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Pro Patria:

Fatherhood and Fatherland in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Literature and Language

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by

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December 2010

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Keywords: Adichie, identity, post-colonial, Nigeria, Biafra, father figures, adolescence,  
*Purple Hibiscus*

## ABSTRACT

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*Purple Hibiscus*, a novel by third-generation Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie, appears at first glance to be a simple work of adolescent fiction, a *bildungsroman* in which a pair of siblings navigate the typical challenges of incipient adulthood: social ostracism, an abusive parent, emerging desire. However, the novel's setting—a revolutionary-era Nigeria—is clearly intended to evoke post-Biafra Nigeria, itself the setting of Adichie's other major work, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This setting takes *Purple Hibiscus* beyond the scope of most modern adolescent fiction, creating a complex allegory in which the emergence of self and struggle for identity of the Achike siblings represent Nigeria's own struggle for identity. Adichie achieves this allegory by allowing the father figures of the novel to represent the different political paths Nigeria could have followed in its post-colonial period. The Achike siblings' identities develop through interactions with each of these patriarchs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my committee, Phyllis Thompson, Shawna Lichtenwalner, and Karen Cajka, for all of their help and support and the completion of this project. They provided me with not only excellent suggestions and intellectual aid but also with much-needed moral support.

I must also thank my parents for the lifetime of support and encouragement, as well as my many friends who helped me along the way.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Purple Hibiscus*, by third-generation Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie, is (at its most basic level) a coming-of-age tale. Fifteen-year-old Kambili and Jaja, her older brother, must face political unrest, uncaring classmates, and a strict home life. They also must deal with a father whose severe abuse will leave lasting scars—both physical and emotional. A close critical reading, however, reveals *Purple Hibiscus* to conceal much deeper levels of meaning.

As a third-generation Nigerian writer, Adichie falls into the tradition followed by other Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe. The writings of these authors deal, either directly or indirectly, with the social and political upheaval of twentieth century Nigeria. While Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, has the Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Nigeria-Biafra War) as its direct setting, *Purple Hibiscus* addresses the situation in more indirect ways. Adichie uses the war as the allegorical, rather than the literal, antecedent for her novel. The war, a political coup aimed at altering the balance of power among several ethnic groups, is also a result of the British colonization of Nigeria, for this colonization attempted to unite the disparate tribes into one nation. *Purple Hibiscus* explores the issues of ethnic tensions and political unrest in Nigeria as parallels for coming of age and defining identity.

The earliest Nigerian civilization is traced to the fifth century. The next several centuries saw the rise of several powerful kingdoms, each with separate governments and languages. England began to explore the area in the early nineteenth century, though

malaria caused death for most British explorers. British colonial rule began in Lagos in 1861. However, colonial Nigeria had been rife with problems, and “the fundamental cause had been the tribal hostility embedded in this enormous and artificial nation. For Nigeria had never been more than an amalgam of peoples welded together in the interests and for the benefit of a European power” (Forsyth 11). Eugene Achike, patriarch and father of Kambili and Jaja in *Purple Hibiscus*, is representative of colonialism and its problems. After a century fraught with administrative difficulties, England granted full independence to Nigeria in 1960. In essence, England pulled out colonizing forces without leaving any real infrastructure behind; the administrative issues were left to be dealt with by ethnic groups as many and varied as the problems themselves. This created a perfect storm of conditions for political unrest and identity crises.

Most of the population of Nigeria following the departure of British forces was located in the Hausa and Fulani communities of the northern part of the country. However, the southern and eastern parts of the country were more industrialized and educated (having, in fact, one of the highest literacy rates in Africa at the time). However, the increasing political and economic power of the Igbo people threatened the other ethnic groups: “as the power and influence of the Ibo grew, it seemed that they became more and more the objects of hate and distrust” (Schwab 4). A political coup on January 15, 1966, led by several Igbo (including Major General Johnson T. U. Aguiyi) was intended to stem this tide of hate by forcing Nigerian nationalism; Aguiyi suspended the 1960 constitution and dissolved the federation of separate states. This action sparked three months of anti-Igbo riots, the assassination of Aguiyi on July 29, 1966, and the deaths of some five thousand Igbo in the north by late September of that year (Schwab 5).

This, in turn, sparked the secession of Biafra as untold numbers of Igbo returned to the east. However, Nigeria feared losing control of lucrative oil fields in the Biafra region, leading to the Nigeria-Biafra War. After many deaths on both sides, Biafra forces surrendered. Biafra suffered more heavily than the other Nigerian forces, shrinking “to an estimated 1/10 of its original size and to a population of 3.2 million [from an estimated 14 million] during the fighting” (Schwab 115). The end of the war was not the end of the problems, however. Post-Biafra Nigeria has also been riddled with difficulties, varying from extreme violence between religious groups to government corruption and an unstable economy.

Post-colonial Nigeria, emerging into its future, is like an adolescent child—navigating both the past and the possibilities of the future, attempting to choose its own path and determine the best course toward its national goals. Like adolescence, however, the path is unsteady, pitted with peril, and fraught with unseen contingencies that must be navigated with the least amount of psychological and emotional pain and which can change the available options. This is particularly difficult given that adolescence is a time marked by internal struggles of identity in addition to those struggles that are external in nature.

Nigeria, as a nation, was caught in the throes of identity struggle following the Biafra War and the emergence of post-colonialism. Nigerian citizens may share a common identity, but they are only loosely bound as Nigerians. Citizenship is not enough to forge lasting, nationalistic bonds:

citizens *in* nation-states [. . .] tend to be only conditionally, partially, and situationally citizens *of* nation-states. Identity struggles, ranging from



altercations over resources to genocidal combat, seem immanent almost everywhere as selfhood is immersed—existentially, metonymically—into claims of collective essence, of innate substance and primordial sentiment, that nestle within or transect the polity. (Comaroff and Comaroff 634)

The citizens of Nigeria are attempting to navigate through an abundance of history, ranging from the histories of individual tribes and religions to struggles suffered on a national level. In order to move forward into the future, the citizenship must be able to forge a new identity.

The Igbo people are united to the rest of Nigeria by artificial measures of geography and resources, not by any ethnic or cultural bonds or by any particular feelings of nationalism. However, “indigenous and non-indigenous people share a history, if not a shared view about the normative consequences of that history” (Meskell 73). Regardless of the differences between the Igbo and the other cultural groups in Nigeria, they all form a part of the emerging nation’s identity. They must work together to forge a new, postcolonial nation, uniting their disparate individual histories. The necessarily varied hopes of each of these groups create a multitude of potential futures; *Purple Hibiscus*’ father figures represent the strongest or most likely of these, and the future that Kambili and Jaja will eventually choose must echo the eventual future of Nigeria.

While the Nigeria-Biafra War was about independence, the children of *Purple Hibiscus* are seeking to carve out their own identities. This is also true of Nigeria, “a young country in several striking ways, and the most telling is the age of its people: well over half are less than thirty; an amazing forty-four percent are under fifteen years of age” (Hawley 16). The youth of Nigeria are tasked with rebuilding the nation after a

destructive war. Similarly, as Kambili and Jaja's family disintegrates, they must come into their own. This is metaphorically equal to the struggle of Nigeria to form its own identity in its post-colonial society; according to Madelaine Hron, "the child's quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization" (27). The many father figures who provide models for the children represent the many facets of Nigeria's identities, present, past, and possibility.

The father figures of the novel are influences upon Kambili, even as Nigeria's past (both in reality and in dashed hopes) are influences upon its present: "As evidenced in the novel, Kambili's journey to adulthood also reflects the struggles of young Nigeria, as it negotiates Western and traditional norms, while also being overwhelmed by economic disparity, bad governance, pervasive corruption, or human rights violations" (Hron 31). Eugene Achike and Father Amadi, the two literal fathers of the novel, are the most obvious examples of this metaphorical conceit. Eugene Achike is a man of contrasts, embodying all of the diverse interests of post-Biafra Nigeria. Nigeria, at this time, has Islam and Christianity as its major religions, with indigenous religions a scant ten percent of the population; among Nigeria's many languages are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Fulani—yet English is the official language. Although Eugene absorbs some of the native traditions, he is decidedly a force for colonialism, both in terms of religion and culture. Father Amadi is a man who unifies; he has taken the diverse interests and fused them into cohesive whole.

The mothers in the novel are relative non-entities, characters that are acted upon, rather than actors themselves, with the exception of Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene Achike's sister. This could be because motherhood is typically connected with ideals of nurture

and home stability, neither of which is to be found in the political life of post-Biafra Nigeria. However, Ifeoma is a single mother and sole breadwinner, which place her into the fatherhood role (as the head of household) alongside her role as mother. The father figures have made choices that now dictate their lives (and their roles as potential histories). Papa-Nnukwu, the children's grandfather, represents the real history of indigenous culture. His son Eugene represents the actual present of conflict and colony. Ifeoma and Father Amadi are ideal options for the future, representing democracy and unification, respectively. Placed in opposition to the father figures, the children are dynamic figures whose ultimate characters and life choices are to be determined. They are the ones who must choose the future of Nigeria. This future, the identity of emerging Nigeria, is intricately linked to the emerging identities of the adolescents.

