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Childhood and Initiation in Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966).

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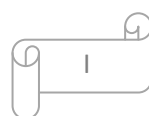
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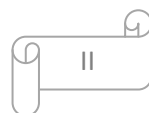
To: My dearest family, especially my parents.

Amar, Faiza, Nassim,

My twin sister Amel.

All my classmates and friends,

especially Naima Akkache and Meriem.



Abstract

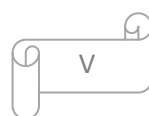
*Our research paper deals with the issues of childhood and initiation in Camara Laye's **The African Child** (1954) and Francis Selormey's **The Narrow Path** (1966). It intends to compare the visions of two African writers, the Guinean Camara Laye and the Ghanaian Francis Selormey, who write about such important issues in two different Western languages, French and English, and in two different periods of African history, colonial and post-colonial times. The purpose of this dissertation is to study the African child's growth and how the African narratives of childhood use the image of the child as a symbol of growth and of the individual's passage from childhood to adulthood in parallel with his country's passage from colonization to independence. We focus similarly on the change in the experience of childhood between the early African narratives of childhood and the recent ones. Besides, we will deal with the new African child's identity through discussing the clash of cultures and childhood trauma that resulted from colonialism. Stress will be put on the idea of life as a passage and the different ceremonies and celebrations that accompany that passage from one stage to another. To attain our objective, we need to compare the two narratives of childhood **The African Child** and **The Narrow Path** in the light of Arnold Van Gennep's theory **The Rites of Passage** (1960) and to rely also on Stefan Helgesson's **Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life** (2011). In order to prove this issue, it is necessary to apply the cited theories on the two novels and to study the processes of initiation presented by the authors: the traditional rites of passage and modern education, in addition to the comparison of the identities of the two child protagonists in relation to a range of influential factors mainly the clash of cultures and childhood trauma and in relation to important figures such as the father and the mother. It is deduced that the problem of identity is a recurrent issue in these narratives of childhood that record the African quest for identity in post-colonial times. However, there exist several differences between the two fictions and varied attitudes towards the issue that are determined and stressed by the divergence in their periods of publication.*



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General Introduction

Chapter One:

Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The*

Narrow Path:

Post Colonial Autobiography, Childhood Trauma, the Traditional

Rites of passage and Modern education

“Childhood shows the man as morning shows the day.”

American Proverb

Chapter One

Method and Materials Sections

**“For in every adult there dwells the child that was, and
in every child there lies the adult that will be.”**

John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things*

Chapter Two

Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*: The clash of cultures and the role of the family

“Childhood is like a mirror, which reflects in afterlife the images first presented to it. The first thing continues forever with the child. The first joy, the first sorrow, the first success, the first failure, the first achievement, the first misadventure, paint the foreground of his life.”

SAMUEL SMILES, *Character*

A une jeune fille

**Vous qui ne savez pas combien l'enfance est belle,
Enfant ! N'enviez point notre âge de douleurs,
Où le cœur tour à tour est esclave et rebelle,
Où le rire est souvent plus triste que vos pleurs.**

**Votre âge insouciant est si doux qu'on l'oublie !
Il passe, comme un souffle au vaste champ des airs,
Comme une voix joyeuse en fuyant affaiblie,
Comme un alcyon sur les mers.**

**Oh ! ne vous hâtez point de mûrir vos pensées !
Jouissez du matin, jouissez du printemps ;
 Vos heures sont des fleurs l'une à l'autre enlacées ;
 Ne les effeuillez pas plus vite que le temps.**

**Laissez venir les ans ! Le destin vous dévoue,
Comme nous, aux regrets, à la fausse amitié,
A ces maux sans espoir que l'orgueil désavoue,
A ces plaisirs qui font pitié.**

**Riez pourtant ! du sort ignorez la puissance ;
Riez ! n'attristez pas votre front gracieux,
Votre œil d'azur, miroir de paix et d'innocence,
Qui révèle votre âme et réfléchit les cieux !**

Victor HUGO.

Février 1825.

I. Introduction:

Following the long and complicated history that linked Africa to the Western world which resulted from the encounter between the Occident and the Orient, the North and the South, civilization and savageness, new literary concerns and issues began to emerge to overwhelm the contemporary literature and to shape the facet of modern literary texts. Literature doesn't only tell events or stories; it tells history and bears the historical burden of nations. Likewise, African literature records Africa's history and black people's experiences. It is no surprise, for instance, that childhood and initiation have become themes of a considerable weight in African literature and increasingly attracted the attention of many authors. The themes emerged in this context to use the child motif and give it voice to refer to the rebirth and renewal of nations and societies.

This work is an attempt to explore the themes of childhood and initiation in two African novels of French and English expressions: Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966). The two fictions center on the idea of life as a passage that allows human beings to move from one defined stage to a more developed one. Moreover, Laye's and Selormey's writings contain a great deal of information about what it meant to be an African child during the pre-colonial and the post-colonial periods.

African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti, Camara Laye and Francis Selormey adopted the colonizer's language in their writings to reinforce the African identity and existence and to treat different themes in relation to the African identity and their struggle against the European colonizer. Post-colonial African literature therefore mirrors the cultural clash and the identity crisis that are the main problems of a newly independent nation, and tackles themes which center on these matters. In this respect, childhood and initiation have become major themes in African literature; the child has been the center of many African literary works of either French or English expression.

The themes deal with the child's passage from childhood to adulthood and maturity. In some ways, this autobiographical description of the author's childhood and his initiation to manhood can be considered as a quest for identity through the description of the past events, of history and real life.

The restatement of the problem of the myth of African childhood was introduced with Camara Laye's use of the child protagonist in his novel *L'Enfant noir* (1953) translated into English as *The African Child* (1954). This was resulted from the rise of Negritude in African literature in the 1950s and 1960s.¹ In this respect, the child was represented as a symbol for the cultural clash and the identity crisis that plagued the African continent in the wake of colonialism. For instance, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1971) and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) are samples of novels that portray childhood as a symbol of growth and development.

The theme of childhood allows us to travel through time and memory; it is a bridge which links the past and the present to construct the author's culture and identity. Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) are the best examples of these African novels that treat the themes of childhood and initiation and the ones on which our study will be built.

The African Child (1954) is the first novel of the Guinean novelist Camara Laye written in French under the title of *L'Enfant noir* (1953) and translated into English by James Kirkup and Ernest Jones as *The African Child* (1954). It is considered as an autobiographical novel and a nostalgic portrayal of the author's earliest memories from childhood to adulthood. *The Narrow Path* (1966) is written by the Ghanaian writer Francis Selormey and is considered as the coming of age story of a young Ghanaian boy during the colonial rule.

The Review of Literature

The two novels have been the subject of many critics who discussed their importance and tried to go beyond their literary value to deduce their deepest message. Deicy Jiménez is one of the reviewers of Camara Laye's *The African Child*. In his article "*Camara Laye's The Dark Child: The Undecided World of a Mental Mulatto*", Jiménez writes that *The African Child* illustrates the state of dilemma in which the colonized people are found. He says, "*Camara Laye's The Dark Child represents a good example of the colonized subject's dilemma. It shows his/her struggle for keeping an identity that, in most of the cases, is discouraged by the colonizer.*"² For Jiménez, the novel shows the African struggle and search for an identity in colonial times. It examines also the ambivalence that characterizes the autobiographical novel of the Guinean writer. The child gradually moves from its African traditions to the Western education and this makes him fall in dilemma between the two cultures.

Moreover, Adele King in her book *Rereading Camara Laye (2002)* compares Camara Laye's *The African Child* to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and considers that both novels are of a remarkable importance in African literature. She writes, "*L'Enfant noir (1953), holds a position in Francophone African literature similar to that of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958) in English; it is a portrait of a classic traditional culture.*"³ She considers also that contrary to Achebe who has shown the strength of traditional cultures in his novel, Laye did not criticize colonialism.

Another critic of the novel is Oladele Taiwo who considers that Laye's *The African Child* celebrates and praises the African and the Guinean cultures and societies. This idea is well developed in the author's book *An Introduction to West African Literature (1967)*. Speaking about Laye's novel, Taiwo states, "*His book is a praise-song of Guinea culture, a*

celebration of its rich society woven into a vivid yet subtle tapestry. It is a romantic theme, nostalgic and may be idealistic, but certainly real enough."⁴

Abderrahmane Arab also reviews Mongo Béti's opinion about Laye's novel. Arab in his book *Politics and the Novel in Africa (1982)* considers that Mongo Béti's criticism of Camara Laye's exclusion of the colonial situation in *L'Enfant noir* shows his rejection of exoticist literature through concentrating on the social aspect of the African society. He then says, "*Mongo Béti's criticism of Camara Laye's 'blindness' to the colonial situation in L'Enfant noir underlines the rejection of all remnants of exoticist literature and stresses by contrast the novelist's role as social and political enlightener.*"⁵

Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* on the other hand has received an abundant criticism. For instance, Anderson Brown considers the novel as an autobiographical one, recounting the misadventures of Kofi. It is a childhood story, which serves as a document of life in Ghana. Brown adds that the novel relates themes such as the coming of terms with a strict father, the coming of age, and the tensions that define the life of a young African student in the post colonial Era, caught as he is between traditional life and the brave new world.⁶

Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, argue in their *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English (2005)* that Selormey's *The Narrow Path* is written in a simple and direct language with a remarkable absence of any comments about the society's contradictions resulted from the European influence. They affirm,

The child focalizer does not speculate about the contradictions in his society under the impress of European values. [...] *The Narrow Path* does not show how personal experience can be related to communal life. The major artistic strengths of the *Narrow Path* are its direct and concrete language presented with an unreflective and confessional narrative voice and resonant with innocence.⁷

Stefan Helgesson joins these critics who tried to study Selormey's *The Narrow Path* and comments about the significance of its title in his book *Exit: Endings and New*

Beginnings in Literature and Life (2011). He says, “*The Narrow Path* [...] The trope in the title is clear and is built on the commonplace Christian metaphor of life as a journey, with the moral dictum that sticking to the ‘narrow path’ is the way to a good future.”⁸ According to Helgesson, the title of the novel is inspired from the Christian belief that life is a passage from one stage to another.

Devin M. Geary is another critic who argues in his thesis entitled *Transnationalism and Identity: The Concept of Community in Ghanaian Literature and Contemporary Ghanaian Culture* that *The Narrow Path* is one of the African novels that explore the impact of independence on Ghanaian conceptions of community and identity-formation. It can be read as an exploration of the implications of the loss of self, conflict between tradition and modernity, and the complications of a dual identity. Devin adds also that the novel’s protagonist, Kofi, is disillusioned by his community. He says, “*Again in The Narrow Path: An African Childhood, the protagonist is disappointed by the illusory nature of community—he does not find it fulfills the claims it makes. The author explores the relationship between the Ghanaian individual and community, as well as Christianity’s effect on traditional community structures.*”⁹

Through the review of literature discussed above, we notice that Camara Laye’s *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey’s *The Narrow Path* (1966) have been analyzed by many authors and critics. However, little research has been devoted to put them into perspective together. Therefore, in order to overcome this literary restriction and fill in this gap in research, we suggest to join the two novels in a single comparative study based on the themes of childhood and initiation that are major themes in literature and the linking point between Camara Laye’s *The African Child* and Francis selormey’s *The Narrow Path*.

The Issue and the Working Hypothesis

Our work is an attempt to study *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path* and put them into perspective together. This comparative study will focus on the themes of childhood and initiation in the two novels since they can be considered as autobiographical novels that use the memories of their adult authors to chronicle the life of child protagonists. The two are also Bildungsromans, or coming of age stories which are novels of formation, initiation and education that deal with their protagonist's psychological and moral development from youth to adulthood.

We will try to explain the role and the importance of the themes of childhood and initiation in the process of formation and revival of the African identity and how the African writers have used the narratives of childhood to reach this objective. The chosen novels will help us to study the change in the experience of childhood, the different exits from it and the variations that may be noticeable between the recent narratives of childhood and the previous ones. It will also pose the crucial problem of the African child's growth to explain how the issues of childhood and initiation influence the African identity, being a set of ideas that refer to memories, figures and genealogies which help in the construction of identity.

Method and Materials

To achieve the above stated purpose, we will rely on Arnold Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and on Richard K. Priebe's chapter *Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood* included in Stefan Helgesson's book *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011). Firstly, Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* introduces new ways of thinking about the rites of passage and provides us with a guide of the different cultural celebrations. Van Gennep then considers the reality of human existence is constructed by a series of transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next, man's life therefore is made up of a succession of stages with

similar ends and beginnings. These events and stages are done or performed through ceremonies which announce the passage from one defined position to the other.¹⁰

Secondly, Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011) deals with the wide and varied phenomenon of exit, along with its related concepts. In this book, Richard K. Priebe concentrates on the narratives of childhood and provides us with the definition of the concepts of childhood and exit that are extremely context-dependant. He refers also to the change in the experience of childhood and the exits from childhood that the most recent narratives convey in relation to those that appeared previously. It is deduced that in every story the narratives are concerned by the state of the continent in parallel with the specific situation of an individual.

Our choice of the above mentioned theories is mainly motivated by their importance and their relevance to our subject and problematic. Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* and Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* will allow us to enlarge the scope of our research and help us in our study of the themes of childhood and initiation in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. Meanwhile, the two theories will help us in analyzing the idea of exit and passage and the rites of passage that accompany the child in his initiation into adulthood and then solve the problematic of the child's growth and development.

Research Outline

Our work will be divided into three sections: the Method and Materials Section, the Result Section, and the Discussion Section. Firstly, the Method and Materials Section that is our first chapter, consists of Arnold Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and Stefan Helgesson's book *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011), the biographies of the two authors, Camara Laye and Francis Selormey, and the summaries of

the two novels, *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path*, respectively. Secondly, the Result Section includes our findings and shows how the applied theories help us to understand how the themes of childhood and initiation are used in *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path* to explain the process of the African child's growth. Finally, the Discussion Section is divided into two chapters, the first one deals with the postcolonial autobiography, childhood trauma and the rites of passage in Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, whereas the second is about the problem of culture and identity and the main factors and figures that influence the child's passage from childhood to maturity.

Notes and References

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- ³ Adele King, *Rereading Camara Laye* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 2.
- ⁴ Oladele Taiwo, *An Introduction to West African Literature* (Lagos: Nigerprint, 1967), 133.
- ⁵ Abderrahmane Arab, *Politics and the Novel in Africa* (Alger: Offices des Publications Universitaires, 1982), 97.
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- ⁷ Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Great Britain: Routledge Ltd, 2005), 1419.
- ⁸ Richard K. Priebe 'Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood', in *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, ed. Stefan Helgesson, (Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam-New York, 2011), 10.
- ⁹ Devin M. Geary, 'Transnationalism and Identity: The Concept of Community in Ghanaian Literature and Contemporary Ghanaian Culture', (PhD diss., Bucknell University, 2012), 46.
- ¹⁰ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.

II. Method and Materials

The following chapter will present all the methodological elements and materials that will be applied in our study of childhood and initiation in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. The method section will contain summaries and explanations of the two theories that will be used in our analysis. The material section will provide the biographies of the two authors, Camara Laye and Francis Selormey, the summary of their novels *The African Child* (1954) and *The Narrow Path* (1966) respectively, as well as the historical backgrounds in which the novels have seen the light. The purpose of this chapter is to draw parallels between the lives of Camara Laye and Francis Selormey and the events narrated in their fictions. Besides, we will show the shared points between the historical backgrounds of Guinea and Ghana.

I. Methodological Considerations:

A. Summary of Arnold Van Gennep's Theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960)

Rites of passage as a theory owes its existence to Arnold Van Gennep and his work *The Rites of Passage* (1960) on which we will rely on in our study of initiation in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. In this book, Van Gennep introduces new ways of thinking about these rites that announce and mark the individual's passage from a given stage in life to another and provides us with a guide of the different cultural celebrations that accompany this act.

Van Gennep considers that transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next construct the reality of human existence. Man's life, according to him, is made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. These events and stages are done or performed through ceremonies which announce the passage from one defined position to the other.¹ The book discusses and classifies many types

of rites and refers to: the territorial passage, individuals and groups, pregnancy and childbirth, birth and childhood, initiation rites, betrothal and marriage, funerals and other types of rites of passage.

