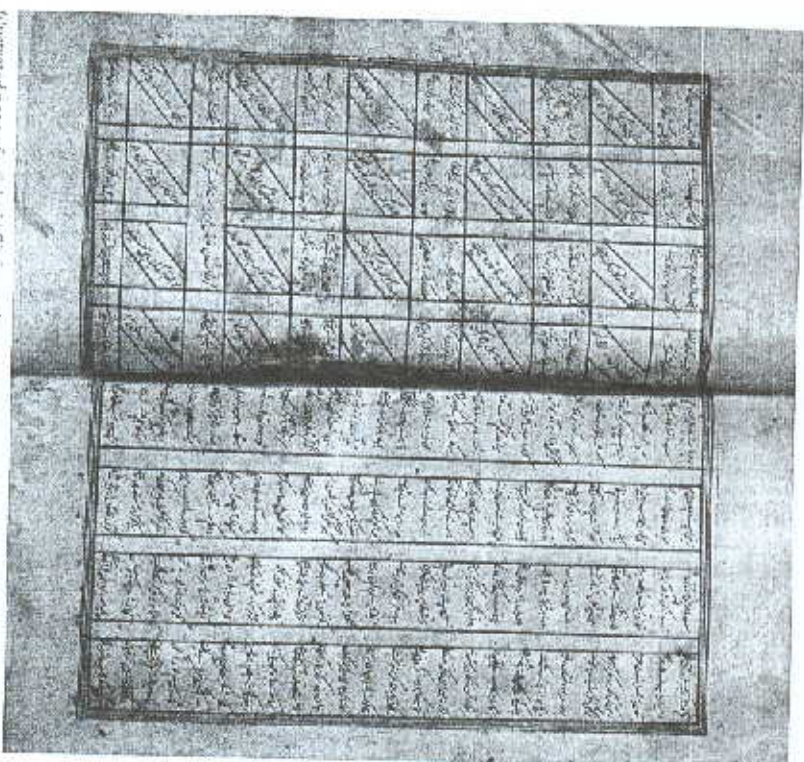
¹⁹ Bakhtin, p. 20.
²⁰ *Ambégnou*, p. 22.

him. He begins to find comfort and tranquility in associating with the poor people around the square of the mosque. It is neither mystical meditation nor reasoning that makes Ismail eventually regain his faith, rather the social companionship of the needy, our happy people of the square. Thus restoration of Ismail's faith coincides with his emigration with the people of his homeland. He attains such a high level of clarity of conscience that he witnesses the noted occasion of the *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Power) with the great Muslim Saint. Upon succeeding in curing Fajana's eyes, Ismail emerges as a synthesis of East and West. In a vague, but symbolically understood manner, Yahya Haqqi tells us that the presence of faith and religious values in an age of science and technology is essential to preserving both the physical and spiritual existence of man. In this way, Arab society is able to maintain its identity while at the same time acquiring from Western culture what can satisfy and advance the special needs of modern Muslim life.

Perhaps the most visible impact of the Western domination of Arabo-Islamic societies can be seen in the realm of thought. By and large, Islamic thought went through three interlocking stages because of this influence. The first phase was characterized by the shock of millions of Muslims who used to take pride in the dynamic and progressive quality of Islam by which they were able to lead the world in scientific thought and philosophy at one point in human history. In trying to understand what went wrong in our recent history, an overpowering feeling of disenchantment took hold over them, and it was only with great perplexity that they attempted to reconcile their lamentable backward condition with the revered excellences of Islam.

This situation, which put Arab society on the defensive for more than a century and a half, and the crisis that accompanied it over "what to do" and "whom to be," eventually yielded a host of political and nationalistic ideologies. This comes as no surprise because:

the discovery of the West, and the consequent cultural transformation of Arab society, has had the revitalizing and intoxicating effect of a renaissance. Its overall consequences have of course been intricately beneficial. But it has had a very unsettling effect on Arab society by bringing into being a new class of intellectuals. And whereas the old "intellectuals," the ulama, were deeply loyal to the basic values and institutions of their society, the new ones did not owe it any such allegiance and looked left and left, East and West, for new sources of inspiration and loyalty. Thus, for the first time in many centuries, new ideas began to erode the fabric of Arab society.²⁷



Illustrated page of a copyist Sa'adunabi's
Copyist of the Soviet Manuscript Collection.