Identity is not a static construct. It is ever changing in response to past events and in anticipation of what is to come. This anticipation is what creates individuality; otherwise, all people would forge similar identities as they share similar events and histories, something that clearly does not happen. Lynn Meskell explains this phenomenon in terms of changing statehoods:

Past, present and future are indelibly linked. Therefore it should come as no surprise that individuals, communities and nations continue to forge ever-changing identities, memories and spaces of their own invention, instigated by expediency, desire, and political will. (73)

The children in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili and Jaja, attempt to navigate their adolescent transitions into adulthood by looking at the models presented to them by the father figures in the novel—Eugene Achike, their biological father; Ifeoma, Eugene's sister;

Father Amadi, a Catholic priest; and Papa-Nnukwu, the children's grandfather.

However, as each of these potential role models is motivated both by his or her own past histories and unique goals, none of them are appropriate for Kambili or Jaja to imitate, as these histories and potential futures are not the children's own.

Kambili and Jaja are allegories for burgeoning post-colonial Nigeria, which must also face an adolescent-like emergence into an identity separate from its colonial roots. The fact that both children are ethnically Igbo, a culture and ethnicity ripped apart by violence, indicates that the identity of Nigeria rests in how well its people can overcome the pain of their past. Children and adolescents do not have the ability to fully integrate all of their personality characteristics and influences into a cohesive whole; this is a skill inherent in the adult brain:

Cognitive-developmental advances promoting greater differentiation conspire with socialization pressures to develop different selves in different relational contexts. Cognitive advances also allow the adolescent to construct self-attributes that represent *abstractions* about the self, based upon the ability to integrate trait labels into higher-order generalizations. However, these abstract representations are highly compartmentalized or overdifferentiated, and therefore the adolescent can only think about each as isolated characteristics of the self.” (Harter 66)

In each of the father figures, in each of the potential futures for Nigeria, Kambili and Jaja are faced with aspects of themselves that are fragmentary and in conflict with one another. Discovering their selfhoods will require navigation through all of the pieces of

their identities, including familial, cultural, and political influences. Emerging Nigeria faces the same difficult task. The realization of a cohesive sense of self is by no means certain for the children or for Nigeria. *Purple Hibiscus* indicates that wholeness is not possible. Even though the children achieve something of selfhood, it is a selfhood fraught with emotional and physical scars that will always remain.

Kambili and Jaja are bombarded by opposing forces: indigenous and colonial, Pagan and Christian, Nigerian and English, familial loyalty and individual identity. They, like “many groups effectively inhabit two worlds simultaneously, navigating between indigenous and dominant Western systems” (Meskell 76). They also are trapped in that liminal space between child and adult, and their successful navigation of their models for adulthood—the father figures—will determine how well the children are able to grow into their futures and, by extension, how Nigeria will do the same.

Jaja and Kambili emerge into adulthood by the end of *Purple Hibiscus*. Their relationships with the father figures in their lives have informed their selfhoods. The children stand for Nigeria at a crossroads. There are many potential paths for Nigeria to follow, and each of these paths has consequences both personal and national. *Purple Hibiscus* is a novel that explores these issues of selfhood and identity, using the form of *bildungsroman* as allegory for the emergence of Nigeria’s post-colonial national identity. Like children who use strong parental models as guides to becoming adults, Nigeria uses its many pasts—from indigenous tribalisms to British colony—to navigate its many potential futures.

## CHAPTER 2

### NIGERIA-THAT-WAS: PAPA-NNUKWU AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE

Any individual or nation attempting to navigate a new identity must first come to terms with its past. For nations, this means recognizing the roles that all cultural groups (as well as colonizing groups) have played in developing a national culture. For children, this means evaluating experiences and attempting to make sense of situations that may be beyond their understanding. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa-Nnukwu represents indigenous culture, specifically that of Igboland. Papa-Nnukwu is the father of Eugene and Ifeoma. He is not Roman Catholic, as are his children, but instead follows the traditional Igbo religion. He is the metaphorical embodiment of indigenous peoples, for Papa-Nnukwu represents native culture. It is this culture, combined with the colonizing culture, that has created the sibling futures of Nigeria that Eugene and Ifeoma represent: autocracy and democracy. Like indigenous culture giving way in the face of a colonizer, he is a father who must let his children become their own individuals—informed by, but not clones of, Papa-Nnukwu himself.

Although Eugene is not threatened by Ifeoma, perceiving her as of no threat to his rule (perhaps because of her gender), Eugene does feel threatened by Papa-Nnukwu. Where the native culture remains, the usurping culture is threatened (in the eyes of the colonizer). For this reason, Kambili and Jaja are forbidden from visiting their grandfather without the express permission of Eugene, and then for only fifteen minutes at a time. When they do visit, they are forbidden from eating or drinking in his home, lest they ingest something unholy or idolatrous—in other words, lest they imbibe thoughts or ideas contradictory to Eugene's own. Kambili and Jaja are left to grow up

with a terribly imbalanced worldview, informed only by the limited and somewhat tyrannical way of life represented by their father; they have no comprehension of cultural heritage. As the grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu should hold the role of the ultimate patriarch, but like Cronus dethroned by Zeus, Papa-Nnukwu is usurped by Eugene and relegated to having no authority. This is the fate of indigenous cultures under a colonizing power. Papa-Nnukwu is a metonymy for pure cultural past. This past cannot remain pure when colonizing forces invade its sphere. Similarly, the Igbo cannot remain as they were before the entrance of external forces. They must either assimilate or they are treated at best with suspicion and at worst as enemies. Eugene sees the cultural past of the Igbo as pagan and therefore a threat to his church.

Papa-Nnukwu, however, also views the usurping Anglo-Catholic culture with a certain skepticism, for it is overthrowing the religion he knows and replacing it with a mystery religion that makes little sense to his experiences. Papa-Nnukwu looks upon Christianity with incredulity, questioning “who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal. It was then that [Papa-Nnukwu] knew that the white man was mad” (*Hibiscus* 84). For a person unacquainted with Christianity, a person who identifies Christianity with usurpers, the image of Christ on the cross is violent and certain to fill the outside observer with some sense of trepidation. Christianity, to Papa-Nnukwu, is a culture that embraces the ruthless sacrifice of an innocent being. Those who are on the path of conquest deem the lives and cultures of the indigenous peoples as collateral damage, whose sacrifice is balanced by the benefit the occupiers receive or perceive to be securing for the colonized. Imperialist regimes often consider the spread of their empires

to be just, as they are spreading the light of culture and enlightenment to “savages.” Of course, this might be a widely divergent opinion than that held by the colonized people themselves.

Despite Eugene’s proscription, Kambili and Jaja are able to be with their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, as he lies dying in Nsukka. His death is a pivotal event, allowing both Kambili and Jaja to approach adulthood with a greater understanding of themselves and a wider appreciation for familial and cultural context. It is not an easy transition, however. Kambili first begins to make the journey when she witnesses Ifeoma praying for healing for Papa-Nnukwu. Kambili listens to Ifeoma petition God for Papa-Nnukwu’s recovery with prayers that are orthodox (referencing the apostle Peter and the blessed Virgin); Kambili’s ‘Amen,’ given at the end of Ifeoma’s prayers, is “a little delayed, a little surprised. When Papa prayed for Papa-Nnukwu, he asked only that God convert him and save him from the raging fires of hell” (*Hibiscus* 150). Kambili, who has heretofore only been exposed to a religion (and a worldview) that is very limited, somewhat frightening, and does not allow for variation (much like Eugene himself), sees in Ifeoma’s prayers a new way of living. She begins to see that there is more than one way to live a successful and Godly life. Whereas Eugene’s prayers are dour and focused on eternal damnation, Ifeoma’s prayers for her father are full of love and hope. Papa-Nnukwu’s own prayers are full of the joy of living, which gives Ifeoma a measure of comfort that is missing in Eugene’s household. Because Kambili is exposed to different ways of interacting with God and the world, she begins to understand that she will have a choice concerning her own future.



Unfortunately, Ifeoma's prayers for her father's recovery go unanswered. Papa-Nnukwu, in his representation of the pure indigenous culture, necessarily cannot survive after a colonizing culture moves in. Unlike Father Amadi and Ifeoma, who are able to leave Nigeria for other cultures that are more open to the types of government that they represent, Papa-Nnukwu cannot leave. As the traditional culture, he has been tainted by exposure to the colonizer; even should the colonial forces of Britain or Catholicism leave Nigeria, they have still left a mark:

[A subaltern] agent cannot hearken back to pre-colonial, pre-orientalist discourse in search of an 'authentic' identity or out of 'nostalgia for lost origins'. . . colonial discourse has forever marked colonized and ex-colonised societies (and for that matter colonial and ex-colonial powers), so that it is impossible to recuperate any identity un-contaminated by it.

(Kapoor 652)

The indigenous culture in its pure and unadulterated form no longer exists: Papa-Nnukwu must die.