In the same work, Van Gennep devotes a whole chapter to the rites of passage; chapter VI provides us with a detailed explanation of these rites through challenging the previous ‘unacceptable general theories’² that linked initiation rites to the age of puberty in both boys and girls. He differentiates also between the physiological puberty and social puberty and argues that the physiological developments of puberty occur at different ages depending on cultures and races. He adds that these differences determine societies’ consideration of the age at which puberty occurs. This is what he refers to as ‘social puberty’; he also examines the different initiation ceremonies. Van Gennep considers that initiation rites differ from puberty rites, for this we must not confuse between these two categories of rites.³

He adds that the age at which boys are circumcised differs from one region to another. He illustrates his idea with the case of Algeria, Orthodox Moslems, and Morocco where the age of circumcision differs from one place to the other. Van Gennep criticizes some earliest works that have dealt with circumcision especially that of Andree. For him, those works have neglected an important point which is the fact that circumcision must be examined within the category of all practices of the same order since it cannot be understood in isolation. He considers that the act of cutting off, splitting or mutilating any part of the body may have a great effect on the personality of the individual that will be modified in a remarkable way.⁴

Van Gennep considers circumcision as one of the simplest practices in comparison with the other ones. He also adds that every type of mutilation is a way of differentiating a given group from their neighbors. He refers to totem groups and the ceremonies of passage

that allow an individual to enter these groups and explains the process of these ceremonies in several Australian tribes.⁵

Van Gennep has theorized the elements of rites of passage and classified them into different types through outlining the three elements of any rite.⁶ According to him, the rites of passage begin with separation from the previous environment, or a period of group segregation for initiates, known as the preliminal stage or rites of separation. During this phase, the initiate is separated from his or her previous environment and way of life. The second stage is that of transition from the old way of life into the new, known as the liminal phase. Van Gennep proposes the idea of “liminality” which is an important term in ritual theory that refers to the period when the initiate is on the verge of entering a new phase of life. The final step to a rite of passage is the post-liminal phase which consists of the incorporation into the community and into the new way of life with attached social status.⁷

This process of initiation or passage from one social status to another is found in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. Accordingly, the novels provide us with two different examples that illustrate the rite of initiation to manhood and Van Gennep's theory will help us for a further understanding and locating the three steps of the rite of passage explained earlier in the two novels. The ritual of circumcision that is considered a traditional rite is given a great importance in Laye's novel since it is the path which leads Laye to the world of men. In the same way, modern education referred to in Selormey's novel can be considered another form of rites of passage. For this, Van Gennep's theory will be of a great use in our study of childhood and initiation in the previously mentioned novels.

B. Summary of Stefan Helgesson's Theory *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011)

Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life (2011) was published in 2011 by Stefan Helgesson. It deals with the wide and varied phenomenon of exit in relation to the concepts of exile, displacement, suicide, endings, and beginning. The first part of this collection is devoted to Southern exit and concerned with literature and film from the Global South, mainly Africa.

Richard K. Priebe's chapter *Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood* included in the same book, represents the latter's view about some recent narratives of childhood in Africa that are framed by Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*. Priebe considers that these narratives of childhood are characterized by two kinds of exit: the exit from childhood and the exit from Africa. Similarly, Priebe studies a vast range of African literature from South Africa to Algeria.⁸

Accordingly, Priebe makes reference to Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953), an autobiographical novel that narrates according to him a simple story of growing up in Guinea. The adult narrator of the novel also makes us aware of another exit, an exit from the traditional oral world into which the young Laye was only partially initiated. Priebe considers that the implied hope at the end of the novel is that the multiple exits will ensure Laye's return to Africa that will be an entrance into an adult life where he can help to shape a new Africa. He adds that between the time Camara Laye wrote *L'Enfant noir* and when Beah wrote *A Long Way Gone* a profound shift is remarkable in the signification of exiting childhood and exiting Africa in African narratives of childhood of the past fifty years.⁹

Priebe considers that the concepts of childhood and exit are extremely context-dependant. He defined 'Childhood' as being used to refer the stage of the human development between

infancy and adulthood. The term 'exit' according to him is related to the passage and process of moving from one area to another. In narration, the term exit indicates that a given character is leaving one stage in life in addition to the way that leads the same character to that point of departure that implies a crossing into a new stage of life and it differs from the conclusion of a narrative. He notes also that narratives of childhood generally end with an exit but without any conclusion.¹⁰

In fact, Priebe's aim through his study is to look at the change in the experience of childhood and the exits from childhood that most recent narratives convey in relation to those that appeared previously. We find that in every case the narratives are as much about the state of the continent as they are about the specific situation of an individual. Depending on what he has already noted and his belief that childhood is a period that separates between the infant as being dependent and the adult as being relatively autonomous, Priebe considers that the exit from infancy requires both a certain level of cognitive awareness and biological development. He adds that the exit from childhood needs an advanced individual both cognitively and biologically in addition to the recognition of his culture as having the ability to contribute and to be an efficient member in his society. Then, he comes to the conclusion that all the African narratives of childhood represent political reflections on the future of the child, and whether he will succeed or fail to become the adult person. He assumes that the majority of these narratives can be considered as allegories that use child characters as symbols for their societies that are passing from a given situation to another, through trying to change the current state by finding an exit or a *huis clos*.¹¹

Thus, African narratives of childhood fall into three phases. Phase one includes childhood narratives published between the 1950s and the 1980s, they represent the classroom or Western education as being the only door to the exit from childhood. In these narratives, literacy is also represented as an important means to get rid of colonialism and to pass from

the traditional world into a modern one. The child therefore forms his adult identity and becomes a civilized African man or woman. In phase two (1980s- 1990s), the classroom maintains its important position, but the idea of education as the key to the future is questioned. Phase three narratives, especially those about child soldiers, are characterized by the presence of the gun and violence that dominate the narration and replace the classroom by becoming the only passage that will lead the child to adulthood.¹²

The focus on education and literacy in the phase-one childhood narratives shows an exit from childhood marked by an exit from the traditional, oral culture. The latter is depicted with nostalgia, like in *L'Enfant noir*.¹³ Most of the phase-one narratives of childhood are filled with the optimism of youth and the longing for the independence that the young feel as they approach their exit from childhood and enter into adulthood. There exist an implicit connection with the colonial status of Africa at the time; a parallel is drawn between the child's emergence from childhood into adulthood and his country's emergence from colonialism into independence.¹⁴

According to Priebe, Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* is an interesting childhood narrative that falls into the phase-one group. He considers that all African narratives of childhood are highly political, centering on countries as well as individuals.¹⁵ He considers also that the idea of exit in the early narratives of childhood makes them understood as allegories of hope in the emerging postcolonial landscape.¹⁶

Priebe notes that very few of the writers he has considered have a pessimistic view of the future of neither Africa nor of their childhood narratives.¹⁷ Likewise, these authors would not be publishing their works if they could not imagine an Africa to which they might return. Childhood, both real and imagined, is a phase of possibility, and collectively the African narratives of childhood allow consideration of a range of possibilities for Africa and those

who live there. Laye's narrative, along with all the other phase-one and phase-two narratives where the classroom is central, allows for an exit from childhood leading to a potentially productive outcome for the individual and society.¹⁸

II. Materials:

1. Biographical Elements:

A. The Biography of Camara Laye:

Camara Laye (1928–80) was a Guinean novelist who wrote in French. He was born in Kouroussa, Upper Guinea, in what was then French West Africa. Laye's first or given name is in fact Laye, and his family name is Camara, but he always referred to himself as "Camara Laye." He was born into a lineage of Malinke (or Mande) blacksmiths and goldsmiths, and during his childhood in Kouroussa and in his mother's birth village of Tindican, he absorbed the traditional and not yet heavily French influenced culture of his people. He attended both the Koranic and the local French elementary school in Kouroussa.¹⁹ As a child, he went through the traditional initiations of Malinké culture, including the ritual of Kondén Diara (the ceremony of lions) and ritual circumcision, references to which reappear in his first novel *L'Enfant noir* (*The African Child*). Indeed, the happy childhood described in *L'Enfant noir*, ignorant of the impact of European culture on African traditions, seems to have been much Laye's own.²⁰

At the age of fourteen, he was sent to the technical school, Ecole Georges Poiret, in Conakry. While in Conakry, he stayed with the family of his uncle, Mamadou Camara who had been educated in the French system contrary to Laye's parents who were illiterate. Through his uncle, he met his first wife, Marie Lorifo. In 1947, Laye was given a scholarship to pursue his studies in automotive mechanics in Paris after coming first in the final examinations for the Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle de Mécanicien.²¹

In 1947, at the age of nineteen, he traveled to Paris to continue his studies in mechanics, where he also worked at the Siruca automobile factory, in Les Halles food market, and took further course work in engineering and toward the *baccalauréat*. In 1953 he published his first novel, *L'Enfant noir* (*The African Child*, 1954). It is the autobiographical story of a Guinean boy's life from his earliest childhood in the village of Kouroussa through his development in Conakry until his departure for France. The book won the **Prix Charles Veillon** in 1954, and was followed by the very different *Le Regard du roi* (1954) (*The Radiance of the King*, 1956).²²

This second book is about a white man, Clarence, who seeks his fortune in Africa, but fails. He then embarks on a search for recognition by the African king. In 1956 Camara Laye returned to Africa, first to Dahomey (now Benin), then Gold Coast (now Ghana), and then to newly independent Guinea, where he held a series of government posts. In 1965 he left Guinea for Dakar, Senegal, due to political troubles, and never returned.²³

In 1966 he published his third novel, *Dramouss* (*A Dream of Africa*, 1968). It continues the autobiographical account of *L'Enfant noir*, but also contains a political critique of the corrupt Guinean regime. In 1978 Laye's fourth and final work appeared: *Le Maître de la parole—Kouma Lafôlô Kouma* (*The Guardian of the Word*, 1980). Camara Laye died in Dakar of a kidney infection in 1980.²⁴

The African Child is widely recognized as a landmark in contemporary African writing. It is widely taught, read, translated, and criticised in several languages. *Le Regard du roi* has attracted nearly as much critical attention— James Kirkup's recent English translation of *The Radiance of the King* includes an introduction by Toni Morrison. Though his life's literary output was small, Laye is an important pioneering figure in African literature in European language.²⁵

Through this brief survey of Camara Laye's biography and life, we notice the presence of many biographical elements in his novel *The African Child* that constitute the core of our research paper. Therefore, this autobiographical novel can be considered as a kind of fictionalization of Laye's real life, since we notice the presence of many shared elements such as his wife's name, Marie, which is also the name he has chosen to the protagonist Laye's beloved in the novel.

B. The Biography of Francis Selormey

Francis Selormey was a Ghanaian novelist who was born in a seaside village near Keta in what was then Gold Coast in 1927. He was educated at a Roman Catholic primary school in his home area, St. Augustine's College, Cape Coast, the University of Ghana, Legon, where he studied physical education, and in Germany.²⁶

Selormey was a chief physical education instructor at St. Francis Teacher Training College and later became a senior sports administrator in the Volta Region. He turned to writing initially as an avocation. In his autobiographical first novel, *The Narrow Path* (1966), a boy grows up to learn that his Christian father's harsh behavior toward him was a mark of his love.²⁷ He also wrote two film scripts: "*Towards a United Africa*" and "*The Great Lake*," about Ghana's Volta Lake. His patriotism and deep interest in African unity also influence some of his works.²⁸

In his novel, *The Narrow Path*, Francis Selormey narrates the traumatic experience of his childhood as a Ghanaian school boy caught controlled by a strict father, a headmaster of Catholic Mission Schools, who insists on Christian education and sets his family members on '**the narrow path**'.²⁹ Married, with six children, he spent the last years of his life as a farmer before his death in 1983.³⁰

The events and the details of Kofi's life described in *The Narrow Path*, a novel of personnel development, resembles in many ways those that characterize the life of Francis Selormey since it falls in the autobiographical genre that depends and centers on the author's personal life.

2. Summaries of the two Novels

A. Summary of Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954)

The African Child is Camara Laye's first novel. It was originally written in French under the title *L'Enfant noir* in 1953 and was translated into English as *The Dark Child* or *The African Child*, by James Kirkup in 1954. *The African Child* is an autobiographical and highly nostalgic novel that describes the lamented African past and outlines the conflict between African traditions and Western culture imposed by colonization.

The novel opens with a scene of a small child, of about six years, playing peacefully round his father's hut. In this respect, the fiction describes the life and growing up of an African child in Guinea, West Africa. The book is an autobiography that portrays a vision of Islamic and ancient African community in the pre colonial era, a time when traditions are given a great importance and determine every aspect of their life.

The little Laye narrates about various events and persons surrounding him as he grows up to manhood in a Malinke tribe. Both his parents are endowed with supernatural powers incarnated in the presence of the guiding spirits of their race represented by the black snake that inspires his father, a blacksmith and goldsmith, and helps him in his work and life. His mother from her side also has inherited her father's totem of the crocodile that makes her respected by all people.

Laye grows up between Tindican and Kouroussa. Tindican is his mother's home village where he learns more about traditions and Rice Harvest and enjoys graze animals and life in the fields. The protagonist, Laye, frequents both a Muslim and French schools which are the first step of his initiation. Then, he describes the second phase of his initiation, the rite of circumcision, a key ritual practiced in many parts of Africa signifying the passage into manhood which is performed in two ceremonies, a public and a secret one.

The boy provides us with a detailed description of this traditional practice; he describes the long journey along the forest and the night they spent with the famous Kondén Diara and then the village feast and celebration of this rite. After that, he narrates the manner in which he undergoes circumcision that transforms him into a grown man. This event will allow the reborn Laye to begin a new phase of his life, to mark his separation from his previous life and social status and to become an independent man with a personal hut.

The novel sheds the light also on exile and depicts two different kinds of departure: Laye's journey to Conakry, Guinea's capital, to pursue a course in technical studies and to stay with his uncle Mamadou's family. The second type of departure lies in the long journey out of Guinea and Africa, when he gets a scholarship for advanced studies in France, a journey that makes him feel torn apart with the pain of separation from his country, his family and his girl friend Marie.

B. Summary of Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966)

The Narrow Path is the first novel of the Ghanaian novelist Francis Selormey. It was published in 1966 and acted as a document of life in postcolonial Ghana. The novel is considered as rather semi-autobiographical; it is a Bildungsroman of a Ghanaian school boy, Kofi, who undergoes a series of adventures and hardships that will lead to his maturity and

growth. The fiction also makes reference to the African postcolonial life and society and highlights the presence of the colonial school and its role in the child's initiation into manhood and in people's life in general.

The novel recounts the childhood of Kofi as he attends a series of Catholic schools following his strict headmaster father, a loving but hardworking and severe man. Through giving an image of a young African boy caught between traditional life and the new world opening up before him; Selormey makes reference to the tensions and the cultural clash that reigned during the post colonial era to shape the facet of the new independent Ghana.

The narration follows Kofi's emergence from childhood to adulthood crossing the narrow path traced by his father. Selormey's story of the child's formation and development is narrated by a small boy and begins with introducing his family starting from his grandfather, an illiterate wealthy fisherman, his literate parents, a strict headmaster father and a kind ex-teacher mother. The novel records Kofi's initiation that is achieved through modern education and training in the house of a master where the boy acquires the necessary skills that will allow him to become a man. Francis Selormey stresses the presence of the classroom and the colonial and Christian education that affect Kofi and the life of his family that is characterized by a series of journeys from town to town responding to the father's nature of work.

The narrative contains sixteen chapters and an epilogue which tells Kofi's adventures at home and in school. It provides us with a vivid description of Ghanaian customs and traditions and centers also on the harshness and righteousness of Kofi's father, an important figure who contributes to the boy's initiation and passage into manhood. Likewise, the novel ends with Kofi's recognition that behind his father's strictness and cruelty there has always been a sort of passion and love.

3. Historical Background of the Novels

A. Historical Background of Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954)

Any literary work, being the outcome of the historical background of its period of publication, reflects a powerful depiction of the prominent events which marked that particular era. Since writers are considered as the voice of nations, one can presume that they could not let the prevailing circumstances and situations without being recorded or revealed to the simple citizen. Being written by a Guinean writer, the study of the historical background of Laye's novel *L'Enfant noir* (1953) stresses the necessity of a backward study of Guinean history in order to understand the historical events that marked the period of the novel's publication.