Holding popular Islam responsible for the defeat of the Arabs because of what they saw as its irrationality, ritual worship, and passive attitudes²⁸ in face of the West's scientific and technological superiority, these new ideologies preached immediate socio-economic transformation of Arab societies through military and political power.

Similar to the situation in the Arab world, secular nationalism finds the same appeal in other parts of the Islamic world. In the Arab world, however, Arab socialism—with its Bahthi and Nasirite forms and its slogans of militarism, state ownership,

²⁷ Harun A. Khan, *Crises of Faith: A Study of Intellectual and Transformational Forces in Islam* (1978), p. 264.

²⁸ See Harun A. Khan, *Crises of Faith: A Study of Intellectual and Transformational Forces in Islam* (1978), p. 264.

Islamism and rapid industrialization had sweeping effects, despite the existence of totalitarian monarchies and military systems. Liberal ideology, though less popular, also emerged as an option.

At this stage, Muslim scholarship failed to produce a viable alternative. The traditional 'ulama' (scholars), though responsible for preserving Islam through its period of decay, failed to lead the masses or bring forward the living and dynamic force of Islam. The anachronistic and ritualistic approach of the 'ulama' to Islam was irrelevant to the new needs of contemporary Muslims. It is only in the second phase in the evolution of modern Islamic thought, the stage of recovery from the shock caused by Western domination, that we see an emerging Islamic ideology throughout the Muslim world.

Indeed, one cannot ignore the contribution of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and that of his student Muhammad 'Abdu in trying to pump new blood in Islamic political and social thinking. Because of the contribution of these two Muslim revivalists and many others, two distinct ideological camps began to take shape, one secular nationalist and the other pan-Islamist with modernist tendencies. Both camps share numerous similarities. They both are reactions to Western domination and are products of Western influence. Both call for modernism and independence from Western hegemony and have adherents from among the educated elite. Yet, the two camps remain antagonistic by reason of, as we shall see a little later, their philosophical differences.

The advent of European colonial rule, with its secularist doctrines of separation of religion and state and separation of "religious" and "scientific" knowledge, two notions quite alien to Islam, but which nevertheless took root in the Muslim world, gave forceful momentum to the secular nationalist movement. The imposition of these doctrines by colonial powers on a society that had functioned for more than twelve centuries on the basis of different sets of political and cultural values had a lasting, leastwise impact.

To the imperialist Europeans, the implementation of the separation of religion and state in their new colonies was for them sufficient proof of the superiority of their culture and therefore justifiable either because of their "civilizing mission" in the underdeveloped world or because of their need to curb the latent militancy of political Islam. As for the distinction between "secular" education and "religious" education throughout its history Islam had never advanced any policy of scientific or materialistic isolationism. In fact, Islam's definition of acts of worship includes, besides the prescribed rituals, any endeavor, whether physical, intellectual, imaginative, or otherwise, that can promote and preserve better human life. Transplanting the concept of the separation of religion and state from its natural Western environment, whether rational or not, caused a great deal of confusion and contributed to the overall regression still apparent in the Muslim world.

The past few decades have witnessed a tremendous resurgence of Islamic

ideological thought. This new phase in Islamic thought is marked by a sceptical attitude towards Western norms of liberal rationality and a call instead for the return to Islamic traditions for political and cultural inspiration. Indeed, for hundreds of years Islam has never completely lost its sway over the psychic and behavior of its followers.²² Added to this is the fact that the nationalist systems that succeeded the colonial powers have failed to meet the citizens' material needs or to grant them their basic human rights. Hence, a new current of thought has surfaced among the general Muslim public, denouncing that Islam be given a chance and that socio-political institutions reflect the popular culture of the people. Islamists, for their part, have begun to present Islam as a power capable of unlocking the inner resources of the people. Their call for modernity is now being seen for the first time as not synonymous with Westernization.

The Islamic movements' call for an Islamic order capable of rehabilitating the masses made them in some places the voice of the dispossessed. However, the greatest breakthrough in contemporary Muslim thought has been the reintroduction of the old concept of *jihād* (legal reasoning, independent judgement) as a third source of Islamic law. The great efforts made by some contemporary Muslim thinkers to apply this concept to the modernizing of Muslim thought and traditions and to the utilization of science and technology to bring new solutions to the problems of the emerging societies have proven quite appealing to intellectuals.

These innovations in Muslim thought have given Islam a new appeal and have fostered its spread among the young. Thus we see the resurgence of Islam as an alternative ideology, as a response to the Western domination of the Muslim world.