The clearest image of Papa-Nnukwu comes only after his death. As he lays stretched on his mat in Ifeoma's living room, Kambili "imagined [her] forebears a century ago, the ancestors Papa-Nnukwu prayed to, charging in to defend their hamlet, coming back with lolling heads on long sticks" (183). This culture clearly has no place in a modern world, where the violence between groups is not for mere tribal dominance or for defense but is state-sponsored. Papa-Nnukwu is as much a product of this idea of primal justice as he is a product of ancestor worship. Papa-Nnukwu stands as the paradigm of what Houston Baker, Jr. terms "native wholeness" (1047). He represents all

of the traditions, culture, and religion embodied in the Igbo people. However, as Baker further asserts, “emancipation from colonial domination never entails, or even suggests, fulfillment of the beautiful poetic dream implied by Aime Cesaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*. The return to one’s ‘native’ land is a paradigmatic impossibility” (1047). Simply put, the move to post-colonialism creates as much of a paradigm shift for a culture as did the initial colonial takeover, but this does not imply a simple return to pre-colonial life. It is not simply a matter of removing something which has been superficially attached, for the tenets and culture of the colonial society have been assimilated, however shallowly, into the existing paradigm. For children who were born into colonial life, there is no memory of life before that time, except as it exists in the collective cultural history of indigenous peoples. This is made clear in the way Kambili and Jaja relate to their grandfather. The children are fascinated by and a little afraid of Papa-Nnukwu, but they find his rituals and beliefs to be something alien. The incorporation of colonial values (through such things as Christianity, the English language, and Western ideas of luxury) precludes any ability to sink back into an indigenous paradigm. Papa-Nnukwu, more so than any other father figure in the novel, is unable to continue existing as a potential future. He cannot simply leave to find a culture more welcoming to his beliefs, for there is none following the destruction of his own. As his culture dies, so too Papa-Nnukwu, as an agent of that culture, must die.

The respective ways Ifeoma and Eugene handle the death of their father represent different ways of dealing with the past. After Papa-Nnukwu’s death, the first question Eugene asks of Ifeoma is not whether there was any pain or any final words of wisdom, but whether Ifeoma had called a priest to perform extreme unction. Further, Eugene

refuses to have any part in a traditional burial. Although it is later discovered that Eugene does, in fact, supply funds for such a ‘Pagan’ burial, his motivations are suspect—Eugene’s dealings with traditional, non-Catholic society generally provide him with some sort of benefit, usually by way of status or power. Eugene’s method is to completely eradicate the indigenous identity of his father, even in death, where Papa-Nnukwu cannot refuse him. By forcing Catholic ceremony onto Papa-Nnukwu’s death, Eugene is attempting to remove cultural memory as well as the culture itself. However, Ifeoma refuses to comply with Eugene’s wishes:

Aunty Ifeoma got up and started to shout. Her voice was unsteady. ‘I will put my dead husband’s grave up for sale, Eugene, before I give our father a Catholic funeral. Do you hear me? I said I will sell Ifediora’s grave first! Was our father a Catholic? I ask you, Eugene, was he a Catholic? *Uchu gbadi!*’ Aunty Ifeoma snapped her fingers at Papa; she was throwing a curse at him. Tears rolled down her cheeks.’

*(Hibiscus 188-189)*

Ifeoma feels that the greatest dishonor that can be done to her father is to deny him his traditional funeral. When a culture passes, it can be kept alive in cultural memory. To do otherwise (as usurpers attempt) is not only to lose the memory of the culture but also to lose the lessons gained and maintained in ethnic heritage. Papa-Nnukwu’s portrait is the embodiment of his cultural memory: upon the painting’s destruction it becomes something that lives apart from the physical realm, never to be retrieved but in memory. Memory fades with time, as does native wholeness. Just as indigenous society cannot be recovered once a colonizer moves in, Papa-Nnukwu dies under colonialism.

The painting that Amaka makes of Papa-Nnukwu becomes something much more than a piece of art when it is bequeathed to Kambili. For Kambili, the painting represents her final link to a departed past, one which she had only begun to find. While Kambili was a child, she was bound only to the history and the culture that her father allowed her to see; she was the newly colonized land, the infant nation of emerging Nigeria, and her father shaped her entire outlook. However, as Kambili enters her adolescence and incipient womanhood, she begins to shape her own identity. She has begun to explore her history and that which has shaped her (Papa-Nnukwu and the Igbo culture, although indelibly changed by English colonization, have certainly shaped Kambili through their impact on Nigerian history)—yet, with Papa-Nnukwu’s death, Kambili loses first-person contact with this history and must navigate only through her memory of it. This history, then, behaves toward futures in the same way that Papa-Nnukwu’s grandfather behaves toward Kambili: they become frozen and static.

Eugene feels threatened by Papa-Nnukwu and his potential impact on the development of Kambili and Jaja, even as colonizers fear the history and legends of the overtaken peoples. Where these legends remain in the public consciousness, they can serve as rallying points for dissent. Therefore, when Eugene discovers the painting, he behaves predictably and destroys it, the same way conquerors often attempt to destroy local things like temples. After Eugene attempts to exert his authority, “the painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something [Kambili] had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa’s feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors” (210). Kambili never had access to her own history, and now that history, in its “earth-tone colors,” was going the way of the earth itself, in an

ironic echo of the Biblical adage “to dust you shall return.” Nigeria’s history, the history of the people of Igboland, is now enmeshed with the desires of outside Western forces. Rather than producing fruit itself, the native culture becomes the soil in which the future is cultivated. Native wholeness has passed, but there remains in the upcoming generation cultural memory which must integrate with the forces still active in the country. It falls to the multiple versions of Nigeria that remain to determine the course of Nigeria’s future.

## CHAPTER 3

### NIGERIA-THAT-IS: EUGENE ACHIKE AND COLONIZING CULTURES

When an indigenous culture passes, there must be another culture to fill the vacuum. Fittingly, Eugene Achike (Papa-Nnukwu's son) takes over the role of defining Nigeria, replacing the indigenous culture with the colonial culture that usurped it. Eugene is the consummate colonizer, seeking to establish order as he sees it onto his family. He embraces Western values, European religion, and consumerism; he also seeks to impose these same values onto his wife and children.

Like any colonizing country treats the people under colonial rule, Eugene assumes that the needs of his children are the same as his own. He does not consider that their needs may be unique and uniquely suited to their circumstances. At the very least, Eugene assumes that his needs are of more pressing importance than anyone else's, particularly his children. Eugene controls the smallest details of their lives, scheduling them for every minute of every day; it is presupposed that Eugene will determine his children's future. Kambili "had never thought about the university where [she] would go or what [she] would study. When the time came, Papa would decide" (*Hibiscus* 130). Kambili blithely accepts that her father will control her; she has not yet made her run for independence, nor does she understand that her future is hers to decide. This state is allusive to the state of the Nigerian people who accept colonizing forces.

Eugene even interferes with Kambili's social life by making her run to the car following her last class, rather than lingering to socialize with the other students. On the one occasion Kambili takes a bit longer to reach the vehicle, "Papa slapped [her] left and

right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on [her] face and ringing in [her] ears for days” (*Hibiscus* 51). It is typical of colonizers to force their own culture onto the indigenous group. When the indigenous group resists, or simply has trouble adopting the new culture, the response is often violent.

Eugene does, however, truly love his children, and truly believes that he is acting in their best interests. According to Ernest Gellner, “High Culture is so to speak normative; it considers itself to be the model of human comportment, and it spurns Low Culture as a miserable distortion or aberration. It may treat Low Culture with indifference as well as contempt, or alternatively it may feel that, in a perfect world, Low Culture should be transformed in its own image” (39). Of course, “High Culture” is self-defined and usually indicates an imperialist force exerting control over an indigenous population, but the concept also indicates more than a simple desire for territory or resources. The term “High Culture” also indicates that the colonizers believe they are bringing the light of civilization to conquered peoples. Eugene’s colonialism has a more missionary spirit than a spirit of conquest—he seeks to convert and enlighten rather than simply conquer, and he truly believes in the righteousness of his actions. This, however, does not stop Eugene from being a force of violence in the lives of his children. His tea, for example, a symbol both of colonialism and of his love for his children, “was always too hot, always burned [Kambili’s] tongue...[Kambili] knew that when the tea burned [her] tongue, it burned Papa’s love into [her]” (*Hibiscus* 8). Kambili has accepted Eugene’s ostensible motivation; she believes that he is acting in her best interests, even when his actions clearly show otherwise. As long as both Kambili and Jaja maintain this

belief, Eugene's colonizing forces (and those of English colonialism in Nigeria) will remain in control. However, Jaja begins to openly rebel against this rule.

Although Eugene Achike is ethnically Igbo, he has chosen to identify himself with the colonizing British culture to personal advantage. He is a wealthy man, thanks to having adopted Westernized business methods, and his identification with British Catholicism has netted Eugene personal power. Amalia Sa'ar refers to this as the "liberal bargain":

The concept of the liberal bargain refers to a particular process whereby members of disadvantaged groups become identified with the hegemonic order, at least to a degree. Despite the hierarchical and selective character of liberal orders, quite a few members of marginalized groups stand to gain some benefits from them, or seem to believe that they do. Many of those who face exclusion because of their demographic attributes (notably their ethnic or racial background, and their gender in the case of women) may at the same time enjoy some advantages, thanks to their education, occupation, or to other ascribed traits that are less stigmatized (681).

Eugene has taken his education and adaptiveness and used them to launch himself to the top of the colonial power structure. This move, however, will prove risky, for in the post-colonial paradigm the colonial protectors of those who have made such a bargain are no longer present. This thrusts Eugene into the spotlight, potentially unable to hide from those who would consider him a threat. Eugene's ideological loyalties are to the old colonial regime, not the current regime. He, like Ade Coker, stands as a rallying point for those who dislike the current rule.