In the past, Guinea was part of the Mali Empire, which covered a large part of western Africa between the 13th and 15th centuries. Guinean contacts with the European world began from the mid-1400s when the Portuguese and other European traders settled Guinea's coastal region. By 1891, the country eventually became a French colony.³¹ The French claimed the coast of present-day Guinea in 1890 and named it French Guinea (*Guinée française*) in 1895. Neighboring colonies also bore the name "Guinea." The British colony of Sierra Leone to the south was sometimes identified as British Guinea, and to the north, Portugal's colony was named Portuguese Guinea.³²

The end of French West Africa began with Guinea. It was granted independence in 1958 under the leadership of Sekou Touré who rejected a French offer of membership in a commonwealth and demanded total independence. The French reacted by cutting off financial and technical aid, and there was a massive flight of capital.³³ After Guinea gained independence, the first president, Sekou Touré, named the country the People's Revolutionary Republic of Guinea. The second president, Lansana Conté, changed the official name to the

Republic of Guinea. The capital city is Conakry, and the country often is referred to as Guinea-Conakry to distinguish it from other nation-states with the same name.³⁴

When reading Laye's *The African Child* however, we notice the absence of any reference to the political situation in the novel that is mainly based on celebrating and praising the Guinean culture and traditions. At least since the division of Africa in the late nineteenth century, the French policy towards its colonies and attitudes about the importance of promoting the French culture and continuing relations between the colonies and France were reflected in many ways mainly in literature. Before almost any literature was written by West Africans in French, there had been a colonial literature, with a moral and political purpose.³⁵

After the war, independence movements were appearing in Africa and particularly in French Indochina. Students from French West Africa and Cameroon, such as Mongo Beti, criticized the French colonial policy and advocated independence. Others, like Laye, saw the advantages of remaining within the French Union.³⁶ With the war in Indochina, and the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the end of the French Union was already in sight. It was suspect to many conservative leaders, especially when movements toward independence were supported by the Communist Party during the Cold War. Marie- Hélène Lefauchaux, who was a firm supporter of the French Union, played an essential role in the publication of *L'Enfant noir*.³⁷

Literature in French from the colonies slowly began to prosper after the war. Many French intellectuals were interested in Africa at this time and the first Francophone African poets published in France were well received. Senghor, for example published two volumes in the 1940's.³⁸ Apart from poetry, not much creative writing by Africans was published before *L'Enfant noir*. In 1947, 'Présence Africaine' was founded in Paris to promote African

culture. The group's journal, *Présence africaine*, did not publish many novels during its early years until the publication of *L'Enfant noir* in 1953.³⁹

In fact, the French encouraged African writers, because writing books was seen as proof of the success of the colonial system of education. The interest the French government showed toward Laye was part of the French government's policy of promoting Africans who would believe in the French Union and not ask for political independence.⁴⁰ During the period between 1950 and 1960 and continuing after independence in 1960, France continued its cultural colonization. The Ministry of France Overseas had several areas for technical and cultural cooperation, including education, literacy programs, training of professional staff, and schoolbooks. French schoolchildren were indoctrinated with the mentality of the French Union through such publications as *La Belle Histoire de l'Union Française* that includes many pictures of exotic scenes.⁴¹

L'Enfant noir gives a favorable image of the life of native people of Guinea and shows the benefits of colonization in French West Africa. The character Laye in *L'Enfant noir* is grateful for the help he had received from the colonial administration in being given a scholarship to France. There is no mention in the novel of the presence of forced labor or of the French colonial policy during the war. Yet, Laye never received the support given to other African writers in the 1960's because Guinea gained its independence in 1958.⁴²

The French government was interested in *L'Enfant noir* because it was not an attack on France. The novel offered a portrait of a traditional and mysterious African culture, which was implicitly contrasted with the modern world that Africans would learn from France. It was a portrait of the "African soul" that was acceptable to the French but unacceptable to African militants striving in the 1950's for independence from France.⁴³ Thus, through publishing his first novel, *The African Child*, Camara Laye can be considered as one of the

West African writers influenced by Senghor's philosophy of negritude and fight for blackness. Through his novel, Laye attempted to revive the African culture and restore to his people their dignity and respect by calling attention to the African presence.⁴⁴

B. Historical Background of Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966)

The Ghanaian novelist Francis Selormey wrote his first novel, *The Narrow Path* (1966), which is published in post-colonial Ghana and put in our hands a document of life prevailing in that country at that time. However, through reading the novel, one can easily remark the absence of historical events and of any mention of the post-colonial disillusionment or political corruption that characterized the period in Ghana along with all newly independent African countries. Except for the presence of colonial education, there was no trace of colonialism. Accordingly, for a better understanding of the circumstances in which the novel has seen the light, it will be necessary to trace it back to the major events that marked the history of Ghana.

Present-day Ghana has been inhabited since at least 4000 BC, although little evidence remains of its early societies. Trading networks grew stimulated the development of Akan kingdoms in the center and south of present-day Ghana. The most powerful of these was that of the Ashanti, who by the 18th century had conquered most of the other kingdoms and taken control of trade routes to the coast. This brought them into contact, and often conflict, with the coastal Fanti, Ga and Ewe people-and with European traders.⁴⁵

The Portuguese arrived in the late 15th century, initially interested by the trade in gold and ivory. However, with the establishment of plantations in the Americas during the 16th century, slaves rapidly replaced gold as the principal export of the region. The fortunes to be earned in the slave trade attracted the Dutch, British and Danes in the late 16th century. The Akan kingdoms grew rich. By the time slavery was outlawed in the early 19th century, the British

had gained a dominant position on the coast. The Ashanti continued their attempt to expand their territory and protect their interests and the coastal Ga, Ewe and Fanti peoples came to rely on the British for protection. Conflict between the British and the Ashanti sparked a series of wars that increased in 1874 with the sacking of Kumasi, the Ashanti capital. However, in 1896 the British occupied Kumasi and established a protectorate over Ashantiland, which was expanded in 1901 to include the northern territories.⁴⁶

In the late 1920s a number of political parties that aimed at regaining African independence sprang up. However, these parties were identified with the intelligentsia and failed to recognise the demands and aspirations of most of the population. In response, Kwame Nkrumah, secretary-general of the country's leading political party, the United Gold Coast Convention, broke away in 1949 to form his own party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). With the slogan 'Self Government Now', it quickly became the voice of the masses.⁴⁷

A year later, Nkrumah called for a national strike. Seeking to contain the situation, the British responded by imprisoning him. While he was there, the CPP won the general election of 1951 and he was released to become leader of the government. Ghana finally gained its independence in March 1957; it was the first West African country to do so. At independence, Nkrumah cast aside the name Gold Cost in favour of that of the first great empire in West Africa, Ghana, famed for wealth and gold. By getting independence in 1957, the Gold Cost was also the world's leading producer of manganese. It had the best schools and the best civil service in West Africa, a cadre of enlightened lawyers and a thriving press that were the result of years of colonization.⁴⁸

In this way, we have exposed all the methodological and material elements that will be used in our research. Our reader will be able to understand more our study that consists of

comparing Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, in the sake of solving the problematic of the child's growth and initiation into manhood.

From all what has been said, it is deduced that the writings of Camara Laye and Francis Selormey mirror the culture and the social life in colonial and post-colonial Guinea and Ghana. We have noticed also the presence of shared bibliographical elements between the authors' real lives and that of their two child protagonists; Laye and Kofi, a factor that makes us classify them in the autobiographical genre.

Notes and References

¹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 65.

³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Stefan Helgesson, *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam-New York, 2011), x-xi.

⁹ Richard K. Priebe 'Some thoughts on the idea of Exit in Recent African narratives of childhood', in *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, ed. Stefan Helgesson, (Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam-New York, 2011), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ Douglas Killam and Alicia L. Kerfoot, *Student encyclopedia of African literature* (USA: Greenwood Press, 2008), 77.

²⁰ Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne, *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (UK: Routledge, 1998), 275.

²¹ Adele King, *Rereading Camara Laye* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 20.

²² Killam and Kerfoot, *Student encyclopedia of African literature*, 77.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 78.

²⁶ Ibid., 282.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 282-283.

²⁹ Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Great Britain: Routledge Ltd, 2005), 1419.

³⁰ Viewed 1 April 2014, < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Selormey>.

³¹ Viewed 25 July 2014, < <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/guinea/history#ixzz3D7KnOWnR>>.

³² Viewed 25 July 2014, < <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guinea.html>>.

³³ Viewed 15 August 2014, < <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/guinea/history#ixzz3D7KnOWnR>>.

³⁴ Viewed 15 August 2014, < <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guinea.html>>.

³⁵ Adele King, *Rereading Camara Laye* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁴ Oladele Taiwo, *An Introduction to West African Literature* (Lagos: Nigerprint, 1967), 49.

⁴⁵ *West Africa* (USA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2009), 325.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

III. Results

Our research paper has dealt with the themes of childhood and initiation in Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966). Through analysing the two works, we have tried to explore the issues of childhood and initiation in relation to the radical changes that marked Africa's passage from colonialism to independence. To reach our purpose, we have applied Arnold Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011). We have also mentioned the historical contexts of the two works, their summaries and the lives of their authors. For a better understanding of the issues of childhood and initiation, we have divided our discussion into two main chapters. The first one contains four sections which study the novels as postcolonial autobiographies and deal with childhood trauma, the processes of initiation presented in the two novels in addition to the problem of culture and the main factors and figures that influence the child's passage from childhood to maturity on which we have applied the two theories mentioned above.

In the first chapter, we have studied the two fictions as postcolonial autobiographies that deal with childhood trauma. We have come to the conclusion that the depiction of childhood trauma in both autobiographical narratives is related to the presence of the colonizer and colonial education with a slight difference in the case of Selormey's Kofi whose trauma is related to the father who represents Western culture and education. Secondly, we have compared the processes of initiation in the two novels: traditional rites of passage and modern education. Through our analysis, we have deduced that the process of initiation represented in Laye's *The African Child* differs from the one used in Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. This divergence is mainly due to the periods of publication of the two fictions; Laye's novel was published in colonial times and evokes nostalgia of traditional life, whereas

Selormey's narration was published after independence and centers on modern education. The two prose fictions stand for the child's initiation into adulthood and represent two different processes through which maturity is achieved.

In the second chapter, we have explored the different factors and figures that influence the child's identity in his passage to manhood. This chapter has allowed us to pose the problem of the clash of cultures and to compare the identities of the two child protagonists, Camara Laye's Laye and Francis Selormey's Kofi through exposing a range of factors and figures that have a great role in the construction of their identities. In this respect, we have begun with highlighting the effect of the clash between traditions and modernity that is resulted from colonialism. Afterwards, we have moved to the role of the family organization and the father and mother figures in the construction of the child's identity.

This section can be closed by saying that this comparative study between *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path* has allowed us to find the shared points and the differences between the two works. However, the temporal distance separating *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path* and the difference in their periods of publication have stressed the existence of many divergences between the two fictions mainly at the level of their protagonists' initiation into manhood.

Chapter One:

Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*: Postcolonial Autobiography, Childhood Trauma, the Traditional Rites of passage and Modern Education

Introduction:

The present chapter will present the visions of the Guinean author Camara Laye and the Ghanaian Francis Selormey towards the issues of childhood and initiation. It will show how the image of the child is used as a symbol of growth and development of the individual and his passage from infancy, ignorance and dependency to adulthood, maturity and autonomy on the one hand and as a symbol of rebirth and maturation of a nation and its passage from colonization and domination to freedom and independence on the other hand. In this respect, the chapter will deal with the processes of initiation presented in Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966).

The African Child was produced in the colonial period, whereas *The Narrow Path* was published in the postcolonial period. The two novels foreground Africa's emergence from colonization to independence and the reconstruction of the native African identity from Guinean and Ghanaian perspectives. Thus, they will help us to unveil the child's problematic in African literature and to comprehend the manner in which it is used as a symbol of growth and development.

In fact the aim of this study is to deal with the change in the experience of childhood, the different exits from it and the variations that may be remarked between the recent narratives of childhood and the previous ones. It is noticeable that in every case the narratives are both

about the state of the continent and about the situation of the individual himself. Most of these narratives represent the child as a figure for an entire society in transition towards an exit from the actual state and show an implicit connection with the colonial status of Africa.

This transition or passage is represented differently in the two novels depending on the authors' education and the historical background of their countries. As we have mentioned in our previous chapter the two have frequented the missionary school and this colonial education enables them to the mastery of the language of the colonizer. This chapter will allow a better understanding of the African child's growth, initiation and emergence from childhood to manhood. It is divided into four sections: The first one will study the two novels as postcolonial autobiographies; the second one will deal with childhood trauma, whereas the third and the fourth ones will examine the different processes of initiation through which the child passes to achieve adulthood and maturity according to Camara Laye and Francis Selormey. Our analysis will unveil the aim of the writers' use of the child and initiation motifs in their novels and their relation with the status of Africa.

To elaborate on this, we will rely on Arnold Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and Stefan Helgesson's book *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011) in addition to some other theories and critiques. This method requires approaching the history of Guinea and Ghana and referring to the importance of the child as being a targeted subject for colonial intentions, and as being a symbol for a nation's rebirth and renewal. By focusing on the child, we will discuss the issue of initiation through the views of Camara Laye and Francis Selormey and in its wide sense of passage and transition from a given state or situation to another.

Section One: Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* as Postcolonial Autobiographies

This section will study Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) as Postcolonial Autobiographies. It will link the post colonial theory and the autobiographical genre in an attempt to explain the authors' intention through narrating their personal lives. Then, we will explain how the autobiographical stories and the authors' lives and experiences are used by postcolonial writers to attain different objectives that will be revealed in the following lines.

Before starting our analysis, it will be necessary to explain what is meant by postcolonial autobiography. David Huddart in his book *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography* (2008) studies the use of the autobiographical genre in relation to the postcolonial theory. Huddart refers to Janet Harbord's view that "*the writing of the self involves an engagement with the various cultural resources available [...] such conventions do not repress the potential text of the 'self' but it constitutes its possibilities.*"¹ Another very important point is that postcolonial theory is filled with what the author calls autobiographical moments. He says "*autobiographical moments have become very common in postcolonial theory [...] the question of what functions such moments are designed to perform [...] that such moments can be related to identity politics.*"² Huddart's work is an approach to the analysis of the role of autobiography in postcolonial theory.

It seems necessary to define also what is meant by the term postcolonialism. For this, we refer to Charles Forsdick's and David Murphy's *A Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (2003). In his chapter included in the same book and entitled *Seeds of Postcolonialism: Black Slavery and Cultural Difference to 1800* Roger Little considers that the term presupposes a viewpoint prompted by the end of colonialism. It is assumed that the

only texts that deserve attention are those written after that time and particularly those by colonized peoples, as in the negritude movement or even after the independence of former colonies. This is to distinguish postcolonialism as a critical stance from post-colonialism (with a hyphen) as a historical era.³

In her book *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (2007), C. L. Innes points that many postcolonial writers have drawn on their childhood experience sometimes as a means of conveying precolonial culture, a relatively innocent world preceding the impact of foreign educational system, sometimes conveying the vulnerability and the exposure of a child to the dictates of colonial power, and at the same time offering a perspective which challenges the premises and beliefs that are taken for granted in the hegemonic culture accepted by adult readers. In these ways postcolonial autobiography is always read differently from autobiographies produced in metropolitan context. For whereas metropolitan autobiographies are more typically works which seek to explore and assert the writer's individualism, postcolonial autobiographies are often written to portray the author as a representative of his cultural group, as in the case of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir (Dark Child)* (1953), or as the embodiment of a new nation's struggle to come into being and its establishment of a cultural and ideological identity.⁴

To begin with Camara Laye, he wrote his novel *The African Child* in the colonial period and narrates scenes from his happy childhood and the traditional and harmonious tribal life. The narrative deals with Laye's process of maturation and records his emergence from boyhood to manhood. Richard K. Priebe considers in his chapter included in Stefan Helgesson's book *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011), that Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* appeared in 1953 is an autobiographical novel in which we find a fairly simple story of growing up in Guinea.⁵

In his book *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition* (1994), Kenneth W. Harrow says that Laye talks about himself, about the one who was presently narrating his story, and about the one he had been. This familiar and personal approach was totally new to African literature.⁶ This means that Camara Laye through his novel *The African Child* was one of the first African writers who introduced the autobiographical genre to the African literature. In narrating his personal childhood Laye uses the personal pronoun “I” as the novel opens with a scene of a young boy of five or six years. He asserts, “*I was a little boy playing round my father’s hut. How old would I have been at that time? I cannot remember exactly. I still must have been very young: five, may be six years old.*”⁷ This is what Harrow calls the “point of departure” that shows the protagonist’s entry onto the scene.⁸

The novel centers on the life of a young boy, Laye, and as it is life writing, the narrator speaks of himself and tells his personal childhood and process of maturation. Harrow considers that in these narratives, the narrative point of view is usually focalized through the protagonist’s subjectivity, so that the coordinates of reality-time and space- are given relative to the protagonist’s subjectivity.⁹ Thus, everything in the fiction is related to the child protagonist and involves his presence and the portrayal of his feelings of happiness, sadness, and nostalgia.