This brief outline of the development of Islamic thought in the post-independence era impels a discussion of the degree to which the socio-historical and political realities of the epoch are embodied in the novels under investigation. The question of whether art reflects society is an old one. Man has, throughout the ages, been influenced by his surroundings, and in many ways we are products of our environment. Artists are no exception. They write from specific sets of socio-economic and political circumstances. Hence, these circumstances can play a role in shaping the artist's imagination. If an ordinary person can take to the streets to protest the apartheid laws in South Africa, the artist can do the same. In this light that we can examine protest writings produced in South Africa or by the Harlem Renaissance writers. We derive a better understanding of these works by placing them within their historical frameworks. In such an undertaking, Roland Barthes' notion of the text as an isolated, self-contained, self-reflective entity cannot be relevant.²³ Similarly, an analysis of the novels in this work divorced from their

²² Ibid., p. 242.

²³ Roland Barthes, *Essays Critiques*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1966, p. 466.

historical context cannot be complete, since the questions of "what to do" and "whom to be" reflected in the identity crisis experienced by the central characters in these works (and perhaps also by the writers, since these works are highly autobiographical) are strongly related to the socio-historical factors we have outlined.

It is against this background that we now turn to examine the strong Sufi element in *Amibiyyas*. The theme of the spirituality of the East versus the materialism of the West occupies a great deal of space in this work. We have already asserted that the perception of the spiritual and physical elements of life is alien to Islam and a gross misunderstanding of its basic doctrines. Indeed, some can argue that the belief in the virtual superiority of the East held by many in the "colonized world" is nothing but an unconscious attempt to psychologically dispel the agony of defeat caused by Western powers in the arena of science and technology. This it could be argued is mainly so because this notion surfaces at a time in which Western civilization has reached its prime in industrialization and economic prosperity, whereas the East is sinking into economic retrogression.

In *Thierno*, the Qur'anic school teacher in *Amibiyyas*, materialism and exploitation are synonymous. The West's materialistic superiority and its imposition of colonial rule on other members of the human race is sufficient proof to him of the fact that materialistic advancement will produce greedy individuals devoid of any ethics and societies lacking a moral center. Hence he does not make any concessions to Western powers. Until his last moments, he continues to believe that only suppressing ego (body and other aspects of the material world) can he and Diallobé attain a key, on the other hand, holds another unbalanced view. She takes an uncalculated risk, her willingness to sacrifice the Diallobés' spiritualism in order to gain the spiritless material power of the West. Her stubborn belief in the adoption of Western ways as a means to stop the Western invasion and her determination to send Samba Diallo to a foreign school reflect her willingness to act without faith, which in turn reveals a conviction that excessive spiritualism produces a weaker society capable of being captured and annihilated. Between these two extreme ideological stances, a basic Islamic principle is lost.

However, ISMAÏL's call in *Kanyo* for a marriage between Islamic faith and Western science and technology seems to be in harmony with Islam whose philosophy and actual history proves that the preservation of the cultural character of its followers is as important as the scientific advancement, either springing from within the faith or adopted from other cultures.

The reconciliation of the narrative presented in *Kanyo* between Arab society and Western science emerges very clearly despite the author's unfortunate use of many traditional measures as symbols of hegemonic Egyptian culture. On the other hand, the poem is a very distinctive light on the book. In it, the author

suggests that the marriage between indigenous tradition and some aspects of Western culture is possible, but in order for it to take place the Arab intellectuals must act as pioneers, and they will never be successful in their unique mission if they totally reject their traditional values or disassociate themselves from the masses.

Tradition is portrayed in *Amibiyyas* in a justious Sufi garb. The challenge which the dominant Western culture poses to the traditional communal society of the Diallobés is an immediate one; hence no chance is given to the Diallobé society to review, modify or seek from within the cultural ways and means by which to curb the invasion. The Most Royal Lady forcefully argues that the Diallobé society has to choose between cultural death and physical death. Her strong sense of fulfillment and shery logic behind her choice of physical survival over cultural survival adds a very tragic tone to the narrative and, at the same time, serves as the strongest condemnation possible of Western colonialism. In vain does Samba Diallo's meager struggle to get his message to the hearts of his people. He sees no distinction between cultural and physical death. In fact, he strongly believes that if his people adhere to their Sufi traditions they can win the battle. He wants to offer Samba Diallo as a savior to his people. In his education of Samba he strives to ensure that the boy will grow up to master death, since mastering death is the only guarantee of cultural and physical survival. In order for Samba to realize this, he must absorb his culture by growing up in his natural environment like a gourd that clings lovingly to its source of nourishment until it ripens. But this does not happen, and Samba does not become a traditional Sufi scholar as his teacher wants. Hence his life ends in a tragic death.