Everything about Eugene is split into dualities, and his religion is no exception. This is a result of his status as the allegory for Nigeria-That-Is, wherein “the ambivalent nature of the new postcolonial societies is evident in its traveling identities” (Nwakanma 2). He is an ideal Christian in terms of his charity; he makes large donations to Peter’s Pence, pays for communion wine, buys new ovens for the convent, builds a wing at the local hospital, and pays the school tuition for several local children. However, he is also extremely violent toward his family, all in the name of the Church. This is also an element of colonialism, demonstrating “what Foucault has articulated as the disciplinary methods of state regulation: in short, administrative colonialism dispersed European values through its coercive methods of dissemination” (Nwakanma 4). Eugene brutally punishes Kambili and Jaja for spending time with Papa Nnukwu, a heathen, and then for lying to him about the transgression:

“Kambili, you are precious.” His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. “You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.” He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second and then I screamed. (*Hibiscus* 194)

Eugene does not perform this act without personal pain; it hurts him to hurt his children and his wife. However, he feels like this is the only way to burn the sin out of their souls. The action is also not without precedent. He permanently deforms Jaja's finger simply because Jaja does not place first on his catechism test, and later in the novel Eugene beats Kambili so badly that she is hospitalized—simply because she kept a painting of Papa-Nnukwu that was given to her by her cousin Amaka. His violent reaction indicates that “while the actual colonialists have seemingly left the postindependence scene, the language[s] of colonization have not” (Mabura 211). The language that Eugene uses is a force bordering on the military, and this extends to his family whenever they behave in a manner that Eugene sees as rebellious.

Eugene forces European Catholicism down the throats of the members of his church, none the more so than his own family. His dominion over his family represents the ruthless invasion of colonial forces into foreign lands; he seeks to suppress native traditions, religions, and languages—except in those cases that benefit himself as a colonizer. Eugene claims that the religious priorities of the Igbo “were wrong; we cared too much about huge church buildings and mighty statues. You would never see white people doing that” (*Hibiscus* 104). The irony of this is that “white” churches do precisely this; the Catholic Church is exceedingly wealthy, and the Vatican has one of the finest collections of art in Europe, if not the entire world.

Eugene is highly praised by the other members of the clergy. In fact, “during his sermons, Father Benedict usually referred to the Pope, [Eugene], and Jesus—in that order” (*Hibiscus* 4). The order here is important; the Pope comes first (and the Church is arguably the most effective colonizing force in human history), and then comes Eugene

as the arm of that power. Jesus, theoretically the most important person in the religion, comes in a distant third. The relationship here is not really one of religion but one of power. Whereas the Pope is the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and thus wields power over all Catholics, Eugene is one of the most powerful men in his sphere. His status in the community is a tool to bring more influence to the church.

The ‘native’ traditions Eugene adopts help to secure his power base. More than this, he also supplants certain tribal thoughtforms with ideas that fit into the narrow range of thought and behavior that is deemed acceptable by the Church. He accomplishes this in a cunning way. Eugene is the *omelora* of this traditional tribe, “The One Who Does For the Community” (*Hibiscus* 56), and he provides alms to the other members of the tribe—pagan or Christian. He does not, however, allow pagans into his home, much like he refuses to allow his children to visit with Papa Nnukwu, their grandfather and an unrepentant, devout follower of an indigenous religion. Eugene’s charitable deeds are used to draw in the pagans, who benefit thereof, but all they are allowed is a glimpse; the pagans are given just a taste of the wealth that Eugene commands with the strong implication that, should they merely convert to Eugene’s brand of Christianity, they could have such wealth, as well.

Unlike his father, Eugene takes no joy in religion. When he draws the ash cross onto penitent foreheads on Ash Wednesday, his “line moved the slowest because he pressed hard on each forehead to make a perfect cross with his ash-colored thumb and slowly, meaningfully, enunciated every word of ‘dust and unto dust you shall return’” (*Hibiscus* 3). Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten period, which symbolizes the temptation of Christ in the desert. Although it is a serious period of religious observance,

it is followed by Easter, a holiday of resurrection, and is in its origins a fertility festival. In theory, Easter—and, by extension, Christianity—is replete with fertility. Beyond the resurrection of Christ (a traditional element of myths involving fertility gods), the symbolism of Easter is a resurrected world: through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the race of mankind is reborn into forgiveness and salvation. However, Eugene's "ash-colored thumb" is a strong contrast to the idea of a "green thumb" which would be more apropos to a fertility or resurrection holiday. Further, his guiding principle is not "He is risen," but "dust and unto dust you shall return." Eugene seeks to save others, including his family members, through purifying fire; he uses painful punishment in an attempt to correct what he sees as sinful transgressions.

Eugene's relationship with God is linked to Eugene's relationship with Kambili. As Eugene fears judgment at the hands of God, Kambili fears it at the hands of her father; Eugene seeks to purify his family by punishment and himself by self-denial. His conception of the redemption from sin is that so long as one faces punishment on Earth one might not face it in Heaven. He seeks to balance present pain with the promise of future bliss. Biafra, too, was supposed to be an idyllic place, a place of refuge for the Igbo people who were widely persecuted (and even murdered) for their cultural heritage. However, both sides in the Nigerian-Biafran War were seeking an unreachable ideal. The Unification powers of Nigeria were seeking a unified Nigeria in which the different cultures could blend together into one nationalist whole.

This duality is represented in Eugene. While he is colonizer in the sphere of religion, he represents the Igbo people in the cultural sphere. Although Eugene refuses to allow pagans to enter his home, he opens his home to his traditional tribe at Christmas, as

long as they profess to be Christian. While the women of the village prepare food (with the foreknowledge that they will be able to take home any leftovers, thus enriching their tables far better than they could have done on their own), the men of the village await alms. Anikwenka, an old man, spits “you are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave!” (*Hibiscus* 70) to Eugene after Eugene refuses to allow Anikwenka, a pagan, into his home. Although Anikwenka’s time is passing (like Papa Nnukwu), he can see the folly of holding onto colonialism despite Eugene’s attempt to placate his indigenous history. Eugene, however, builds “a Catholic fort. . . against his Igbo cultural past” (Mabura 210). He is attempting to shield his own indigenous past with the most powerful instrument of colonization that he can find: the Catholic Church. Another method is his negligence of his own father, a strong representative of Igbo’s tribal roots.

By denying his children access to their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, Eugene is stripping Kambili and Jaja of a cultural past—the same cultural past that he has sought to repress in his role as colonizer. Papa-Nnukwu is also not allowed to visit, for “Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, [and] he had not made an exception for his father” (*Hibiscus* 62-63). Upon Papa-Nnukwu’s death, Eugene does eventually decide to pay for the sacrificial cows demanded by his father’s religion but his first reaction is still to ask Ifeoma whether she had called a priest to perform extreme unction. His unification of cultures is forced and ultimately a failure; despite his attempts, he fails both to protect the employees of the *Standard* (his indigenous responsibility) and to indoctrinate his children into his restrictive view of Catholicism (his colonial responsibility).

Eugene also manifests colonization in subtle ways. For example, “he hardly spoke Igbo...he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English” (*Hibiscus* 13). What is interesting here is that to be ‘civilized,’ Eugene assumes that his family must speak English. This is an extension of the high culture/low culture dichotomy, for he does not even consider the fact that the Igbo have a civilization of their own. The only true culture is English culture. Eugene uses the supposed inferiority of indigenous languages to promote a colonial culture in the same way that “race. . . and even the construction of race itself as a biological and social reality, was of course used by Western Europeans to justify slavery and later to justify colonialism” (Adichie 43). Similarly, the Nigerian government did not accept that the Igbo people, through differences in religion, language, and culture, had a unique civilization; the government believed that Igboland belonged with the rest of Nigeria.

Eugene lives his life with the arrogance of a man whose power is certain, unchallenged and unending. His selfish arrogance is so extreme that Ifeoma considers him to be challenging the highest power that exists: “Eugene has to stop doing God’s job,” says Ifeoma; “God is big enough to do his own job” (*Hibiscus* 95). Jaja’s defiance of his father, therefore, is an assault not merely on the power of his father but also on the power of the ruling class. It is the defiance of the subjugated classes under the powers of colonialism. This defiance also challenges the underlying beliefs of the ruling class; that is, that they have a divine right or duty to be masters of other races. Therefore, Eugene has a difficult time accepting Jaja’s incipient adulthood and its concomitant self-rule, for Jaja’s independence (whether of thought or deed) questions Eugene’s divine right to rule. This is why “when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came

tumbling down, it was everything” (*Hibiscus* 15). It was Eugene’s right to rule; it was Eugene’s unquestioned autonomy; it was the assumed inferiority of the subjugated that came crashing to the Earth.

Eugene catches Jaja and Kambili looking at the painting of Papa-Nnukwu that was created by Amadi; the painting represents a link to their native culture, their history (both Igbo and familial), and their extended family. Naturally, as colonizer, Eugene is infuriated. To Eugene, the painting is treasonous. It represents a toehold held by a culture and a religion that he is trying to repress. It also represents the ideology of Ifeoma’s family, an ideology which values personal expression and individual liberty—both of which threaten Eugene’s home rule. However, Kambili does not regret that she brought home the painting. She is, perhaps, not even regretful of its discovery and subsequent destruction. Kambili seems to be resigned to the chain of events following the discovery of the painting. She wonders if “perhaps it was what we wanted to happen, Jaja and I, without being aware of it. Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka—even Papa—and things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order” (*Hibiscus* 209). The original order, of course, passed away with Papa-Nnukwu; however, to Kambili, who knew of no other style of rule than fascism before her visit to Nsukka, Eugene represented the original order. After being given a taste of democracy, there is no way the children can let their father’s abuse of his power stand. Things necessarily must come to a head, as the children must decide whether to reintegrate into the repressive lifestyle or to seek their own independent identities.