In fact, Laye’s novel was published in 1953, when Guinea was still a French colony. For this, Laye’s intention through narrating his personal life that presents a model of the life of a whole community is mainly to celebrate the African culture and to respond to the Western racist portrayal of black Africans in their writings. Mildred Mortimer stresses this idea in his book *Journeys through the French African Novel* (1990) in which he examines Laye’s novella as a response to Conrad and, by extension, as a response to other colonialist works. For him, Laye wishes to show that the culture ignored and/ or denigrated by colonialists,

labeled “pagan” or “primitive”, is in fact *different* from but not inferior to European culture.¹⁰ He adds that this idyllic childhood was the theme that brought the work under attack by African writers such as Mongo Béti, who criticized Camara Laye in his article “Afrique noire, littérature rose” and accused him of ignoring the political realities of the colonial period.¹¹ The article then is criticizing Laye’s idyllic description of childhood through giving a pink literature and image of innocence, peace and happiness to the colonized black and benighted Africa.

Laye grows up between Tindican and Kouroussa and frequented both a Muslim and French schools which are the first step of the protagonist’s initiation. Then, the novel refers to exile and depicts two different kinds of departure: Laye’s journey to Conakry to pursue his studies and to stay with his uncle Mamadou’s family. The second type of departure is the long journey out of Africa, when he gets a scholarship for advanced studies in France, a journey that separates him from his country, his family and his girl friend Marie. All these autobiographical elements are found in the life of the author, Camara Laye, himself.

Francis Selormey’s *The Narrow Path* is also an autobiographical fiction that chronicles the life and the misadventures of a young Ghanaian child, Kofi, growing up in Ghana. Kofi is the narrator of Selormey’s story, he starts the narration by his family’s genealogy introducing his grandfather and the life he maintains, Kofi gives us a detailed account of his family starting from his grandfather’s family till his parents’ encounter, their marriage and his birth. He says, “*From this time onwards, Kofi gradually grew stronger. His mother and father were proud and happy [...] And so, in love and trust, I thrived.*”¹² Then, this sentence announces the coming events and introduces us to a coming of age fiction published in post colonial times and centers on the tensions that define the life of a young African boy caught between traditional life and the new world.

The events of the novel centers on the boy, Kofi, and give us an image of an adventurous child. Thus, Kofi grew more and more troublesome and becomes the source of the majority of his parents' quarrels and this has shaped the bad relationship that links him with his father. In this respect Kofi says, "*At this time, I grew more and more troublesome and began to be impertinent. [...] This was a great source of quarreling between my parents,*"¹³ We notice also the use of the pronoun "I" that characterizes the autobiographical writings as the case in Laye's fiction. Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly considers in their *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English (2005)* that "*The Narrow Path, a novel of personnel development [...] He restricts the views of an adult narrator, relinquishing the narrative thread to a child focalizer, Kofi, who provides the reader with insights into the young boy's world. Selormey's skilful handling of the first-person retrospective narration can be compared with the narrative mode of Camara Laye's L'Enfant noir (1953).*"¹⁴ It narrates the influential events that affected child narrator's life and the construction of his adult identity. The boy asserts,

I do not look back with any pleasure on the year when I was nine. I suppose that it must have held many pleasant days, but the incidents that remain vividly in my mind are all dark ones. I became very sick. I do not know what the sickness was. [...] my parents were no longer trying to persuade the spirits to return my life to me, but only to give me a peaceful death.¹⁵

Contrary to Laye's fiction that celebrates the African culture, Selormey's was written in postcolonial times and thus its main purpose is to denounce the colonizer's process of assimilation. Through giving an image of a young African boy caught between traditional life and the new world opening up before him; Selormey wants to attract the readers' attention to the tensions and the cultural clash that reigned during the post colonial era to shape the facet of the new independent Ghana.

Section Two: Childhood Trauma in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

The following section deals with childhood trauma in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. Being autobiographical narratives of childhood and initiation, the two fictions give voice to the child and narrate his experiences and concentrate on the events that mark his memory and affect his personality as he grows up. Regardless of the cause of his trauma, the traumatized child becomes one of the major concerns of African literature and authors. In this respect, we will study Laye's and Kofi's traumatic experiences that characterized their passage into adulthood and the construction of the adult self.

In her book *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (2010), Kate Douglas explains the role of trauma and memory in the autobiographical narratives of childhood. She links autobiography studies and that of childhood to explore the ways in which one particular cultural site, in this case autobiography, has constructed childhood- has contested its meanings, histories, and representations.¹⁶ In other words, this book helps us to understand how childhood is constructed through life writing forms. Kate Douglas recognizes the fact of the existence of different schools of thought that study the advantages and disadvantages of speaking out about trauma. She considers that traumatic autobiographies have long been recognized as therapeutic "silence-breakers" for individuals who have suffered pain or distress. Douglas refers mainly to Martin Alcoff's and Gray- Rosendale's views who believe that traumatic remembering has recently been repositioned from "the individual psyche to the social sphere, where it rightfully belongs."¹⁷ This means that writing his childhood traumatic experience can help the autobiographer adult in breaking the borders of silence and then healing and getting rid of his psychological shock and trauma. Kate

Douglas adds that autobiographers of childhood in interpreting their childhood experiences are influenced by their contemporary social and political contexts.¹⁸

Before analyzing the effects of trauma on the growth and the development of Camara Laye's and Francis Selormey's protagonists, it is necessary to give a brief definition of the concept. In her book *Memory of Childhood Trauma: A Clinician's Guide to the Literature* (1996), Susan L. Reviere considers that the veracity and accuracy of childhood traumatic memory is an issue of much controversy, calling up new clinical and theoretical questions about memory processing, including fresh reflexions on both the psychological and cognitive mechanisms involved and the nature of historical versus reconstructive articulation personal history.¹⁹ For her, childhood traumatic memory is an issue that caused disagreement among clinicians and theorists and raised a range of questions about memory processing and psychological and cognitive mechanisms.

Susan L. Reviere provides definitions of trauma according to different clinicians. Sigmund Freud defines it as "*any impression which the nervous system has difficulty in dealing with by means of associative thinking or by motor reaction.*"²⁰ He goes further describing trauma as "*a situation that presents the mind with a stimulus too powerful to be dealt with in the normal way.*"²¹ Pierre Janet similarly conceptualizes and describes as traumatic "*any experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to take adaptive or effective action.*"²² Bonanno adds that "*traumatic experience defies a child's ability to understand, assimilate, and if accommodation poses a threat too great, memory for traumatic events may be impaired.*"²³ From these definitions, we understand that trauma is a situation or an experience from which the individual cannot escape or control and that has psychological and physical effects on his behavior and personality.

Our concern in this section is to investigate the impact of trauma on the child in both novels and to deal with the challenge the child has in surpassing this trauma and to expose impacts of childhood trauma on adulthood and the construction of identity. To begin with, Camara Laye's *The African Child* which is an autobiographical novel that narrates his personal experience and childhood and celebrates the tribal life in Guinea. According to Albert S. Gérard, in all autobiographical or all semi-autobiographical stories, the school or Western education is the first element that threatens the balance of the African child and leads to his trauma and frustration. He claims in his book *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1986) that,

Both Camara's first and his latest novels are illustrative of an important tendency in the African novel: the writer's need to come to terms with his own personal experience, [...]L'Enfant noir was the first and remains the most accomplished prose version of the idyllic view which, in blending the innocent happiness of childhood with the alleged harmony of village life, was one of the central tenets of negritude.²⁴

According to him then, the African novel stresses the importance of the author's own personal experience in his growth and formation of identity. In this way, Laye's *L'Enfant noir* emphasizes the principles and beliefs of negritude.

Gérard adds,

In all autobiographical or all semi-autobiographical stories, the school is the alien element that first upsets the balance of the African child, ushering in a new, in many respects traumatic and frustrating, phase. Western education and literacy are a cause for divisiveness, as the child's nostalgia for the past combines with the newly acquired admiration for Western civilization.²⁵

From the two quotations, we understand that Albert S. Gérard considers that in Laye's novel, Western education is the main cause of the trauma and frustration of the African child who is put between two different worlds, the fact that results in a fragmented identity.

In Laye's fiction, the boy, Laye, gradually moves from his African traditions to the Western education and this makes him fall in a dilemma between the two cultures. In *The African Child*, Laye's trauma is related to the presence of two different and opposite worlds: the foreign Western world to which the child is introduced through colonial education and the native African one to which he belongs. According to the above mentioned definition of trauma, when the child is exposed to the Western education, he loses his ability to understand or assimilate this new culture. This traumatic experience in which the child is put, leads to a split identity. The African boy tries to resist the colonizer's culture that imposes itself in Africa and this attempt to resist reflects the African struggle against Europe. Laye then lives in confusion, he is torn between his native Islamic and Malinké customs and the French way of life. Laye says, "*And I was no longer sure whether I ought to continue to attend the school or whether I ought to remain in the workshop: I felt unutterably confused*"²⁶ this shows the child's dilemma and the mental struggle that leads to his trauma.

Camara Laye highlights this point through showing the child's nostalgia for the past combined with his admiration for the newly acquired Western civilization, a factor that will affect Laye's behavior and personality as he grows up to manhood. From the one hand, Laye is eager to learn more about this new world "*Once in school, [...] Everything we learned was strange and unexpected; it was as if we were learning about life on another planet; and we never grew tired of listening.*"²⁷ On the other hand, the child's little brain cannot receive or understand this new and strange culture, since its main objective is assimilation, the child becomes a toy, a victim for colonial intentions and this was the main cause of his trauma, and loss of balance and stability. Laye says,

My life did not lie here ... nor in my father's forge, either. Then what sort of life was I going to lead? And I would tremble at the thought of the unknown existence ahead of me. Wouldn't it have been simpler to follow in my father's footsteps? 'School ... school ...' [...] Did I like school all that much?²⁸

For Francis Selormey, Kofi's trauma is resulted from his father's harshness and cruelty. The father's figure in the novel is an embodiment of the colonial education. *The Narrow Path* gives us an image of an authoritarian father, a strict headmaster formed in the British missionary schools. Through this character, Selormey wants to emphasize the continuity of the assimilation process even in post colonial times. Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly consider in their *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (2005) that "Selormey in his autobiographical novel *The Narrow Path* (1966), recounts the traumatic experience of his childhood and especially the pain inflicted by his father, Nani, headteacher of Catholic mission schools, who battered his family members to set them on 'the narrow path'." ²⁹

The type of trauma presented by Francis Selormey is different from that portrayed by Camara Laye. Laye's trauma is related to the presence of Western education and culture, whereas Kofi's is caused by his father, Nani, who brutalizes him and wants to bring him up in the new ways. Nani restricts the child's freedom through drawing the path he must follow. Kofi says, "But my father was still firm [...]. He gave me no opportunity to stray from the narrow path he had laid down for me." ³⁰ Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly add "Kofi gives an intimately piercing and unvarnished account of how his father brutalized him. He does not understand his upbringing, nor is he judgmental towards his father. The child focalizer does not speculate about the contradictions in his society under the impress of European values." ³¹ This means that Kofi concentrates on narrating his traumatic experience and the physical pain and psychological shock caused by him neglecting the contradictions caused by the presence of the European culture in his society.

Kofi breaks silence and recounts how his father brutalizes and traumatizes him, he narrates, "He slapped my face, on both sides, till my head rocked dizzily backwards and

forwards. [...] I fought and twisted, while he rained blows all over my body."³² This cruel treatment from his father's side has developed a feeling of hatred and indifference in Kofi's heart who feels humiliated and wants to kill his father. He says, "*Then black hatred came to fill my heart, and I decided to kill my father. [...] Then I thought I was dying, and I was glad, and got pleasure out of the thought of my father's remorse, [...]*"³³

This citation describes the boy's psychological state as he constructs a dark conception of the father and associates him with fear and anxiousness. Kofi asserts, "*Just then my father emerged from his sitting-room, and looked at me in his stern way. At once all my confidence evaporated. I was furious with him for making me so. After all, I was doing nothing wrong. Why did I feel guilty just because my father looked at me.*"³⁴ This constructs a great gap between the father and his son resulting in a sort of indifference and apathy that characterized their relationship. The child affirms, "*That was the last time he beat me, and from that time he began to be an old man, and before I was twenty-four he was dead. I never achieved that father-and-son relationship with him that I so dearly wanted.*"³⁵

From all what has been said, we conclude that the portrayal of childhood trauma in both autobiographical narratives is related to the presence of the colonizer and colonial education with a slight difference in the case of Selormey's Kofi whose trauma is related to the father who represents Western culture and education. Our study has shown the importance of recording one's traumatic experience in getting rid of that psychological shock and loss of stability. It has explained how Camara Laye and Francis Selormey have used the traumatized child to represent cultural issues and problems and to expose the lasting impacts of childhood trauma on adulthood. Furthermore, both novels use the image of the traumatized child to represent the theme of the quest for identity in Africa. The authors focus on how childhood trauma affects the adult and stress the search for identity and children conflict with their own identities and their resistance to the imposed changes. The relationship between personal and

cultural traumas is emphasized in the African narratives of childhood because cultural tragedies can lead to personal trauma.

Section Three: Traditional Rites of Passage in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

Camara Laye and Francis Selormey's texts give us a survey of Guinea and Ghana socially, culturally and historically. In Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966), the child protagonists stand for a whole continent in transition and movement. The fictions are narratives of childhood and initiation, because they chronicle the life and the adventures of two boys and follow their formation and education through narrating their development and passage from one defined stage of life to another, from childhood to adulthood.

The idea of passage announces an exit and the end of an old social situation and the beginning of a new one. The end of childhood refers to the beginning of adulthood that are two periods of human life bridged through initiation since maturity is achieved via initiation that can be considered as an exit from childhood. This idea of exit is developed by Stefan Helgesson in his *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011) that deals with the wide and varied phenomenon of exit in relation to other concepts like exile, displacement, suicide, endings and beginning. In Richard K. Priebe's chapter included in the same book and entitled "*Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood*", he considers that the concepts of childhood and exit are extremely context-dependant and provides us with definitions of the two concepts.

According to Priebe then,

‘Childhood’ is here employed to cover the stage of the human development between infancy and adulthood.” whereas “‘exit’ in general has to do with the passage and process of moving from one area to another.[...] a character’s leaving one stage in life as well as the process that gets the character to that point of departure that implies a crossing into a new stage of life.³⁶

It is worth mentioning also that these passages, initiations and exits that characterize the human life are performed through ceremonies. The processes of these ceremonies vary from one region to another depending on the social group and its culture. For instance, Laye’s *The African Child* (1954) and Selormey’s *The Narrow Path* (1966) are set in different African tribes and published in different periods of time. Laye’s narration was published in colonial times and evokes nostalgia of traditional life. Contrary to it, Selormey’s fiction was published in the post- colonial period and centers on modern education. Depending on this, children’s initiation will naturally differ in the two novels and will be one of the main points that make them different. In this respect, our analysis will deal with the reflection of both authors about childhood and initiation and will focus on the study of traditional rites of passage and on modern education in Camara Laye’s *The African Child* and Francis Selormey’s *The Narrow Path*.

If we start by Camara Laye, we find that most details of his own life are reflected in the story of the small boy Laye. The French language is used by the author as a means of expression that stresses once again the influence of the French colonizer on Laye himself and on Guinea as a whole. The demands of the colonial period during which Camara Laye’s *The African Child* was published and the nature of the social and tribal environment where its events took place had been elements of crucial importance in the novel. It is highly nostalgic celebrating the African and the Guinean traditions ignoring all the political realities of colonialism.