Our discussion of these works shows that the tension between indigenous cultural heritage and Western impact results not only in an influx of new literary genres and art forms as well as conflicts within and between individuals, but also in a new secular political thought which then enters into an intense contest with a newly born Islamic thought that has an inherited traditional basis. Advocates of this emerging Islamic thought face resistance from doctrines and traditional practices within their societies owing either to flaws in the traditional society itself or to the imposition of colonial institutions. The separation between religion and state and between "secular education" and "religious education" as well as the pursuit of spiritual satisfaction without regard to the material needs of man can all be cited as examples. The two novels under investigation here either completely idealize the Arabo-Islamic societies and their traditional ways of living or severely attack that very tradition, blaming its cultural structure for their defeat by Western powers.

Since all these two works have intellectuals as central characters, and since these characters undergo an intense identity crisis at a time in which the actual history of their societies puts them in the crossroads between two civilizations, it is by no means surprising that the historical period in which the novels are set is one that would be revealing of the identity crisis of these African intellectuals.

Conclusion

This work establishes the socio-historic as well as the political and cultural significance of the theme of the clash of cultures between the West and the Muslim world. Although predominant in the literature of sub-Saharan Africa, this theme also surfaces, although perhaps not as commandingly, in North African writings. The culmination of this encounter is the imposition of Western colonialism on Muslim societies. This has resulted in the generation of western values and ways of living and governing throughout the Muslim world. A major concern of this analysis has been with the Muslim world's reaction to Western dominance as presented in the works under study. The result is the portrayal of various aspects of the confrontation. In *Farafra*, Cheikh Hamidou Koussoulé ripples through the evils of the encounter is highlighted through the horror that ripples through the traditional structure of the Diallohé communal society in *Lamp*, Yahya Haqaj emphasizes the spiritual side of the clash, which he considers a major ingredient in the happy synthesis of religion and science in the Arab world.

However, despite the varied attitudes towards the West displayed in these works, a common perspective surfaces. In order for the Muslim intellectual to work for the cultural transformation of his society, he has to remain part of it, for those who isolate themselves from their society cannot influence it.

We can relate the moral of the two novels under review to some of the Principles of *Iskhan kahbari*, in particular the First principle which is faith and piety in Allah.³² It is the loss of this faith and piety in Allah that resulted in Sariba's crisis. The second principle emphasizes the vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge. The intimate adoption of this principle by Ismail, the central character in Haqaj's *Lamp* as the expense of faith resulted not only in Ismail's personal dilemma, but also in his rejection of his people, as well. Hence, the message to both central characters as representatives of their societies is that faith in Allah and the pursuit of knowledge must go hand in hand.

The impact of Western domination on Arab and Islamic societies is not limited to the socio-historical and political aspects of life. On the literary level, the encounter itself is responsible for the adoption of the novel as an immigrant literary genre which is now part and parcel of Arab culture. In the realm of thought Western influence caused great shock to the Arab and Muslim worlds and later fostered the growth of a host of secular and religious political ideologies. Part of the concern of this study has been with the socio-historical reality of Western dominance and its influence on the literary creations of Arab and Muslim artists. One comment has been that, while their art is not a photographic representation of reality, it does however evolve from a specific

socio-historical context of whose influence it cannot be completely independent.

The emergence of the theme of the clash of cultures in Muslim fiction arose in response to the Muslim world's socio-historic and political encounter with the West at the turn of the previous century. The Muslim world's preoccupation with the issues of the post-independence era has, no doubt, caused a decline in this theme as Muslim nations find their way toward modern life. Nonetheless, the continuously increasing presence of Muslim communities in the Western hemisphere, including the tens of thousands of scientists, artists, engineers and physicians, has created new realities which will, I am sure, breathe new life into the theme of cultural alienation.

In this respect the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, and the London bombings in July 2005 together with the two Gulf wars, will definitely generate a flow of writing in which neither the West nor the Muslim world will be portrayed in a favorable light. Again, both the West as well as the Muslim world will be perceived negatively, but this time the perception will be based on recent reality. Whatever happens, the most recent encounter between the West and the Muslim world will not at all help in decreasing the cultural misunderstanding rampant today.