Eugene’s downfall begins before his physical death. The murder of Ade Coker provides a devastating blow, for Eugene realizes that his power is not all reaching. The

colonizing forces are faltering in the face of an indigenous population that wishes to be independent. When Eugene hears of Ade Coker's death, his reaction is one of the turning points for Kambili. She sees him "crumpled on a sofa in the living room, sobbing. He seemed so small. Papa who was so tall that he sometimes lowered his head to get through doorways. . . now he seemed small" (*Hibiscus* 206-7). Kambili's impression of her father had been, until this time, exaggerated. She exaggerated his powers and his abilities; the image of a man who is too tall for doorways is reminiscent of a small child's perception of any impressive adult. Now that she has seen some of the truth, however, and Eugene has admitted to himself that he is not omnipotent, he is reduced to what he actually is—in Kambili's eyes as well as his own.

Eugene's death is an allegory for the end of colonization in Nigerian history. He is poisoned, a violent and actively created death, as is the death that occurs to overthrown governments. Of further significance is the fact that Eugene is poisoned by his wife, Beatrice. A woman who, through silence, acquiesced to the abuse taking place in her own home, Beatrice appears on the surface to be the ideal colonized person. However, the depth to which Beatrice accepts her role as colonized comes into question. She finally ends Eugene's tyranny after a brutal beating which causes a miscarriage (although the novel suggests that this has happened before). Her actions therefore indicate that Beatrice is taking a stand to protect the children of Nigeria—to end, as it were, colonial rule. Poisoning is also a tool of assassination, further indicating that Beatrice represents the dissent of a conquered people.

Eugene's death brings an end to the tyrannical rule in his own home, an act that is reflected in the death of the Big Oga, which "is revealed as the ending point of Nigeria's



military rule. His death and the death of Uncle Eugene bring in a new hope, a dawn, to the polity” (Oha 203). It is no coincidence that the two deaths occur almost concurrently within the novel. Governmental transitions are by nature a type of upheaval, and this upheaval is not the less dramatic for happening on a smaller scale. The household is certainly changed in a vast way.

Eugene is not merely a colonizing figure but also the ultimate figure of authority; rebelling against his rule is unthinkable for Kambili, who had never known her own autonomy. Eugene acts almost in the capacity of a feudal king, whose law is absolute and whose reign, at least in Kambili’s eyes, is both immutable and eternal. Kambili never considers that a change in regime will come. She never considers “the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. . .he had seemed immortal” (*Hibiscus* 287). When Eugene is killed, Kambili finds herself without a guiding force, notwithstanding the minor rebellions she entertains concerning Papa-Nnukwu. Even these rebellions were an attempt to grasp at an external leadership, for Papa-Nnukwu himself represents a regime, although one that been thwarted by the forces of colonization that Eugene himself personifies. These forces are quite European in nature; “most of the wars of European colonial expansion, from 1500 to 1950, can be seen as wars of coercive regime change” (Orend 190). Eugene’s authority and social standing represent the regime change of imperialism; Eugene’s murder represents another sudden regime change, this one the overthrow of colonizing powers. Eugene’s death is, at heart, militaristic: the old guard falls to the new guard in a violent coup.

Like colonial rule, Eugene must pass. He is the literal father of Kambili and Jaja, as colonial rule was the parent of post-colonial society, but he can no longer flourish.

New generations are rising who have never experienced pre-colonial life, so they have nothing but their own experiences against which to judge the current regime. Eugene was poisoned by his wife, a woman who consented by silence. Beatrice forever changes the landscape of her household (as the Nigerian political landscape is changed with the withdrawal of British colonial forces). Although Beatrice does not present any alternate paths for Nigeria, she does clear the way for a new regime to rise. Jaja and Kambili (and by extension ascending Nigeria) will clean up after the old regime for years to come, even as they work to determine their own identities.

## CHAPTER 4

### NIGERIA-THAT-COULD-BE: FATHER AMADI AND UNIFICATION

When discussing the potential identities of Nigeria, recognizing the cultural history and current regime are only part of the equation. Identities are also formed upon hopes and goals for the future and continue to be shaped as these potential futures come—or do not come—to pass. Two potential futures of Nigeria are embodied in Father Amadi and Aunty Ifeoma. Both of these characters are surrogate father figures whose influence expands the farther Kambili and Jaja get from Eugene; however, both of these characters ultimately leave Nigeria, indicating that the futures they represent cannot come to pass.

Whereas Eugene is Nigeria-that-is, representing the failed goals of colonizing Europe, Father Amadi is one of the imagined futures of Nigeria, representative of the ideal of Nigerian unification. More interested in people than power, he has successfully blended the colonizing culture with the indigenous one. The bulk of Nigerian Catholics reside in Igboland, and Father Amadi is the ideal Nigerian Catholic. His songs of praise are sung both in English and Igbo, and he is far less bound to European Catholic tradition than Eugene.

Although Kambili could sense that life with her father—symbolizing life in Nigeria under the current regime—was not the way life was supposed to be, devoid of both joy and spontaneity, she does not begin to understand this consciously until her stay in Nsukka, where Kambili meets Father Amadi. At first, Kambili is unable to socialize with Father Amadi; she has been raised in an environment that makes her place in the

Church abundantly clear, but Father Amadi wishes to make Kambili a participant in her religion rather than as a passive recipient. Through unceasing effort, Father Amadi is able to draw Kambili out of her shell. She becomes taken with him as he triggers some sort of fantasy response, behaving as though the life Father Amadi represents is her actual reality. Father Amadi eclipses the current regime, represented by the leaders of the church, in authority. Like the other church leaders, Father Amadi is a figure of authority, yet he is a figure that rules through love rather than coercion. In this respect, he represents the Nigeria that should exist—Nigeria as it would be if the leaders were more perfect and showed more humanitarianism to the people. Kambili, being a child (and perfectly representing the third-generation citizens of post-Biafra Nigeria who cannot conceive of different rule, having never known any other), has difficulty responding to Father Amadi; under his aegis at confession, she finds it difficult “to feel penitent now. . . guilty instead because [she] could not focus on [her] sins, could not think of anything except how near he was” (*Hibiscus* 175). Despite her confusion, Kambili senses that Father Amadi represents the way that life is supposed to be, although she does not have conscious understanding of this but rather a vague, unidentified dissatisfaction with her father’s rule.

Father Amadi, unlike Eugene, does not communicate entirely in English. He is not, then, a strict representative of the colonizing culture, but rather represents the blending of the two cultures in a harmonious way. After all, once a new culture has been introduced, it cannot be completely removed, just as experiences, once lived, cannot be fully erased from memory, although they can be deeply buried. Even traumatic memories are seldom simply forgotten. According to researcher Richard McNally,

“psychogenic amnesia is caused by events whose psychological or emotional meaning produces memory loss without damaging the brain. . . psychogenic amnesia is extremely rare” (186). The only way for a nation to forget either an indigenous or imperialist culture is to introduce trauma at such a level that would cause irreparable damage—which would lead to the nation not existing at all, either through destruction of national heritage or through the populace itself. Similarly, a native culture can never be completely suppressed, regardless of the violence or virulence of the attempt by imperialist forces. Eugene, the colonizer, does not understand this and fights to convert his land completely. Father Amadi, on the other hand, welcomes and embraces the marriage of the cultures, taking what he will from each. Kambili, having been raised entirely in the colonizing culture, “did not fully comprehend [Amadi’s] English-laced Igbo sentences at dinner because [her] ears followed the sound and not the sense of his speech” (*Hibiscus* 135). She has this same trouble when he sings praise songs in his native tongue, for she is so unfamiliar with the practice that Igbo seems to her a foreign tongue. Eugene had succeeded in suppressing the indigenous Igbo culture in his home, but Father Amadi is now bringing in unification forces to challenge Kambili’s upbringing.

Hearing Father Amadi sing the Igbo songs of praise that have been banned from her home, Kambili initially has to fight against the indoctrination that has taught her that the only correct way to live is the way of the colonizer. However, thanks to Father Amadi, Kambili does not feel ashamed to be communicating with God in her native tongue (despite the years Eugene has spent adapting and translating his very thoughts into English). Rather, for the first time in her life, Kambili feels “that [she is] at home, that

[she is] where [she] had been meant to be for a long time” (*Hibiscus* 179). This post-colonial worldview, that cultures can blend and that a native culture is as good as an imported, European one, is remarkable in someone so young as Kambili. It is inspired by Father Amadi, the vision of what life could be in the most perfect of Nigerian futures.

During Kambili’s first outing at the stadium with Father Amadi, she feels self-conscious but also immensely happy that she is able to spend time with him. When he runs away from Kambili and tries to coax her into following him, “Father Amadi was like blue wind, elusive” (176). Kambili feels that, even should she give in to Father Amadi’s desires and chase him onto the field, even should she stretch her legs and run free, she will not be able to catch him. Father Amadi represents a dream future of Nigeria. He is the perfect blending of cultures, of the colonizer and the colonized, retaining the best of both worlds. However, this is not the way that national identities are formed. It is never a perfect, peaceful transition, although that is always the hope; peace is always elusive.