Laye's *The African Child*, doesn't make any reference to the colonial situation in Guinea. The novel is mainly based on celebrating and praising the Guinean culture and traditions. At least since the division of Africa in the late nineteenth century, literature turned its attention to the French policy towards its colonies and attitudes about the importance of promoting the French culture and continuing relations between the colonies and France.³⁷

The fiction is written in the colonizer's language and tells us about the African daily life and the different African cultural celebrations. This is not done randomly, but in purpose since Laye's novel is considered by many critics one of the classics of African literature that is addressed both to African and European readers in an attempt to celebrate the African culture and contradict to the racist colonialist texts. This idea is developed in Mildred Mortimer's *Journeys through the French African Novel* (1990), in which he considers that Laye's novel is a challenge to the colonialist novelist's premise that Africa is uncivilized and without culture.

The novel proves that the indigenous oral culture has become a literate one, with the writer assuming the language of the colonizer and establishing the African writer as the authentic voice for his society. Laye writes for Africans and Europeans, in contrast to the colonialist novel, which is written exclusively for Europeans.³⁸ It centers on the themes of childhood and initiation and the traditional rites of passage mainly the passage from childhood to manhood that is achieved through circumcision. On this matter Mortimer adds that Laye chooses to present autobiographical episodes that refer to his individual maturation process and to his coming of age in Malinké society, a story of Laye the individual who is part of a larger community.³⁹

In our study of the rites of passage in Camara Laye's *The African Child*, we rely on Arnold Van Gennep's theory *The Rites of Passage* (1960). In this theory, van Gennep

introduces a new perception of the rites of passage and a guide of the different cultural celebrations. Kathleen Garces-Foley in her *Death and Religion in a Changing World* (2006) defines the rites of passage both as a description and a theory. She writes,

As a description, rites of passage refer to many different sorts of ritual events through which an individual is given a new status within his or her society. Boys become men and girls women. They may pass from being single to being married and then to being parents. They may be initiated into various societies and a few may become priests through rites of ordination, just as students undergo a graduation ceremony. Many other rites also occur to mark the change from an old to a new place in society.⁴⁰

She adds,

Rites of passage as a theory was first proposed by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957), who argued that all rites of status change involve a threefold process that is best described in terms of its middle or liminal phase, framed by pre- and postliminal elements. Liminal comes from the Latin word *Limen*, “threshold” that which we must pass over or under as we move from one space to another.⁴¹

The process of initiation or passage from one social status to another explained in Van Gennep’s theory and his three steps of the rite of passage pointed earlier will help us for a better understanding of the process of initiation in Camara Laye’s *The African Child*. The ritual of circumcision in the novel is given a great importance since it is the path which will lead the protagonist, Laye, to the world of men. For this, Laye describes his circumcision starting from the separation stage to the incorporation stage. He announces the beginning of the ritual of circumcision by saying,

I was growing up, the time had come for me to join the society of the uninitiated. This rather mysterious society_ and at the age, it was very mysterious to me though not very secret_ contained all the young boys, all the uncircumcised of twelve, thirteen or fourteen years of age, and it was run by our elders, whom we called the big ‘Kondéns’.⁴²

This passage refers to the first step of the rite of passage; it represents Laye’s joining to the society of the uninitiated that stands for the first stage of initiation rites which lies in the separation stage. These words explain the boy’s separation from his previous environment,

that of his society and his mother. The boys were taken to the sacred place where the initiation takes place every year ensuring both their separation from their families and the mysteriousness of the ceremony. Next to this, the boys leave the town to spend the night with Kondén Diara the terrible bogeyman or the lion who roars and devours little boys. Laye affirms, *“That terrible bogeyman, that ‘lion that eats up little boys.’ And here was Kondén Diara [...] This night was to be the night of Kondén Diara [...] Kondén Diara would begin to roar”*⁴³ He adds *“As soon as our elders had made sure that no intruder was present to disturb the mysteriousness of the ceremony, we left the town behind and entered the bush by a path which leads to a sacred place where each year the initiation takes place.”*⁴⁴

The roaring suddenly stops in the same way it has begun. At this stage the boys are educated, instructed in tribal law, and are taught the songs of uncircumcised and the recitation of myths. Laye transmits to us his experience by saying,

A new command rang out, and we sat down in front of the fire. Now our elders begin our initiation; all night long they will teach us the songs of the uncircumcised; and we must remain quite still, repeating the words after them, singing the melody after them; there we sit, as if we were in school again, attentive, and very obedient.⁴⁵

The lion ceremony remains a secret for the boys who ignore what goes on during it. And after having taken part in it for several times, the secret is revealed announcing their final initiation into manhood. Laye explains,

It is only after having taken part several times in the lion ceremony that we begin vaguely to understand what goes on but we still keep it in secret: we only talk about what we have guessed to those of our companions who have shared the same experience; and even so the real secret is not revealed to us until the day of our final initiation into manhood.⁴⁶

In fact the lion ceremony is performed to help the boys and train them in hardships and prepare them to become men. Laye asserts, *“If the ceremony of the lions has the character of a game, if it is for the most part pure mystification, yet it has one important feature: it is a test, a training in hardship, a rite; the prelude to tribal rite,”*⁴⁷

After that, comes the second step in the rite of passage which is the liminal or the transition stage that will allow the child to abandon his childhood and become a man. Laye announces the beginning of this stage of transition,

But I was still a child: I was considered not to have reached the age of discretion yet! Among my companions, most of whom were circumcised; I was still looked upon as a child. [...] Whatever the reason, I have now reached the age at which I, too, must be reborn, at which I, too, must abandon my childhood and innocence, and become a man. It was not without misgivings that I approached this transition from childhood to manhood.⁴⁸

Circumcision is a rite that has a great importance in the African society; it is considered as a new birth and a new life. The ceremony is practiced in two phases, the public and the secret one. The public ceremony is attended by the whole town and everybody participates and rejoices with the initiates. It is a great festival, a very noisy one and full of activities and dance which last for several days, whereas the essential ceremony remains a secret. Laye asserts,

The public ceremony differs completely from the secret one. The public ceremony is one of rejoicing. It is the occasion of a great festival, a very noisy festival in which the whole town participates and which lasts several days. And it is almost as if by dint of noise and activity and dancing and merry-making people were trying to make us forget our anxiety about the coming ordeal, and its very real physical pain.⁴⁹

Laye and his companions know perfectly that they were going to be hurt, but they are ready for this pain since the temptation is greater and it was the only passage leading to man's estate. He says,

I wanted to be born, to be born again. I knew perfectly well that I was going to be hurt, but I wanted to be a man and it seemed to me that nothing could be too painful if, by enduring it, I was to come to a man's estate. My companions felt the same; like myself they were prepared to pay for it with their blood. [...] Why should we be spared? Life itself would spring from the shedding of our blood.⁵⁰

The circumcision rite is a transition from childhood to adulthood, from individual to social values. It is to introduce new men to their social group. Lay says, "*Nevertheless, a few*

men followed us out. The rest awaited in their huts, the ceremonial shots that would announce to all that one more man, one more Malinke, had been born."⁵¹ After the dancing ceremony, the boys' heads would be shaved and they would be gathered in another hut. Laye narrates, *"On this final day, we were all worked into a strange kind of excitement. The men who perform this initiation, after having shaved our heads, gathered us together in a hut built apart from the compound. This hut, which was very spacious, would henceforth be our dwelling place;"*⁵² In addition to the fact of isolating the boys who are to be circumcised from their previous environment, they are also isolated from their mothers' world since the latter are not allowed to speak to them. Laye says, *"We were going to dance, and the others were going to watch. At present we were not allowed to mix with other people; our mothers could not even speak to us, let alone touch us."*⁵³

When the dance ends, the boys did not go back to their hut, they would be taken to the bush where they would be circumcised. Laye describes that crucial moment in their passage to manhood,

I felt something, like a bum, and I closed my eyes for a fraction of a second. I do not think I cried out. No, I cannot have cried out; I certainly did not have time to do that either. When I opened my eyes, the operator was bent over my neighbor. In a few seconds the dozen or so boys there were that year became men: the operator made me pass from one state to the other, with an indescribable rapidity.[...] As soon as the operation is over, the guns were fired. Our mothers, our relatives in the compounds heard the reports.⁵⁴

As described by Van Gennep, after all these ceremonies comes the final step to a rite of passage that is the post-liminal phase. This stage consists of the incorporation into the community and into the new way of life with attached social status. For this, Laye and his companions are left in their hut after being circumcised and received lessons which may be useful in their new lives. Laye says,

The teaching we received at the bush, far from all prying eyes, [...] These lessons, the same as had been taught to all those who had gone before us, confined themselves to outlining the sort of conduct befitting a man: to be

absolutely straightforward, to cultivate all the virtues that go to make an honest man, to fulfil our duties towards God, towards our parents, our superiors and our neighbour. And we had to tell nothing of what we learned, either to women or to the uninitiated; neither had we to reveal any of the secret rites of circumcision.⁵⁵

After that, the boys are incorporated in their society again; they were no longer regarded as boys, but as men. At this stage, Laye is allowed to see his mother,

By the third week, I was allowed to see my mother. [...] and that after my joy in seeing her I suddenly felt a strange depression. Ought I to attribute this emotional instability to the transformation that had been worked in me? When I had left my mother, I was still a child. Now ... [...] I was a man! Yes, I was a grown man. And now this manhood had already begun to stand between my mother and myself.⁵⁶

After a long period of living separately from their environment, the boys have become so indifferent to the life they lived before. So, the boys need time to settle down and get rid of this indifference. Laye affirms,

We had been so cut off from the world, we had become so different from what we had been, even though a mere month had elapsed between our childhood and our entry into manhood; we had become indifferent to all that we had been before, that I no longer knew quite where I was. 'Time', I thought, 'time will help us to settle down again.'⁵⁷

Finally, the boys completely recover and return back to their parents to maintain a new life that started from living in a personal hut. Laye describes his feelings as he opens the door of his new hut,

I opened the door of the hut; my clothes were laid out on the bed. I went up to it and took them in my hands one by one, then put them carefully back; they were men's clothes. Yes, the hut was opposite my mother's, I was still within earshot of her voice, but the clothes on the bed were men's clothes. I was a man!⁵⁸

In addition to the rites of passage, we may find in *The African Child* many other cultural celebrations that justify the way of life of the African people. A life which is riddled with magical and supernatural beliefs which have a great influence on the way people lead their lives. For example, the novel narrates about totemism, the tom-tom and rice harvest and

many other celebrations that construct the daily life of Africans. This idea is stressed by Oladele Taiwo in his book *An Introduction to West African Literature* (1967). He says speaking about Laye's novel: "His book is a praise-song of Guinea culture, a celebration of its rich society woven into a vivid yet subtle tapestry. It is a romantic theme, nostalgic and may be idealistic, but certainly real enough."⁵⁹

Like Camara Laye, Francis Selormey uses the colonizer's language to narrate a Ghanaian childhood and its experience with colonialism. Published in the Post-colonial period, Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) marks the absence of traditional rites of passage like circumcision. Contrary to Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) however, Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* is more concerned with a modern process of initiation. The child protagonist's, Kofi's, initiation into manhood is achieved through modern education and training in the house of a master.

The novel is written in English and stresses the presence of missionary schools and the colonies dependency on the colonizer even after independence. In his text, Selormey gives the image of a Ghanaian school boy who attends a series of Catholic schools following his strict headmaster father who was formed in the colonial school. The book then mirrors the reality of Ghana and presents Selormey's vision and position towards the process of initiation that is central to the novel.

The three steps of the rite of passage explained in Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* and applied earlier on Camara Laye's fiction can be adapted to Selormey's novel. Van Gennep's theory can be used to explain the modern initiation of the protagonist Kofi that is performed through sending the boy to the house of a master to be trained and initiated and to mark his passage to the following and advanced social stage in his life. The first step of this rite is that of separation.

At this separation stage, Kofi also experiences the pain of separation from his previous environment and quitted his family to his Master's house where his initiation will take place. He affirms announcing the beginning of this experience, *"When I was twelve I left my father's house and went to live with a master.[...] The worst thing of all to me was that the family would be broken up."*⁶⁰ Like Laye who was separated from his family during his circumcision, Kofi also spends a period of his life away from home to acquire some skills that will allow him to gain the status of a grown and mature person. At this stage, Kofi is educated and taught how to behave like an educated man.

In the house of his master and the place where his initiation takes place, Kofi has found another boy, Kosi, who accompanies him in his training period. Kofi says, *"The boy came to me and looked at me. He was handsome and smart and confident. I felt inferior and uncomfortable under his gaze."*⁶¹ This feeling of inferiority felt by Kofi in Kosi's presence is due to the fact that the latter has been in his master's house long before his arrival. Then, Kosi has already begun his initiation and training for this, he helps Kofi in many situations through explaining to him the house's organization. As an illustration for this point, Kofi says repeating his master's words as he asks Kosi to show him everything he should know: *"Now Kosi, [...] 'You will look after Kofi. Show him everything he should know. He will eat and sleep with you.'"**⁶²

After that, comes the second step of the boy's initiation that is referred to as the transition stage that allows the child to pass into another stage of his life. Kofi penetrates a new environment where he learns and acquires many skills. He says, *"Now I was no longer a son in the house. I was a servant. Although life was pleasant and orderly, and punishments rare [...], yet, I found it very difficult to settle down and suffered agonies from home sickness."*⁶³ In his master's house Kofi performs many activities like baking with his master's mother, Daga, and cleaning shoes. He asserts, *"Then I remembered that I have been told that*

*the old lady was a baker. [...] Daga came and placed before each of us a large lump of dough and she stayed beside me and taught me to knead it.”*⁶⁴ He adds, “*As we left the baking-room [...] When we crossed the yard and went back into the house our master was coming out of his room. I was given his shoes to clean.*”⁶⁵ After a period of time, Kofi becomes accustomed to this new mood of life. He asserts, “*By the middle of the year I had settled down to the orderly routine of life in my master’s house. The round of household work, school, [...] and for some months I fell into no trouble.*”⁶⁶

Finally, the last step to a rite of passage consists of the post-liminal phase that is done through incorporating the initiated boy into the new way of life. Kofi joins his family again after being initiated and he describes his arrival home from his master’s house: “*I knew that I have learned how to behave in a considerate way, and to be helpful in the house, and I was determined to let my mother see the results of my training.*”⁶⁷ He adds, “*I felt grown-up, almost a different person of the silly little boy who had gone home last year;*”⁶⁸ these citations shows Kofi’s growth and his passage to another step of his life.

As we have said before, and according to Kathleen Garces-Foley, graduation ceremonies are also part of rites of passage since they are a kind of advancement to a higher class. She writes, “*[...] Boys [...] may be initiated into various societies and a few may become priests through rites of ordination, just as students undergo a graduation ceremony. Many other rites also occur to mark the change from an old to a new place in society.*”⁶⁹

Therefore, we may consider Kofi’s ceremony of graduation as an important point in his passage from childhood to manhood. Kofi describes that ceremony and the way he wears his kente for the first time over one shoulder as the men do; this idea represents Kofi’s passage to manhood. He narrates,

One by one our names were called and we walked through the crowded congregation to receive our certificates. My parents had lent me a kente, and

for the first time I wore it over one shoulder as the men do, instead of tied at the back of the neck as the boys do. [...] I came back clutching and stumbling through the smiles of my family and friends,⁷⁰

Francis Selormey uses the image of the child and narrates his childhood in English to attract the attention of the European reader to his work and to show that African children are the target of the colonizer in his colonial mission and his process of assimilation.