Father Amadi’s religion is filled with a wondrous joy that transcends the rules and dictates of the Catholic Church. The Church that Eugene legitimizes is highly European and, however tacitly, seeks to repress any ritual that might endorse the native pagan religion. Further, Eugene’s Church seeks to reinforce the colonizing rule by eliminating all native practices. The end result of Eugene’s rule is that the Church—the model for paternalistic authority, from nuclear family unit to the ultimate leadership of God—is devoid of life in its quest to maintain control. Whereas Father Amadi’s religion is full of joy, Eugene’s religion is morose; Kambili “never smiled after we said the rosary back home. None of us did” (*Hibiscus* 169). All that Kambili has hitherto known is fear and restriction, and she reacts strongly to the promise of a better world that Father Amadi

offers. When Kambili considers Father Amadi (who is rapidly becoming a target for her burgeoning feelings of love), she is filled “with a fierce, unreasonable sadness [to think of] how Father Amadi’s smooth skin would not be passed on to a child, how his square shoulders would not balance the legs of his toddler who wanted to touch the ceiling fan” (*Hibiscus* 180). Couched in the symbolic abstinence of Catholic priests, Father Amadi’s future is one of fruitlessness. As priests cannot father children, Father Amadi’s legacy—unified, peaceful Nigeria—is destined to remain unfulfilled, something that Kambili instinctively understands. She begins to spend as much time with him as she is able, as though she is trying to imbibe through her very skin the elusive future that Father Amadi represents.

Father Amadi, in his representation of the perfect post-colonial Nigerian society, is a source of confusion for Kambili. She has hitherto only experienced life under the rule of her father, Eugene, a symbol of colonialist power. Eugene’s place of importance in the Catholic Church has ensured that Kambili associates religion and God with colonialism. When she is confronted with Father Amadi, “the young visiting priest who had broken into song in the middle of his sermon, whom Papa had said [they] had to pray for because people like him were trouble for the church” (*Hibiscus* 136), she is suddenly confronted with an alternate to the life she has always known. The Church has presented her with a Europeanized, colonialist version of God, and Father Amadi now presents Kambili with another version. She “could not reconcile the blond Christ hanging on the burnished cross in St Agnes and the sting-scarred legs of those boys” (*Hibiscus* 178) with whom Father Amadi played soccer. Here, Father Amadi is presenting Kambili with an

alternative religion, one where she belongs as she is and is not dependent on her Anglicization.

The relationship between Kambili and Father Amadi becomes close rather quickly; it certainly pushes the boundaries of appropriateness. Although at the beginning Kambili “felt almost sacrilegious addressing this boyish man—in an open-neck T-shirt and jeans faded so much [she] could not tell if they had been black or dark blue—as Father” (*Hibiscus* 135), this awkwardness is more reflective of Kambili’s opinions of the Church than it is her opinion of Father Amadi. In fact, Kambili finds herself inexorably drawn to Father Amadi; “even in the priestly garb, his loping, comfortable gait pulled [Kambili’s] eyes and held them” (*Hibiscus* 162). Kambili longs to find a place in Father Amadi’s world. However, she finds herself unable to converse freely with him. Kambili is so indoctrinated in her father’s brand of Christianity (and way of life) that she cannot mold herself to Father Amadi’s way of living. However, she can sense the beauty and acceptance of Father Amadi, and can by extension sense the pure perfection of the life that he represents. Father Amadi represents a society that embraces the colonial culture and the indigenous culture equally. It is a culture that embraces all people, rather than casting off those who do not fit the stringent rules it has arbitrarily chosen. Kambili so longs to belong to this world that she “was grateful that he had said [her] name, that he remembered [her] name” (*Hibiscus* 164). The simple act of recognizing Kambili includes her in Nigeria’s perfect future.

However, Father Amadi knows that his perfect, inclusive future is something that can exist only in hopeful dreams. The road to peace is difficult at best, and post-Biafra Nigeria could hardly be considered ideal conditions. He is forced to leave for Europe.



However, Father Amadi wishes while he can to include Kambili as much as Kambili wishes to be included. Father Amadi's behavior is so marked that those around him believe him to be in love with her; Amadi himself tells Kambili that he "wanted to take [her]. And after that first day, [he] wanted to take [her] with [him] everyday" (*Hibiscus* 280). Father Amadi likes Kambili as much as she likes him. He sees her as the future of Nigeria. It is Kambili who represents the direction in which the country will go; naturally, Father Amadi desires that Nigeria follow the perfect imagined future that he himself symbolizes.

Had unification between the two cultures (English and Nigerian) been successful, English culture would have merged seamlessly with the native cultures in a peaceful way, creating a new hybrid culture. However, unification did not work; it was only partially accomplished, resulting in two separate Nigerias (North and South), and that much was only made possible through extensive violence and a high casualty rate. Although the ideal might have been the best possible outcome for post-colonial Nigeria, the ideal situation did not occur. Further, Christianity still remains something of an "Other" in Nigerian society. The earliest forms of religion in the region currently known as Nigeria were Islam and native religions; therefore, "Islam seems to have become rather domesticated in a way that Christianity has not: Christianity is still largely identified as a foreign religion and associated with the colonial power structure, while Islam has gained a Nigerian texture" (Ekeh 88). Although Father Amadi represents the best aspects of Catholicism (whereas Eugene often represents the worst, despite his fiscal generosity), Father Amadi will never be able to achieve the perfect unification of Christianity and

native culture that he desires. He will always be perceived as colonizer, as outsider.

Father Amadi cannot remain in Nigeria.

Father Amadi, rather than staying in Nigeria where he represents a bygone hope, is forced to move to Europe. Despite his good intentions, Father Amadi remains informed by the same colonizing forces as Eugene, so he also fails. Ironically, the colonizer has to return to the land of the colonizers. Although he does not return to England, the country that colonized Nigeria, he does go to Germany, which also maintained African colonies. This move takes place at the same time as the death of Eugene. Both colonizers are lost at the same moment in history. This moment allegorically represents the end of the Biafran conflict. It also represents the moment when Nigeria had to stand on its own, emerging into its own identity as an adolescent emerging into incipient adulthood. This transition does not take place overnight and is imperfect; Nigeria maintains loose bonds with England, and Kambili is still a child who needs a father figure.

## CHAPTER 5

### NIGERIA-THAT-COULD-BE: AUNTY IFEOMA AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, is his opposite in nearly every way. She allows a great deal of freedom for her children, in contrast to the tight rule Eugene maintains. Respectful of cultural tradition but not bound to it, and educated in Western thoughtforms, Ifeoma is representative of the democratic option for Nigeria's imagined future. It is a future where all people, regardless of ethnic group, religion, or gender, are allowed to have a voice. Although Ifeoma and Eugene share the same blood, they represent wildly divergent styles of rulership: Eugene, the somewhat tyrannical imperialism; Ifeoma, the modern Western democracy.

To Kambili, Ifeoma is larger than life. In truth, she is a large woman, and "the wrapper that stopped above her calves would stop above the ankles of an average-size woman" (*Hibiscus* 278). In opposition to the quiet life that draws into itself and leaves empty spaces (the life embodied by Eugene and his family), Ifeoma expands, life and energy filling all available space. Additionally, Ifeoma is not a woman with power in the Church, as Eugene is such a man; rather, Ifeoma is a teacher, who is concerned not with forcing her viewpoints onto others but instead with teaching others to become actively engaged in forging their own viewpoints.

The visit to Nsukka marks Kambili's first experiences with the idea of democratic rule—the idea that Kambili herself is capable of making her own decisions and carving out her own identity. The contrast between Ifeoma's world and Eugene's world proves quite unsettling for Kambili, as the contrast between two governing systems proves

unsettling and difficult for any emerging post-colonial society. Ifeoma's home is crowded, both physically and intellectually. Not only are there many people living in a small space, but each of them fills that space with words, ideas, and the spark of burgeoning life. Contrasted with this, Kambili's home "had too much empty space, too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. [The] ceilings were too high. [The] furniture was lifeless" (*Hibiscus* 192). Kambili's home, the seat of Eugene's colonization and his power, is not merely full of empty space but also full of wasted resources and completely devoid of the intellectual robustness that would destroy Eugene's regime—for this robustness is life, and human life always seeks improving change.

The way that Ifeoma raises her children is diametrically opposed to the way that Eugene raises his. Eugene raises his children on the principle of fear. They are able to achieve only what Eugene wants them to achieve, and then they only achieve because they are afraid of the consequences of failure. Kambili and Jaja do not nurse any ambitions of their own but are simply being made into machines. Ifeoma, on the other hand, allows her children to nurse ambitions and to make mistakes, for she believes that this is the only way that the children will grow. Her parenting philosophy is about "setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and [Kambili]. [They] did not scale the rod because [they] believed [they] could, [they] scaled it because [they] were terrified that [they] couldn't" (*Hibiscus* 226). Kambili and Jaja's reactions are typical for children in the type of household in which they live; "in their efforts to attempt to avoid further abuse and to

please punitive parents who set harsh and often unattainable standards, many child victims of abuse strive to do better, to be perfect. However, such a strategy may backfire as they develop overidealized images that they cannot contain” (Harter 275). Eugene forces a high level of performance from his children with threat and severe physical punishment. Ifeoma, however, simply encourages her children, allowing them to perform to the fullness of their particular abilities and to discover their particular strengths. Aunty Ifeoma represents the possible future of Nigerian democracy. In this future, no child is bound by socioeconomic measures or questions of race or religion, at least in theory. Ifeoma’s is the future within which each Nigerian citizen has a voice as well as the freedoms that the polity of Western society considers a birthright.

Amaka, Ifeoma’s daughter and Kambili’s cousin, is an adolescent girl who embodies what Nigeria could become if it should follow a democratic path. Amaka listens to both Western and traditional Nigerian music, and she freely expresses her opinions. Sometimes this does lead to a sense of cruelty, as Amaka often ridicules Kambili for her reservedness; however, Ifeoma does not ignore this behavior but rather uses it as a teaching opportunity. On one such occasion, “Aunty Ifeoma’s eyes hardened—she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at [Kambili]. ‘*O ginidi*, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!’” (*Hibiscus* 170). Ifeoma, in keeping with democratic tradition, believes that a nation cannot be strong unless each member of the society fully embraces and uses his or her talents and skills. In order for this to happen, all members of the society must feel essential—they must feel as though their contributions are important. The way Ifeoma inspires and teaches her children embodies Western ideas of civic pride and civic participation.

The democracy espoused by Ifeoma extends not only to those who have the same beliefs (political or religious) but also to all members of the society; this includes those who are traditionalists, or who belong to an indigenous people that is ruled by a colonialist society. Whereas Eugene wants to eliminate his father's influence from his children's lives, considering him to be a backwards influence, Ifeoma embraces Papa-Nnukwu as "not a heathen but a traditionalist", and "sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar, that when Papa-Nnukwu did his *itu-nzu*, his declaration of innocence, in the morning, it was the same as [their] saying the rosary" (*Hibiscus* 166). Rather than wishing to suppress a culture that is passing into memory, Ifeoma wishes to learn from it. She does not attempt to revise history but seeks to create a cultural heritage that is inclusive of all members of a nation.

Ifeoma, as the spirit of democracy, is necessarily at odds with the ruling powers of Nigeria. In her life, these powers are embodied in the way the university at Nsukka, where she is a lecturer, is run by the fascist government. As Ifeoma is attempting to empower her students, to prepare them for the next generation of leadership, she is forced to live in increasing fear and under increasing threat. Ifeoma, however, refuses to bow to governmental pressure, for she is "not paid to be loyal. When [Ifeoma] speak[s] the truth, it becomes disloyalty. . .when do we speak out, eh? When soldiers are appointed lecturers and students attend lectures with guns to their heads? When do we speak out?" (*Hibiscus* 222-3). Ifeoma is the spirit of revolution, and as all people who are revolutionaries, refuses to regress into the past or the dying present.

However, like Father Amadi, Ifeoma cannot remain in Nigeria. Like the perfect post-colonial future that Amadi represents, Ifeoma's Western democracy has no place in

the emerging Nigeria. In fact, the attempt to introduce a democratic system actually exacerbated tensions in post-colonial Nigeria, for “the introduction of electoral processes (in the form of ‘one man, one vote’) led to the power-defining phenomenon of ‘tribalism’ that embittered the relations between various ethnic groups” (Ekeh 91). Pre-colonial Nigeria did not exist as a unified nation but as kingdoms that bordered one another. Attempting to keep these groups together in the absence of any unifying force or cause is destined to fail—the diverse ethnic groups perceive of each other as threats, economically and politically. Democracy is an idea that is almost guaranteed to fail at this particular point in time. Kambili can sense this and dreams “that the sole administrator was pouring hot water on Aunty Ifeoma’s feet in the bathtub of [Kambili’s] home in Enugu. Then Aunty Ifeoma jumped out of the bathtub and, in the manner of dreams, jumped into America. She did not look back as [Kambili] called her to stop” (*Hibiscus* 229-30). Ifeoma represents a future that is untenable. There remain too many power struggles and questions of identity for a truly democratic government to maintain political control; the populace is still deeply informed by militaristic tendencies—in other words, schoolyard politics. The emerging character of Nigeria remains too immature to handle the more adult role of democratic rule. Even Ifeoma’s dual role as mother and father is too modern, too Western, to fit into contemporary Nigerian society. Nigeria is simply not ready for Ifeoma—she must move to America.

## CHAPTER 6

### NIGERIA-THAT-MUST-BE: JAJA ACHIKE AND STRUGGLING IDENTITIES

Kambili and Jaja must choose between the potential futures available to them; by choosing, they will solidify their burgeoning identities. Jaja is perplexed and a bit impressed by life in Nsukka, life in a democratic household. Ifeoma's style of parenting (and thus type of rulership) is represented by the flowers in her yard, which are the namesake of the novel: the purple hibiscus. Upon first sighting the flowers, Jaja is strangely drawn to them:

'That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Aunty?' Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fence. 'I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses.'

Aunty Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, colored a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. 'Everybody has that reaction the first time' (*Hibiscus* 128).

Like the purple hibiscus, a flower so uncommon that few have seen it, democracy seems to be a beautiful myth. Like democracy, the purple hibiscus must be actively sought and cultivated—it is not to be found without both fertile earth and willing caretakers. For the Nigeria in *Purple Hibiscus*, a nation that has been embroiled first in colonization, and then in a vicious autocracy, a peaceful democratic regime is far from the political reality.

While in Nsukka, Jaja feels for the first time the savor of personal autonomy. In what nearly becomes a rite of passage, Jaja is able to express his own thoughts and make his own choices. He takes to this role as if he had never been oppressed, his shoulders broadening, his back straightening with his newfound freedom and adulthood. Even



Kambili notices this; she “listened to him and marveled at the wonder in his voice, at how much lighter the brown of his pupils was” (*Hibiscus* 126). Jaja becomes the representative of a free people, a people at liberty to make their own rules and dictates as demanded by their situation. For the first time in his life, Jaja is free from colonial rule.

After Jaja visits Ifeoma and her family in the university city of Nsukka, he returns changed; he is no longer willing to quietly accept Eugene’s rule. Jaja has seen in Ifeoma’s family a completely different future than any offered to him by his father. Ifeoma rules with love and laughter, completely unknown in Eugene’s household, and she allows each child to flourish according to his or her own abilities. This is a more democratic version of Nigeria’s future. Adichie’s choice to locate Ifeoma’s family in Nsukka has more meaning than the simple coincidence that Ifeoma is an instructor in the university. Nsukka was one of the first cities of Biafra to fall in the war. Had Nsukka not fallen, Biafra might have been able to win its independence. There is no way to determine what would have happened had Biafra been free. Adichie exploits this uncertainty by the metaphoric fall of Nsukka as the nation faces increasing political unrest. Jaja’s transformation while visiting Ifeoma represents not only his burgeoning independence but also the danger inherent in such.

When Jaja returns home, he refuses to partake in Holy Communion. Eugene is shocked, claiming, “You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that.” Jaja responds, “Then I will die” (*Hibiscus* 6). Eugene is speaking of the death of the soul (true to his messianic colonialism), but Jaja is not speaking of his soul. Jaja is speaking of his desire to be free from the despotic rule of his father. Kambili finds his new defiance “fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom

from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup” (*Hibiscus* 16). Ultimately, Ifeoma and her family flee from Nigeria, even as Nsukka fell during the Nigerian-Biafran War; the democratic ideal cannot be maintained in Nigeria, where the ground is barren to such ideals. So, too, do Jaja’s hopes for his own independence fall. When his independence comes, it is not complete. He is not able to move out of the sphere of colonization. Instead, Jaja becomes a father figure in his own right, fixed into his own orbit. He does not physically die, but he dies to his ideals. Colonialism, though weakened, lives on. Jaja maintains his duality of personality; he is neither fully colonized nor fully independent.

Jaja’s period of imprisonment, lasting three years, does much to shatter the burgeoning independence that he began to experience in Nsukka. For thirty-one months he languishes in prison; for “almost three years. . .Jaja’s official status, all this time, has been Awaiting Trial” (*Hibiscus* 300). Interestingly, this is the exact length of time of the Biafra conflict, which raged for thirty-one months, from May 1967 to January 1970. This is not a coincidence: both Biafra and Jaja are experiments in freedom that ultimately fail. Confined to a small, brutal cell, allowed only the small privileges that his family’s money can buy, Jaja withdraws into himself. That part of him that heretofore proclaimed leadership, the same part which enabled him to step forward and lie to protect his mother and his sister, is sacrificed (or, at the very least, seriously limited) for that same protection. According to James Garbarino, this reaction is not surprising, for “on evolutionary grounds today’s children (and to some degree women) are less likely to experience a fight-or-flight response to traumatic situations, and more likely to experience ‘emotional dissociation and freezing’” (18). The trauma facing Jaja is not

merely that of his father's abuse, but also that of his father's death and his own imprisonment. He cannot escape, and fighting his captors will earn him nothing. Jaja is, perhaps permanently, crippled; he may never reclaim the fullness of future that he began to experience with his aunt and her family. He also remains bound to the identity that his imprisonment has given him—he will never develop a unified, whole identity.

To Kambili, Jaja is a hero; he has sacrificed his freedom and his future in order to liberate his family from a man who could surely be considered a tyrant. However, Jaja himself does not appear to feel the same:

His eyes are too full of guilt to really see me, to see his reflection  
in my eyes, the reflection of my hero, the brother who tried always  
to protect me the best he could. He will never think that he did  
enough, and he will never understand that I do not think he should  
have done more (*Hibiscus* 305).