Section Four: Education in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis

Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

Education is given a great importance in both novels emphasizing its weighty role in the child's construction of identity and initiation to adulthood and manhood. The colonizer was aware of the importance of this category –children- for this, he used it as a means to attack and erase the identity of Africans. In fact, the French encouraged African writers, because writing books was seen as proof of the success of the colonial system of education.⁷¹

During the period between 1950 and 1960 and continuing after independence in 1960, France continued its cultural colonization. The Ministry of France Overseas had several areas for technical and cultural cooperation, including education, literacy programs, training of professional staff, and schoolbooks. French schoolchildren were indoctrinated with the mentality of the French Union through such publications as *La Belle Histoire de l'Union Française* that includes many pictures of exotic scenes.⁷²

The African Child aims at giving a favorable picture of the life of the indigenous people of Guinea, of showing life in French West Africa in terms of the benefits of colonization. The character Laye in *The African Child* was grateful for the help he had received from the colonial administration in being given a scholarship to France. Throughout his life, however, he was convinced that colonization had been beneficial and that the French

have brought many good things to West Africa. Yet, Laye never received the support given to other African writers in the 1960's because Guinea gained its independence in 1958.⁷³

Camara Laye and Francis Selormey through their fictions describe the two protagonists Laye and Kofi's processes of education. In Laye's *The African Child*, education goes hand in hand with the traditional rite, circumcision, in paving Laye's passage towards the world of the grown ups. The protagonist Laye considers education as a unique way to become a successful man. For this, he has not followed his illiterate father's and kinsmen's path and drew a new and a more civilized one for himself. This idea is stressed by his uncle's words when Laye wants to participate in Rice harvest and rice cutting. He tells him, "*Now it's not your job to cut rice. I shouldn't think it will ever be: later on...*"⁷⁴ This sentence seems to foretell the child's future and pushes him to think about the prosperous future he will have one day. He says talking to himself "*My life did not lie here ... nor in my father's forge, either. Then what sort of life was I going to lead? And I would tremble at the thought of the unknown existence ahead of me. Wouldn't it have been simpler to follow in my father's footsteps? 'School ... school ...' [...] Did I like school all that much?*"⁷⁵

This desire to trace a different and a better future for himself makes Laye endure and support all sorts of punishment and ordeals. He asserts, "*Our love of knowledge had to be ineradicable to survive such ordeals*"⁷⁶ This love of knowledge drives Laye's attention to school that interests him more and more since he considers it his ticket to get out of Africa, so he accepts to leave his home-land in order to ensure himself a more advanced education. Laye says, "*and, naturally we could hardly wait for our schooling to be over, for the day when we would receive our famous proficiency certificates that would proclaim to the world that we were 'educated'.*"⁷⁷ This quote emphasizes the position given to education in Laye's life, a place about which his father says, "*I knew quite well that one day you would leave us. I knew it the very first day you set foot in school. I watched you studying with such eagerness, such*

passionate eagerness! ... Yes, since that day, I knew how it would be: and gradually I resigned myself to it."⁷⁸

In fact in Laye's novel, education is not restricted to the role of school only; the family and the society also have their shares in the child's education. The father and the mother teach the little boy and introduce him to the natural world through passing to him the old generation's torch represented by the totem of the family and all the customs, beliefs and morals handed over from one generation to the other. The father also considers education a weapon that can help his people to fight ignorance, thus for him educated persons like his son will be needed in their land. He says speaking about Laye's departure to France to complete his studies,

Each one follows his own destiny, my son. Men can do nothing to change it. This opportunity is within our reach: you must seize it. You've already seized one, seize this one too, make use 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 here like you ... Maybe you'll not be gone too long!⁷⁹

He adds instructing his son, "*Beware of ever deceiving anyone, [...] Be upright in thought and deed. And God shall be with you.*"⁸⁰ On the matter of traditions and customs, we may find many passages in the novel that represent the father's interest in passing his knowledge to his son. This is best illustrated when the father explains to Laye why he told him about the black snake, the guiding spirit of their race and how he has to act in order to inherit it. He says,

I have told you all these things, little one, because you are my son, the eldest of my son, and because I have nothing to hide from you. There is a certain form of behavior to observe, and certain ways of acting in order that the guiding spirit of our race may approach you also. [...] if you desire to inherit it in your turn, you will have to conduct yourself in the selfsame manner; from now on, it will be necessary for you to be more and more in my company.⁸¹

The British colonizer constructed missionary schools everywhere in Ghana. Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) was published after independence, it mirrors the post

colonial situation and the remaining fragments of colonization incarnated in the system of education. The novel stresses Africa's dependency on the west and depicts the existence of colonial schools even after independence. Selormey gives a great importance to modern education which plays a crucial role in the development and growth of the protagonist, Kofi, to manhood.

Everything in the novel centers on education; starting from the head- master father and the ex-teacher mother and the presence of the missionary schools and education which allow the presence of priests, teachers and interpreters. Kofi says, "*Another thing that helped me was my association with the missionary priests. In each mission station, the missionaries established schools,*"⁸² Kofi is relating his education to the missionary school to which he owes his success.

The education that the boy received from his father, Nani, is too strict and firm. He as a father and a teacher has drawn for the child the path he must follow, but the path is too narrow restricting Kofi's freedom and strangling the boy. Kofi says, "*But my father was still firm on one point. I was never allowed to eat in another house. I had to report back to him at every meal-time and at bed-time. He gave me no opportunity to stray from the narrow path he had laid down for me.*"⁸³

Accordingly, Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly consider in their *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English (2005)* that Selormey in his autobiographical novel *The Narrow Path (1966)*, recounts the traumatic experience of his childhood and especially the pain inflicted by his father, Nani, headteacher of Catholic mission schools, who battered his family members to set them on 'the narrow path'.⁸⁴

Meenakshi Bharat states in his *The Ultimate Colony: The Child in Postcolonial Fiction (2003)* that the formative education that the child character receives in the novel of

Selormey, is presented centrally, highlighting its importance. Selormey's *The Narrow Path* describes the early education of the child protagonist in remarkable detail, making us aware of the common practices related to education prevalent in Africa. He goes on adding that, "*The practice of sending children to the house of a teacher as servants was apparently a popular method of getting them educated. This was a viable option for those who either could not afford to send their child to school, or those who wanted him disciplined, or even for those who lived in areas where there was no good school.*"⁸⁵ This citation refers to the new method of educating children, a typically Ghanaian method. This method according to Meenakshi Bharat, is so popular and lies in sending children to the house of a teacher as servants to be educated. This was also a beneficial practice for both the parents who have no financial capacities to send their children to school, and for the child who will be disciplined.

Concerning his admission into school, Kofi says, "*When I was six, my father was transferred to the primary school in our home town, [...] It was decided that I should now begin my schooling officially,*"⁸⁶ He then narrates an event that he experienced as a pupil; it was an experience which he remembered vividly, the day when he was praised by the teacher for his good work in front of all the eyes of those who witnessed his punishment under the hands of his father in many times. He declares, "*Here, in the place that had held so much terror for me, I was actually being praised. The delightful experience was too wonderful for me to bear. I burst into tears, [...]*"⁸⁷

Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* tells us about the education of its protagonist Kofi from the beginning to the end. Kofi himself was sent to Keta to study there and to be trained in the house of a master. He affirms, "*When I was twelve I left my father's house and went to live with a master.*"⁸⁸ He adds as he returned from his master's house, "*I knew that I had learned how to behave in a considerate way, and to be helpful in the house, and I was*

determined to let my mother see the results of training.”⁸⁹ His parents in return are also responsible of the training of young boys and girls as it is the custom in Africa. He says,

Our family, in the European sense, was now five in number. But in the African sense our family was much bigger. It is our custom to put into the care of a married couple young boys and girls to be trained. These boys and girls are not exactly servants, for they do not receive wages, and the whole household lives together as a family, but they do much of the work of the house and wait on the master and mistress. The master, in return, clothes and feeds them and provides them with everything they need, and the mistress teaches the girls domestic skills. Many of the boys, and some of the girls, are sent to school by their masters. They return to their parents when their education is finished, and the boys are ready to earn their living, and the girls are ready for marriage.⁹⁰

In the novel, Kofi describes the process of colonial and missionary education and stresses its role in one’s initiation and growth, in the sense that it is the only way to become a successful man. He says,

Our certificates were presented to us one Sunday morning at the end of Mass. School and church were part of one another in those days. The Mission built and financed the schools, and trained and directed the teachers. The schools existed firstly to provide and instruct converts for the church, and secondly to provide teachers, and clerks in government offices.⁹¹

He adds, “*The curriculum was designed to those ends. But to us it was ‘education’ and the only way to become a ‘big man’ in the new world.*”⁹² For kofi, education is the key to success and becoming a great man, it is the only arm one can possess to gain recognition in this new brave world.

In this chapter we have examined the themes of childhood and initiation through comparing the two prose fictions, Camara Laye’s *The African Child* and Francis Selormey’s *The Narrow Path*. We have studied the relationship between the autobiographical novels, postcolonial theory and the childhood trauma as first and second steps towards comparing the two literary works. In the third and fourth sections, we have dealt with the processes of

initiation in both novels. This chapter can be closed by saying that Laye's and Selormey's novels show the African writer's engagement in the claim and celebration of the African black identity. The image of the child is used in both novels to show the child's maturation in relation to a whole society that passes from a given stage to another.

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Chapter Two:

Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow*

Path: The Clash of Cultures and the Role of the Family

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, we have shown the aim of the writers' use of the child and initiation motifs in their novels and how this can be related to the status of Africa. Stress has been put on the processes of initiation presented by the writers. We have seen that the two fictions differ depending on their periods of publication. The two show the divergences that may exist between the previous African narratives of childhood and the new ones. They emphasize also the presence of the colonial education and its influence on African childhood even in post-colonial times.

In the present chapter, we will analyze Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* in relation to the historical context in which the two are produced. In this respect, we will direct our study to the effects of colonialism on indigenous people. We will shed the light similarly on the problems of culture, identity and self defining that were the major problems of the colonial period that spread even during the decolonizing era.

We will argue that there exists a common theme in the texts of Camara Laye and Francis Selormey, it is the clash of cultures. The problem of culture in colonial and post-colonial times resulted from the presence of two cultures that lead to the clash between the foreign Western culture and the native African one. This clash between modernity and traditions leads to identity crisis and puts the subjects, the protagonists Laye and Kofi, in dilemma whether to assimilate the new culture or to maintain their own and traditional ones.

Our main concern is to show the presence of two cultures and to compare the identities of the two child protagonists, Camara Laye's Laye and Francis Selormey's Kofi through exposing a range of factors and figures that have a great role in the construction of their identities. Then, we will see how each child has grown up to adulthood and constructed a personal adult identity and life with highlighting the effects that colonialism and the clash of cultures may have on his process of growth. Therefore, our study will explore the role of the child's family, culture, traditions and education in his trip to manhood and the construction of his adult's identity. Our analysis of the two narratives will rely on Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011) and Richard K. Priebe's chapter *Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood*, included in the same book.

Section One: The Clash of Cultures and the Construction of the Adult Identity in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

Camara Laye and Francis Selormey join the themes of culture and identity with childhood and initiation to underline the effects of colonialism on Africa and Africans. These themes are treated through narrating events and personal experiences that the child protagonists pass through in their passage to manhood. The two authors pose the problem of culture and the passage from the traditional world to the modern one through narrating the experience of childhood and initiation into adulthood. They focus on the construction of one's identity and self defining in a nation that is in transition from colonialism to independence.

The events of Camara Laye's and Francis Selormey's stories took place in West Africa, exactly in Guinea and Ghana. Being located in the same geographical area and having been important zones that suffered from Western colonialism, the two countries have

witnessed nearly the same historical metamorphoses that later on shaped every aspect of life. As a result, literature has developed and made use of the Western languages to construct the African identity against the background of colonial history.

In this way, the autobiographical novel emerged, centering mainly on facts and events told by adults who are sharing with us their childhood's memories and voyaging through memory, breaking all the borders of time and space. They bridge childhood and manhood, innocence and maturity, and the past and the present. Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) fall in this category of novels that treat the issues of childhood and initiation in relation to the African culture and identity.

Richard K. Priebe argues in his chapter *Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood* included in Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011) that all African narratives of childhood represent political reflections on how the child would become, or fail to become, the adult man or woman.¹ Priebe classifies these African narratives of childhood into three phases, the first phase includes childhood narratives that was published between the 1950s and the 1980s including Laye's and Selormey's novels, in which the classroom, Western education or literacy were the key to the exit from childhood as well as from colonialism and the traditional world into an adult identity as a modern African in a modern African state.² He adds, "*The focus on education and literacy in the phase-one childhood narratives shows an exit from childhood marked by an exit from traditional, oral culture.*"³ This reinforces the point that the formation of the future adult identity is the main concern of these narratives.

To begin with, *The African Child* (1954) demonstrates the African search for an identity in colonial times. In the novel, the boy, Laye, is the narrator and the actor of his own story narrating an individual childhood or past which stands for a collective childhood or for the

past of a whole African nation. Laye's first novel is an autobiographical story of a young Guinean child growing up in Guinea till his departure to study in France. The narrator-protagonist is a child that moves gradually from his African culture and traditions to a Westernized culture and education. The result is a split subject, caught between two cultures. In this respect, Priebe asserts that

The theme of the child moving between two or more cultural worlds and into a new world of hybridity has been central to the African narratives of childhood even in the phase- one narratives. The troublesome aspects of this condition were for the most part mitigated by the promise of education and literacy,⁴

The novel was written while Camara Laye was abroad, for this the narration is full of nostalgia for his family, his native country and the past golden moments. Through reading the novel we notice that the small Laye is putting us in an African and typically Guinean environment as he comments on various events and customs that he did not understand when they were happening as he was a kid. In this respect the author says,

But what exactly was a 'guiding spirit'? What were these guiding spirits that I encountered almost everywhere, forbidding one thing, commanding another to be done? I could not understand it at all, though their presences around me as I grew to manhood.⁵

The presence of two cultures and the clash between traditions and modernity that is resulted from colonialism is one of the important points highlighted by Camara Laye in *The African Child*. This problem has greatly affected the identity and the growth of the child protagonist Laye. It has also led to the identity crisis presented in the novel through the in between position and the confusion that characterize the character of the protagonist. Kenneth Harrow notes in his book *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of A Tradition*, discussing this problem in Laye's novel, "*The European impact on African culture is highlighted in L'Enfant noir through Laye's dilemma over choosing to complete his education rather than become a goldsmith like his father*"⁶

The author tells us about Laye's dilemma and confusion that make him torn between becoming a goldsmith like his father or completing his education and thus constructing a huge gap between his father and him. In this context, Laye says, "*And I was no longer sure whether I ought to continue to attend the school or whether I ought to remain in the workshop: I felt unutterably confused.*"⁷ This idea is stressed once again in Laye's thoughts about his future, and his dilemma whether to follow in his father's footsteps or to make his own and new path. He says talking to himself,

My life did not lie here ... nor in my father's forge, either. Then what sort of life was I going to lead? And I would tremble at the thought of the unknown existence ahead of me. Wouldn't it have been simpler to follow in my father's footsteps? 'School ... school ...' [...] Did I like school all that much?⁸

In fact, by his exit from Africa and quitting his home land, Laye doesn't only quit a country or a geographical area, but a whole heritage of culture and traditions, marking not only a physical detachment, but also a moral and cultural one. It is remarkable that the protagonist's childhood represents a gradual detachment and departure from his mother's hut, his father's forge and from Africa as a whole. This is well illustrated in Laye's words when speaking about the significance of some customs that remain a secret for him, because he has left Africa before growing up enough to become interested in knowing the explanation of such matters. He asserts, "*But at that time I was not old enough or curious enough to ask my elders and betters, and when finally I wanted to do so, I had left Africa behind.*"⁹

This detachment then has constructed a huge gap between two worlds: the traditional and the modern one, Africa and Europe. Similarly, it has separated the two worlds of childhood with all its senses of innocence and that of adulthood with all its senses of maturity. It has made an irretrievable detachment between two social states. It began with his circumcision and initiation into manhood which makes him abandon his innocence, and his

installation in a personal hut that can be considered as an announcement of the beginning of a new phase in his life.

The previous point is also highlighted when reporting Laye's confusion and dilemma whether to seize the golden opportunity presented between his hands and go to France for advanced studies. Laye says about this matter, "*My Uncle Mamadou told me that it was a unique opportunity.*"¹⁰ This contradicts with the demand and the will of his mother who wanted him to stay with her and who was crying to him, "*You won't leave me alone, will you? Tell me you won't leave me alone.*"¹¹

Regardless of all these events that precedes his departure, Laye has carried on his plan, followed his dream and made an important and huge step towards a prosperous future, that is to become a civilized and educated man. However, his departure was so sad and the parting was very hard and marks him forever to a point that he is not willing to remember that day no more. Laye describes the day of his departure,

That was how my departure was arranged. And so one day I stepped on a plane for France. Oh! It was a terrible parting! I do not like to think of it. I can still hear my mother's wailing, I can still see my father, unable to hide his tears, I can still see my sisters, my brothers ... No, I do not like to remember that parting. It was as if I was being torn apart.¹²

In fact, this exit from Africa certainly influences Laye's identity and widens the gap existing between his traditional native culture and the modern foreign one he is going to discover in France. The idea of exit and departure is also present in Selormey's novel, but contrary to Laye, Kofi has just left to another town within the same country. He endures the pain of separation from his parents and accepts to move to Conakry just to ensure himself a better level of education and a better future. Laye describes his feelings as he walks to the train's station, saying, "*I was indeed on the way to school, but I was alone; I was already*

alone ... There had never been so many of us, but never had I felt so alone. Although it was perhaps worst for me, we all shared the pain of parting."¹³

It is worth mentioning that the idea of exit is connected to that of abandoning one's own culture and identity and it is one of the points that characterize all the narratives of childhood which always finish with a departure as it is explained by Richard K. Priebe in Stefan Helgesson's *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life* (2011). "*The focus on education and literacy in the phase-one childhood narratives shows an exit from childhood marked by an exit from traditional, oral culture.*"¹⁴ He also draws a parallel between the child's passage from childhood to adulthood and his country's passage from being colonized to independence. He asserts,

And almost always there is an implicit if not overt connection with the colonial status of Africa at the time, a suggested parallel between the child's emergence from childhood into adulthood and his or her country's emergence from colonial subjugation into an independent nation-state.¹⁵

The author attracts our attention to the dichotomy of tradition and modernity and refers to the French colonial policy stressing its process of assimilation. In Charles Forsdick's and David Murphy's *A Francophone Postcolonial Studies* (2003), Murphy considers Laye's fiction as one of the novels written in the dying stages of French colonialism and deals with culture and identity in post independence Africa and emphasizes the 'tradition/modernity' model. He asserts:

The African Child (1959 [1953]) by the Guinean author Camara Laye is a nostalgic evocation of the African village, written from the perspective of a young, educated African who has made the trip from village to town to colonial metropolis. Compensation for the loss of the 'traditional' world of the African village is found in the writing of the (French) literary text."¹⁶

For David Murphy, authors use their French literary novels to compensate for their lost traditional world.

The theme of the clash of cultures is also present in Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966). The fiction belongs to the autobiographical genre and chronicles the life and the misadventures of a young Ghanaian child, Kofi, growing up in Ghana. Just as the case in Laye's *The African Child*, the presence of two cultures and the clash between traditions and modernity is resulted from the British colonialism which is one of the important points discussed in the novel. It is a coming of age story published in post colonial times and centers on the tensions that define the life of a young African boy caught between traditional life and the new world. Priebe classifies the novel in the same category as Laye's *The African Child*,

Francis Selormey, a Ghanaian writer mentioned earlier, published an interesting childhood narrative in 1967, *The Narrow Path*, a novel that falls into the phase-one group."¹⁷ he notes, "I noted that the idea of exit in the early narratives of childhood prompt a reading of these narratives as allegories of hope in the emerging postcolonial landscape. The story of the child going off to school provided a framework where the old authority of both the traditional oral culture and the colonial order could be critiqued while showing a positive new order based on authority of the emerging literate African."¹⁸

He adds speaking about the narratives of childhood:

Childhood, both real and imagined, is a phase of possibility, and collectively the African narratives of childhood allow consideration of a range of possibilities for Africa and those who live there. Laye's narrative, along with all the other phase-one and phase-two narratives where the classroom is central, allows for an exit from childhood leading to a potentially productive outcome for the individual and society.¹⁹

Francis Selormey uses the issues of childhood and initiation to point out the problems of culture and identity crisis which characterize the postcolonial period. This point is developed by Albert S. Gérard in his book *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa (1986)*. He says,

The *Narrow Path* [...] Kofi, the young boy, grows up along the coast of Ghana in 1920's. The son of a catechist-teacher and the grandson of a prosperous fisherman, he must learn how to balance his two educations and live with them both: his formal Christian and Western classroom training which is reinforced in the home by his father, and the informal traditional education he receives from his other relatives and friends [...] Selormey develops his thematic assertions about culture conflict through the narrative action,²⁰

The child Kofi has a dual identity since he lives in a Ghanaian community that instructs him in traditional ways and values, in addition to the modern and Christian education he acquires as he attends a series of Catholic schools following his father. Kofi's father, Nani, being an educated man and a head master wants to educate his family in the new ways.

The cultural clash is also shown in Selormey's novel through the image of the father, who is portrayed as an educated man, a teacher and a headmaster formed in the British missionary schools and who does not believe in witchcraft and who wants to bring up his family in a modern way. Kofi says, "*He no longer believed that all sickness was caused by witchcraft and he wished to bring up his family in the new ways.*"²¹ Nani was an educated man who represents the new generation and the clash between traditions and modernity. As they are described by Kofi, Nani was too different from his uneducated fishermen brothers. He asserts, "*He thought them uneducated, they thought him proud; they were pagans, he a Christian; they were polygamists, he is a firm and outspoken advocate of monogamy.*"²²

Therefore, Kofi's father is subject to people's criticism who favor traditions and old ways against modern education and new ways. This is well illustrated when people make fun of him after he has caused an accident. They say, "*Look at that! A teacher, an educated man, who thinks he is better than us! But he cannot look where he is going. He has learnt many strange things but he has forgotten to be calm and careful.*"²³

Camara Laye's and Francis Selormey's novels act as documents of life in Guinea and Ghana since the two boys Laye and Kofi give us detailed descriptions of various events, ceremonies, cultural celebrations and house-hold or compound organization. Contrary to Laye who is from a Muslim Malinke family, Kofi is from a Christian Catholic family and this has determined the child's progress and his passage to manhood since the Christian education plays an important role in his life and initiation into manhood and is the path which takes him

from childhood and innocence to adulthood and maturity. For instance, Laye is circumcised according to the Muslim Malinke tradition, whereas Kofi was trained and initiated to manhood according to the modern Catholic education as it is explained in the previous chapter.

Unlike Laye who is from an illiterate family, Kofi has grown up in a modern Christian and literate family; he is the son of a headmaster father and a previous teacher mother. Accordingly, his family's way of life has certainly affected his identity's development, Kofi describes his family daily activities especially on Sundays that were reserved to the Church and considered as being different. He says, "*Sundays were quite different – days set apart. They were solemn and quite. We got up very early, bathed and put on our best clothes and went together to church.*"²⁴

Section Two: Mother/ Father Figures in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

At this stage, our study will focus on the specific people and family members mainly fathers and mothers who are important figures in the lives of their children. It is an attempt to examine the importance of father-son and mother-son relationships as another important dimension in the process of growth and identity formation of Laye and Kofi in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. This idea is reinforced in Robyn McCallum's book *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescence Fiction* (1999), in which he explains the importance of the concepts of selfhood, personal identity and the dialogue with society in the individual's passage from childhood into adulthood and the formation of his adult identity. McCallum claims that the formation of identities is related to the individual's sense of a personal identity and his belief that he is different from other selves. Concepts of personal identity and selfhood according to him are formed in dialogue with society,

language, and other people. Modern adolescence that is considered as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood is the period during which notions of selfhood develop and transform.²⁵ This means that the formation of identity is related to the ideas about subjectivity, or of the individual's perception of his personal identity and his ability to differentiate his self from others. According to the author, the concepts of selfhood and personal identity are formed during the adolescence and in relation to society, language and other people. This point is so important in studying the role of the parents and the environment in the development of our protagonists' identities in Camara Laye's and Francis Selormey's novels.

a. Mothers-Sons Relationship

Mothers hold an important position in the life of any child. Being childhood and initiation narratives, both novels represent parents as important characters who have a great influence on the child protagonists, the construction of their identities and their growth. Camara Laye gives an important place to his mother, as a central and influential figure that is always present by Laye's side in all the moments of his life. Right from the beginning, we notice that attachment and the place given to the mother in Laye's heart since the novel opens with a poem in honor of this great African woman to whom he expresses his gratitude. He writes,

[...]O Daman. O my mother, you who bore me upon your back, you who gave me suck, who you watched over my first faltering steps, you who were the first to open my eyes to the wonders of the earth, I am thinking of you ...[...]Woman of the fields, woman of the rivers, woman of the great river banks, O you my mother, I am thinking of you ...[...]”²⁶

Then, the poem is dedicated to Laye's mother to tribute and to praise her and all the African mothers. This idea is highlighted in Deborah Fillerup Weagel's article, *The Power, Symbolism, and Extension of the Mother in L'Enfant noir: A Feminine Portrait by a*

Masculine Author included in her book *Women and Contemporary World Literature: Power, Fragmentation, and Metaphor* (2009) . For Weigel, there exist influential adults or parents in the lives of most children. In the case of Camara Laye in *L'enfant noir*, the mother is particularly in the training of her son. Even though the father is also important, the mother plays a specific role as a nurturer and protector in his life. The poem at the beginning of the novel is a strong testament to the close relationship Laye has with his mother, and it also pays homage to mothers in general. It honors the woman who nursed him, oversaw his first steps, opened his eyes to the beauties of the world, dried his tears, and who was patient at times when he was mischievous. In addition, the book is a monument to extensions of the mother (the grandmother, the aunt, and the guardian) who also function as nurturers.²⁷

Laye goes further in describing his mother, who is in his words a black African woman, a woman of the fields, of the rivers and the great river banks. She is a woman of great simplicity and resignation, a woman of the great family of blacksmiths and goldsmiths who has always been by his side and who accompanies him in every step of his life. Laye says, “*My mother was very kind, very correct. She also had great authority, and kept an eye on everything we did.*”²⁸ He adds that his mother is endowed with strange powers which made his father and all people had a great respect for her, “*He had the greatest respect for her, and so did our friends and neighbours. That was due, I am sure, to my mother’s character, which was impressive; it was due also to the strange powers she possessed.*”²⁹

According to Laye, living in a Guinean patriarchal society, where the father presides, does not prevent his mother from having a strong authority that she gained thanks to her impressive and strong character. Laye says about her influential place in the family and society in general, “*I realize that my mother’s authoritarian attitudes may appear surprising; generally the role of the African woman is thought to be a ridiculously humble one, and*

indeed there are parts of the continent where it is insignificant; but Africa is vast, with a diversity equal to its vastness."³⁰ In addition to her strong character, Laye's mother has inherited from her father his crocodile totem which allows her to draw water from the river without any attack from the crocodiles. Laye says, "*Finally, she had naturally inherited from my grandfather his totem, which is the crocodile.*"³¹

The mother-son close relationship is stressed when the child describes the scene of his return home after the end of the ritual of circumcision and how his mother reacts as if she fears to lose him. He asserts, "*My parents held me tightly in their arms, particularly my mother, as if she was waiting secretly to proclaim that I was still her son, that my second birth had done nothing to alter the fact that I was still her son.*"³²

This love and attachment that link the son and his mother is stressed once again when Laye announces to his parents that he is given a scholarship and he must go to France to complete his studies. This news arose the mother's anger and her disagreement showing her protestation and announcing that she will not accept to live without her son once again. She affirms, "*Yesterday it was the school at Conakry; today, it's a school in France; tomorrow ... What will it be next? Every day there's some mad scheme to take my son away from me! [...]* Do they imagine I'm going to live my whole life apart from my son."³³

Francis Selormey also gives the parents an important place in his novel, as we open it we notice that it is dedicated to Selormey's parents. He writes, "*To my Father and Mother,*" The mother's image provided in the two novels is nearly the same; it is that of upholders who are always present to defend and support their children. Kofi's mother, Edzi, she is educated and literate contrary to Laye's mother. Kofi describes her as he speaks about the beginning of his parents' relationship. He says, "*He began to court a young lady teacher at the near-by*

Protestant school. She was untrained [...]; but she was literate and spoke English, and so was a worthy bride for a go-ahead young teacher."³⁴

Such was Kofi's mother then, a woman who sacrifices for her children and who is always there to support and protect them. In fact Edzi has quitted her work as a teacher in order to take care of her children, and this is one of the great sacrifices a mother can make for her children. Kofi's mother declares when talking about her husband, "*I was independent before he came courting me. It was only in order to bear his children that I had to stop teaching.*"³⁵ Edzi was an independent woman who does not like to beg her husband for money at each time she needs something. Kofi asserts, "[...] *She hated having to go to her husband and say, 'Master, I beg you, give me money for ... this or that.'* [...]"³⁶ In this way the mother thought of a solution to solve this problem and earn money of her own. Kofi adds,

So my mother decided to earn some money of her own again. She started to cook food to sell to the school children during the morning break. [...] Gradually, my mother's trading increased, till she was able to supply all her own needs, and to buy a much-needed dress, now and again, for the children of the house, without begging the money from my father.³⁷

Like Laye and the most of African children who share the same hut with their mothers, Kofi shares the same room and even the same bed with her and perhaps this was one of the most important factors that improve their relationship and deepen their attachment to each other. Kofi says, "*I climbed down from the bed that I shared with my mother, took the hurricane lamp [...], and went to my father.*"³⁸ Sharing the same room with a mother is an important element which sustains the mother-son relationship.

As Laye's mother, Kofi's shows her affection and love for her child, and this was remarkable in her positions towards his father's cruel punishments. The mother tries at each time to settle and to soften the father's character. Kofi narrates, "*I grew more and more troublesome and began to be impertinent. My father decided that it was time I was taken in*

*hand, [...] This was a great source of quarreling between my parents, [...] ‘What is the good of slapping such a little boy so hard, just for breaking a cup? [...] my mother would say’*³⁹

Kofi’s mother sides with him also in many other scenes in the novel.

Kofi also tells us about his mother’s respect for her husband despite all these quarrels that bothered their life from time to time. He asserts, *“Efo is a term of respect meaning literally ‘brother’, and it was the way in which my mother addressed my father at that time”*⁴⁰ (Selormey, 1966:30) Kofi’s attachment and love for his mother is illustrated in many scenes in the novel, mainly when he shows his sympathy and worry towards her when she is sick. He says, *“I did not know why my mother was in pain. I went and stood beside her bed and saw her writhing and biting her lips. I remembered that my father had made a towel warm in hot water and held it to her body. I asked her if I should do the same. She looked at me long and lovingly.”*⁴¹

According to Kofi, his mother accomplishes her role as the wife of the household’s master, then like him she was also responsible for the training and the care of some young girls. He says, *“My mother, at that time, had three young girls in her care; her own young sister, a distant cousin of hers, and a distant cousin of my father’s”*⁴² The girls have a lot of things to learn from Kofi’s mother who gives much importance to cleanliness and organization and teach them how to be fine ladies. Kofi declares, *“My mother had taught them to bath twice a day and to take care of their appearance.”*⁴³

Kofi’s mother is present by his side in every experience he passes through. This is well illustrated in the chapter which narrates Kofi’s bad year, the year when he became very sick and thus caused many troubles for his parents especially his mother. He narrates, *“My mother picked me up and began to bath me, and as she washed me she wept. She wept for many reasons; for the weakness of her child, a living skeleton,”*⁴⁴

Then, we understand that Kofi's mother plays an important role in the child's growth into manhood since she is the soft touch which consoles him in every problem or experience he endures. The mother-son good relationship and attachment is shown once again when Kofi speaks about his leaving his father's house to live with a master. He says, "*The worst thing of all to me was that the family would be broken up. Although always in awe of my father, I loved my mother,*"⁴⁵

As is the case with Laye's mother, Kofi's mother is too attached to her children especially Kofi. Thus she finds it very difficult to live far from them. This is well illustrated when Kofi describes his mother's sadness after being obliged to leave her children with their father and to move to her mother's house in Keta. Kofi affirms, "*My mother went to Keta, weeping as she said good-bye to us.*"⁴⁶ Like Laye's novel, Selormey's also is closed with a scene of departure and exit, a parting which was painful for everybody especially for the boys' mothers; this follows Kofi's departure to the teacher training college. His mother followed him to the main road and wanted to see his departure. Kofi describes his mother's reaction, "*The college was 200 miles away, and it seemed to my mother that I was going to the end of the earth.[...] my mother following. [...] She turned back, weeping.*"⁴⁷

b. Fathers-Sons Relationship

As far as the place of mothers is concerned, fathers hold an important position as heads of the family in both *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path*. Through the two prose fictions we notice the presence of father figures who contribute in many ways to the development of their sons into men. This presence and contribution can be either positive or negative and differs from Camara Laye's story to Francis Selormey's; all these points will be discovered and highlighted through the coming lines.

In Camara Laye's *The African Child*, the father is portrayed as a guide and savior for his son, the close relationship that links Laye to his father is characterized by harmony and complicity, and makes the two attached to each other, a factor which makes the separation so hard for the two, a separation that becomes a burden so hard to bear by the father. This point has been discussed in Kenneth W. Harrow's *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition (1994)*, Harrow affirms, "And, at their best, the fathers, in this literature, are visionaries, guides, and saviors for their sons, as in the case of Laye's father. The model father provided by Laye in *L'Enfant noir* is close to his son, and he laments the loss of his son to the new life brought by the Europeans."⁴⁸ Laye describes his father as the head of the family, an open-handed man who is ready to share everything with his guests. He says, "Then my father, who, as head of the family- a family of innumerable numbers- governed the compound,"⁴⁹ He adds, "My father was an open-handed and, in fact, a lavish giver; no matter who turned up, he would share our meals;"⁵⁰

This close relationship between the father and his son is stressed in many scenes in the novel. For instance, Laye's father is an influential figure in his son's life, since he acts as a model and therefore plays an important role in the child's initiation into manhood mainly through education and all the skills and values the child acquires from him. The nature of the relationship that links the two allows the little boy to feel at ease in his father's company and gives him the opportunity to satisfy his curiosity through asking for answers and explanations for all the matters that concern their family and community.

This is best illustrated when Laye tells us about his dilemma concerning the black snake and all the questions he asks his father about it. Laye says, "I began questioning him in a roundabout manner, as all children do, and on every subject under the sun."⁵¹ At this stage, the father confides a secret of a heavy weight to his little son, a secret which explains the

presence of the black snake as a guiding spirit of their race, this confession can be linked to the close relationship that links the two. Laye affirms when describing this scene, “*He gazed at me for a long while. He seemed to be considering whether to answer or not.[...] That snake, he said, is the guiding spirit of our race. Can you understand that?[...] In our time, it is to me that he has made himself known.*”⁵²

Laye’s admiration and respect for his father make him proud of him and find it obvious that among all the people of his race, this snake has made it known to anyone, but his own father, the headman in their compound. The following quotation will describe to us the father through his son’s eyes, “*For it was obvious to me that the snake could have made himself known to no one but my father. Was it not my father who had authority over all the blacksmiths in our district? Was he not the most skilled? Was he not, after all, my father?*”⁵³

In *The African Child*, Camara Laye gives us an image of an authoritative Guinean father, a good example of a traditional father in a patriarchal society, a source of goodness, simplicity, wisdom, education and all the other good values which a son can inherit from his father and make him proud of having such a model. From his youth Laye is accustomed to observe his father as he works in his workshop, he has grown up with that image of a father working in his forge and acquired the feeling of love, obedience and loyalty for that great man. He says, “*From the veranda under which I played I could keep an eye on the workshop opposite, [...] That is where my father was generally to be found, supervising the work, forging the most important items himself.*”⁵⁴ Laye’s father then is portrayed as a goldsmith who loves his job and who has foreknowledge of what would come to pass, a knowledge he owes to the black snake. This point is highlighted in the father’s words to his son,

You can see for yourself that I am not more gifted than any other man, that I have nothing which other men have not also, and even that I have less than others, since I give everything away, and would even give away the last thing I

had, the shirt on my back. Nevertheless, I am better known than other men, and my name is on everyone's tongue, and it is I who have authority over all the blacksmiths in the five cantons. If these things are so it is by virtue of this snake alone, who is the guiding spirit of our race. It is to this snake that I owe everything."⁵⁵

All these secrets shared between the father and his son stress once again the relationship that links the two. For instance, the father is attached to his son, whom he calls 'little one' an expression which embodies all the feelings of love and affection a father can have to his son. Laye's father intends to pass his knowledge to him and make him inherit the guiding spirit of their race. The little child reports his father's words, "*I have told you all these things, little one, because you are my son, the eldest of my son, and because I have nothing to hide from you. [...] if you desire the guiding spirit of our race to visit you one day, if you desire to inherit it in your turn, [...] it will be necessary for you to be more and more in my company.*"⁵⁶ Similarly, the father expresses also his fear of Laye's being not enough in his company in school's favor, a point that may enlarge the gap between the two and lead to their parting and separation one day. He says, "*I fear, I very much fear, little one, that you are not often enough in my company. You are all day at school, and one day you shall depart from that school for a greater one. You will leave me, little one ...*"⁵⁷

The little Laye gives us an image of a skillful father, a goldsmith whose work fascinates him and considers a kind of a festival that impresses everyone by breaking the monotony of ordinary working days and adding more taste to their life. He says, "*Of the different kinds of work my father performed, none fascinated me so much as his skill with gold. No other occupation was so noble, no other needed such a delicate touch; and, moreover, this sort of work was always a kind of festival: it was a real festival that broke the monotony of ordinary working days.*"⁵⁸

Accordingly, Laye's father has always been present in the important moments of the boy's life. In fact, the father is the source of the boy's power, stability and traditional education, he is always by his side to ensure and advise him, mainly when the boy faces one of the most critical moment in his life, that is when he joins the society of the uninitiated boys and his meeting with the famous Kondén Diara. That day, his father's words were those of encouragement and insurance, he says to Laye, "*Nothing you need really be afraid of, nothing you cannot overcome by your own willpower. Remember: you have to control your fear, you have to control yourself. Kondén Diara will not take you away; [...]*"⁵⁹

The emotions of love and kindness that link Laye to his father and determine the strong father-son relationship they embody are shown in the father's reaction when Laye was leaving his parents to pursue his studies in Conakry. The father gives his advice to his son and then there comes a deep moment of confession when the father opens his heart to his child narrating his life as an orphan and reminding him of the importance of the father in one's life and asking him to seize his opportunity. He asserts, "*You see, I had no father to look after me, as you had. [...] I became an orphan; and I had to make my own way in life.*"⁶⁰ Then, he held him close and then walks away very fast to prevent him from remarking his tears. The scene of departure and parting mark also the end of the novel as Laye describes his father's reaction towards his voyage to France and their separation. He says, "*I can still see my father, unable to hide his tears, [...] It was if I was being torn apart.*"⁶¹

As far as Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* is concerned, the figure of the father is also given a great importance in Camara Laye's *The African Child*. Kofi's father, Nani, is at the center of the story. Nani then, is the most influential figure in the novel since he is considered as a school for his son. Kofi's father therefore, has a great role and even greater than Laye's father's in his son's formation of identity and initiation to manhood.

Through reading Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, we come into contact with a dominant and successful father. The father is portrayed as the head of the family in this novel also; he is the one who bears the burden of the whole household financially. Kofi asserts, "*Financially, my father bore the burden of the whole household,*"⁶² Nani is also his son's guide, since this latter accompanied him he learned much from him. He adds, "*My father would sometimes teach me informally on our walks to and from the school,*"⁶³ In addition to teaching, Kofi's father practices many other activities like being an interpreter of the priests or a choir-master which are mainly related to his position as a headmaster. Kofi says, "*The priests were foreign-usually Dutch-so they could not preach in Ewe, the language of my people. They gave their sermons in English, and they were translated, sentence by sentence, into Ewe, by the teachers. My father was one of these interpreters.*"⁶⁴

The father model provided by Selormey is so different from that given by Laye, Nani wants to bring up his children in the new ways contrary to Laye's father, the goldsmith, who dislikes school that is changing his son's destiny and drawing a different path for him. In this novel however, we do not find that close and harmonious relationship that links a father and his son like the one described in Laye's fiction. Nani has drawn to the child the path that he must follow, but the path was too narrow, restricting Kofi's freedom. He says, "*But my father was still firm on one point. I was never allowed to eat in another house. I had to report back to him at every meal-time and at bed-time. He gave me no opportunity to stray from the narrow path he had laid down for me.*"⁶⁵

This strictness from the father's side constructs a great gap between the two, resulting in a sort of indifference and apathy that characterizes their relationship. A relationship, on which Kofi says, "*That was the last time he beat me, and from that time he began to be an old man, and before I was twenty-four he was dead. I never achieved that father-and-son*

relationship with him that I so dearly wanted, and my brother, who pleased him more than I, was still only a child when our father died.”⁶⁶

Kofi confesses that he regrets the fact that he never achieved that intimate father-son relationship he so dearly wanted. This confession has just followed the scene when his father beat him for visiting his mother without asking for permission. Thus, Kofi continues narrating how his father was cruel in punishing him, *“He slapped my face, on both sides, till my head rocked dizzily backwards and forwards. [...] I turned to run, but he caught hold of my wrist with a grip like a vice. I fought and twisted, while he rained blows all over my body.”⁶⁷* Therefore, Kofi feels humiliated and even wants to kill his father. He asserts again, *“Then black hatred came to fill my heart, and I decided to kill my father. [...] Then I thought I was dying, and I was glad, and got pleasure out of the thought of my father’s remorse, [...] But, of course, I did not die. Neither did I kill my father.”⁶⁸* Accordingly, Kofi’s conception of the father or the image he has of him is always associated and connected with fear and anxiousness. This is well illustrated when Kofi describes his feeling in the presence of his father, *“Just then my father emerged from his sitting-room, and looked at me in his stern way. At once all my confidence evaporated. I was furious with him for making me so. After all, I was doing nothing wrong. Why did I feel guilty just because my father looked at me.”⁶⁹*

All this harshness and ill-treatment from the father’s side does not stress the fact that he does not love his son, but he has his specific and unique way of loving him despite his hardness and cruel treatment. Kofi declares, *“My father decided that it was time I was taken in hand, and in his opinion, it was necessary not to spare the rod in order not to spoil the child”⁷⁰* Then this treatment is practiced in purpose, for the benefit of the child regardless of anything else. Kofi adds in his father’s words, *“I don’t care if he breaks everything in the house! It is because he is careless and thoughtless and rough. He has got to be checked”⁷¹*

Kofi's father is an influential figure in his son's life since he acts as a model and therefore plays an important role in the child initiation into manhood mainly through education. Thus, in the end Kofi has followed his father's footsteps. He says when he returns from his master's house for holidays, *"And I had something to talk to my father about, something which I felt sure would make him happy. I had decided that I wanted to be a teacher. I don't know when this desire became obvious to me. It was no sudden revelation. I suppose it was in my blood,"*⁷² Kofi now has grown up and begun to understand more his father's strictness, hoping for a new and good relationship with his father. He says,

I felt grown-up, almost a different person from the silly boy [...] I squirmed a little in my seat, as I thought of all the scrapes that little boy had got into, and the worry he had been to his parents. I thought that now I understood my father better. I even gave him the benefit of the doubt, and tried to persuade myself that he did not realize how hard he bit. [...] I was confident that my father would see that I had changed, and that a new relationship was before us.⁷³

Despite all these quarrels and problems that interrupt the life and the relationship of Kofi and his father, one can't deny the fact that Nani loves his son, but surely in his personal and different way. Besides, this love is incarnated in Nani's reaction and tears when Kofi was in his way to leave his parents for the teacher training college. Kofi describes his departure,

My father led me out of the house, [...] We did not wait long by the roadside before a lorry came which would take me on the first part of my journey. My trunks were lifted on and I climbed up beside them. Once settled I turned to bid my father good-bye, and saw the hardest thing in all that desolate parting. There were tears in my father's eyes.⁷⁴

The father's tears are then signs of love and pain and that scene of departure and parting marks also the end of the novel and Kofi's exit like Laye's exit from Africa that marks also the end of Camara Laye's novel.

Through this chapter, we have dealt with Camara Laye's and Francis Selormey's common themes presented in their novels. Both writers share common intentions and

objectives in their portrayal of the issues of childhood and initiation. This lies in the use of the child protagonist to raise important problems such as the clash of cultures and the identity crisis.

It is important to understand that the construction of the child's identity is done in a complicated process that demands the presence of several elements. Therefore, the construction of the children's identities in Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* is highly affected by their countries' historical background, the clash between traditions and modernity and their families' members.

Notes and References

¹ Richard K. Priebe 'Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood', in *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, ed. Stefan Helgesson, (Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam-New York, 2011), 6.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid.,9.

⁵ Camara Laye, *The African Child*, trans. James Kirkup (Kenya: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1954), 6.

⁶ Kenneth W.Harrow, *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition* (London: James Currey Ltd, 1994), 35.

⁷ Laye, *The African Child*, 10.

⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹¹ Ibid., 158.

¹² Ibid., 159.

¹³ Ibid., 116-117.

¹⁴ Priebe, in Helgesson, *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, *A Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2003), 223.

¹⁷ Richard K. Priebe 'Some Thoughts on the Idea of Exit in Recent African Narratives of Childhood', in *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, ed. Stefan Helgesson, (Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V. Amsterdam-New York, 2011), 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ Albert S. Gérard, *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Hungary: Coordinating Committee of A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, 1986), 831.

²¹ Francis Selormey, *The Narrow Path* (London: Heinmann, 1966), 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 164.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵ Robyn McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescence Fiction* (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1999), I.

²⁶ Laye, *The African Child*, V.

²⁷ Deborah Fillerup Weagel, *Women and Contemporary World Literature: Power, Fragmentation, and Metaphor* (Germany: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2009), 45.

²⁸ Laye, *The African Child*, 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

³¹ Ibid., 55.

³² Ibid., 111.

³³ Ibid., 156-157.

³⁴ Francis Selormey, *The Narrow Path* (London: Heinmann, 1966), 3.

³⁵ Ibid., 47.

³⁶ Ibid., 46.

³⁷ Ibid., 47-48.

³⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

³⁹ Ibid., 18-19.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

⁴² Ibid., 46.

⁴³ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁸ Harrow, *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition*, 143.

⁴⁹ Laye, *The African Child*, 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁶¹ Ibid., 159.

⁶² Selormey, *The Narrow Path*, 46.

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 176.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Ibid., 161.

⁷³ Ibid., 162.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 184.

V. General Conclusion

Childhood and the process of maturation construct an important subject of study for different disciplines including anthropology, history, sociology, psychology and literature. The themes refer to the reality of life that is built through a series of passages and transitions from a defined stage to another and from a simpler situation to a more complicated one announcing the continuity of the human existence.

Being the base of the construction of one's personality and future, childhood increasingly attracted the authors' attention and has become their source of inspiration. Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1954) and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966) are two influential novels written by two remarkable African novelists. Both works give a vivid image of African tribal and social life and celebrate the African customs and traditions. The two fictions represent also two child protagonists who endure series of adventures and obstacles leading to maturity. Camara Laye and Francis Selormey are then among the authors that were fascinated by the world of innocence that they adopted it in their writings.

Through our analysis of the themes of childhood and initiation in *The African Child* and *The Narrow Path*, we have come to deduce that the two writers stress the importance of the narratives of childhood and initiation in recording the formation and construction of the African identity. Then, the selected novels help us to understand the process of constructing identity by giving the image of two child protagonists that emerge from boyhood to manhood in parallel with their countries' emergence from colonization to independence.

The two novels discuss identity in relation to the idea of passage from one stage to another and highlight the ceremonies and celebrations that accompany this initiation into a new group of life. They deal with the African child's growth in the colonized or previously colonized Africa and explain the effects that colonialism may have on the child's identity.

In their prose fictions, both Camara Laye and Francis Selormey discuss the effects of the cultural clash resulted from colonialism and childhood trauma on the development of the child's identity. The authors make reference to many other important aspects that have a remarkable role in the child's growth such as the organization of the family and its members.

Our comparative study has also shown that being published in two different historical periods has stressed the existence of many differences between the two novels. For instance, Camara Laye's *The African Child* was published in colonial times and evokes nostalgia of tribal and traditional life. Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, however, was published after independence and centers on modern and colonial education in the aim of denouncing the colonial process of assimilation.

The difference in the period of publication between the two novels has affected the authors' depiction of trauma. The portrayal of childhood trauma in both autobiographical narratives is related to the presence of the colonizer and colonial education. The two child protagonists, Laye and Kofi, represent the psychological state of confusion and the divided identity of the colonial subject. This is due to the presence of two different cultures and the child's attempt to resist the changes brought by the colonizer that aimed at spreading the Western way of life against the traditional values. We have also seen that in the case of Selormey's Kofi, trauma is related to the father who is formed in the British missionary schools and represents the Western culture and education and then makes reference to the continuity of the process of assimilation even in post-colonial times.

Through our analysis, we have tried to attract the reader's attention to different themes that characterize the African narratives of childhood like the problem of identity and the clash of cultures, childhood trauma, colonial education, and the rites of passage. The scope of our research, however, did not allow us to deal with all the issues that underline the two novels. We hope that we have helped our readership to a better understanding of the African child's

concern and the construction of his identity in addition to the idea of passage that characterizes the human life and the different celebrations that accompany it. We hope also that we contributed in opening new doors and perspectives for further research.

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