The guilt that Jaja feels is not for his action, for his only transgression has been dishonesty, and that in the pursuit of protection for his family. The guilt that Jaja feels is the guilt of not being able to protect his family more, of not being able to prevent the events that forced Beatrice's hand in murdering her husband, of not being able to prevent Kambili's hospital stay for injuries sustained when her father beat her, of not being able to prevent the miscarriage of an unborn sibling that resulted from Eugene's violence. His guilt is the guilt of a Holocaust survivor or an individual who does not stop the spread of a totalitarian regime—it is survivor's guilt, it is the guilt of a person who could not have prevented circumstance but wishes that he had tried harder to find some way, any way, to prevent the calamities that have befallen. It is the same feeling that Kambili has upon

witnessing a woman being beaten by soldiers: “I felt that I knew her, that I had always known her. I wished I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper” (*Hibiscus* 44). This woman was beaten for spitting at soldiers, the enforcing arm of tyrannical power. Though there is, practically, nothing Kambili can do to aid the woman, and though she knows that even the small actions of helping her rise and clean herself would draw down fury from those who committed the violence (thereby exposing Kambili and her entire family to that same violence), she nonetheless feels guilt for not doing more.

Jaja’s namesake is an eerie foreshadowing of the future that awaits him. He was named after King Jaja of Opobo, a local figure of history and myth who was exiled from his lands for being defiant. As Obiora, Jaja’s cousin and eldest son of Ifeoma, describes him, “Jaja of Opobo was no saint, anyway. He sold his people into slavery, and besides, the British won in the end. So much for the defiance” (*Hibiscus* 145).

Jaja’s overt defiance against his father begins to take shape when Jaja chooses to honor his grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu. In this way, Jaja is taking ownership of his history and his indigenous culture. Although Eugene has forbidden his children from eating or drinking in their grandfather’s home (lest they ingest something blessed by a Pagan), Jaja tells his grandfather “Papa-Nnukwu. . .if we’re thirsty, we will drink in your house” (*Hibiscus* 66). Jaja is not merely choosing to disobey his father on a whim or for convenience; he is making a deliberate decision to turn his back on Eugene’s Catholic teachings. Further, he is speaking for Kambili, as well. In this moment Jaja is taking responsibility for his sister’s future, including her in their cultural heritage. With that one decision, Jaja makes a break from the oppressiveness of Eugene’s rule. Naturally, a

colonizing force wishes to separate an occupied people from their history, thus removing a culture behind which the people might band together as well as creating a vacuum that the colonizing force can then fill with its own culture. America attempted this with wild success against the Native American tribes, replacing native language and religion with English and Christianity, teaching the Native American children that their cultural past was inferior. Reclaiming that cultural past, as Jaja is doing by honoring (or at least not turning his back on) his grandfather, gives Jaja the ability to loosen the colonizer's foothold as he begins to search for his own identity.

Jaja also shows his defiance against his father's rule in sometimes subtle ways; one of these is to take blame for infractions committed by others. By denying his father the chance to punish the offender, he protects them from Eugene's authority. Not only does he protect his mother from prosecution after she murders her husband, he also protects Kambili from their father. On one occasion, Jaja pretends that he told Kambili to eat before Mass when it was actually their mother (*Hibiscus* 102). Although this is seemingly a minor infraction, and certainly seems to be an excusable one in light of Kambili's menstrual pain, Eugene is not a reasonable man. He does, after all, permanently deform his son for not living up to high scholastic expectations and scalds his children's feet for visiting their grandfather. Given Eugene's history, Jaja's defiance is extremely dangerous, and it sets the stage for the tragic dissolution of the family that occurs at the end of the novel.

Jaja's defiance does not come without a price. Jaja is imprisoned for years without being formally charged (thus taking away even his ability to defend himself), and the shoulders that began to broaden in Ifeoma's backyard slump under the weight of his

imprisonment. Like the British, who won in the end, Eugene claims his son. Although British rule was overturned, the mark that the colonizers left on Nigeria was indelible; the land will never be as it once was. So, too, is Jaja; he will never live up to the potential that once lived inside him. Nigeria, especially Igboland, is scarred with the memory of violence and dissolution. It, like Jaja, is like a child reaching adulthood after a lifetime of abuse.

Kambili and Jaja emerge into adulthood together at the time of Eugene's murder. Wounded, self-sacrificing, and struggling to find and keep his voice, Jaja's decision to protect his mother elevates him to the role of patriarch. He enters into the role of father figure and therefore becomes an allegory for Nigeria-that-must-be. Like Nigeria, Jaja suffers from the coup (through incarceration) and will have to struggle to find himself in the future. Jaja will forever be marked by the psychological torment of having been incarcerated, as well as literally and permanently deformed through the actions of his father. Even as Jaja spent years "awaiting trial," the nation of Nigeria is also waiting, waiting for a time when the nation can heal its own scars and move forward as a unified whole. Although there were glorious options for the future, the reality of Nigeria's political situation has made them unreachable. The immediate future is one of struggle, and the outcome is uncertain.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: EMERGING IDENTITIES AND EMERGING STATEHOOD

The father figures (Eugene, Papa-Nnukwu, Father Amadi, and Ifeoma) are not the only adult characters in the novel; there are others, but they are distinctly impotent and fail to provide any real guidance for Jaja and Kambili. Beatrice—mother, wife, and the ultimate symbol of repression in the Achike household—takes the step most repressed peoples only dream about by murdering Eugene. She deposes a tyrannical despot. The choice to poison with a substance procured by a witch doctor indicates a reaching back to native culture, a complete rejection of colonial rule; further, the choice to poison his tea is indicative of the inherent instability of despotic governments. As those who live by the sword die by the sword, these instruments bring down governments that maintain power through fear and violence. Eugene, the colonialist, is brought down by tea—the ultimate symbol of colonization. Nigeria, a nation forged because of British economic desires, falls because of the economic concerns of all the tribal players. Each of the three major ethnic groups (Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, and Yoruba), as well as the many minority tribes, are vying for financial security—and thus power. Similarly, “the objective of [spousal violence] is generally the need of the abuser to have greater power in interpersonal relationships” (Kashani and Allan 33). Britain’s own economic desires continue to act even after Nigerian independence, as Britain provided arms for Nigeria in deference to Britain’s industrial concerns in its once-colony. The path of war is circular and self-referent, as the independent nation poisons itself with colonial concerns; so, too, does Beatrice poison Eugene with a symbol of British colonialism.

Although Beatrice does not face penal consequences for her action, she certainly suffers through Jaja's imprisonment. When Jaja takes responsibility for the murder of Eugene, he takes the position of head of household and thus becomes the symbol for the rising power structure. He does not balk at this responsibility but immediately bears it by sacrificing his freedom for his mother. When the police come to question the family, "Jaja did not wait for their questions; he told them he had used rat poison, that he put it in Papa's tea" (*Hibiscus* 291). He behaves in this instance the same way that Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu behaved at the end of the Nigerian-Biafran War. Ojukwu recognized that the attempt at freedom was a lost cause; he fled the Biafran enclave and left the task of surrendering his forces to the Army commander that took power in his wake. Jaja realizes that there are more important things than winning. By surrendering he is able to protect his family. Ojukwu effectively surrendered in the wake of seemingly insurmountable odds—an outnumbered Biafran Army, scores of Igbo dying of starvation and disease, collapsing morale—and, although there remains a fear of widespread genocide throughout Nigeria's borders, many Biafrans decided that possible death in the future was a better alternative than the death that was almost certain if the war continued. Jaja's action is intended to preempt such bloodshed within his family. After all, at least one unborn child has already been lost due to the conflict caused by Eugene's iron-fisted rule.

Beatrice's life was shattered with Jaja's imprisonment, though it hints at improvement with news of Jaja's impending release. However, the important thing to notice about Beatrice's reaction is her resistance of Jaja's sacrifice. In order for a new relationship to arise, Jaja has to confess to a crime that he did not commit; whatever his



motives, the results of Jaja's choice are more far-reaching than mere protection of his mother. Jaja is accepting the freedom he began to embrace in Nsukka, although it is now limited; in fact, "Nsukka enables Jaja to break the blanket of silence, embrace defiance, and initiate a cultural reclamation of his Igbo roots" (Mabura 220). Jaja moves into the familiar leadership role vacated by Eugene despite the fact that he did not perform the usurping action. Jaja and Kambili have both been deeply harmed by Eugene's murder; "when one spouse murders the other, a child automatically loses both caretakers due to the death of one and the imprisonment or hospitalization of the other" (Kashani and Allan 40). In order to prevent Beatrice's incarceration, Jaja must take her place. The children no longer have father figures to model themselves after and must begin the arduous task of adulthood. Kambili, like Jaja, is changed; she represents the "'doubleness' of Igbo nationalism—its radiating between cosmopolitan and localism—a self-conscious existence at the margins of Nigerian postcolonial history" (Nwakanma 8). She has seen the truth of her father, and although she understands his good works does not talk about them; similarly, she knows that while Jaja was once capable of embodying true and complete freedom, he is now reduced to what his role as family leader demands.

If Eugene is what Nigeria is, Father Amadi is what Nigeria could be, and they are both rejected, then Jaja becomes Nigeria's future. Kambili is in love with the future version of Nigeria represented by Father Amadi, but this love is colored by her upbringing in a colonialist environment. Her love for him (in his role as a positive colonizer) is what enables Amadi to love Kambili back in a way that he cannot love anyone else. Kambili sees Father Amadi as a hopeful symbol of the union of imperialism and tradition, the utopist version of Nigeria that might have been possible had Biafra

never seceded. However, this alone is not enough because he is the colonized as well as the colonizer, and Nigeria is throwing off the yoke of colonization. He is a hope whose time has passed. Eugene and Father Amadi are locked into their roles and cannot adapt or change. Kambili is not locked into her role; however, on the threshold of eighteen and adulthood, Kambili's incipient future is still undecided. She is the undecided Nigeria, and the only father figure left to her—Jaja—becomes her model for the future.

Jaja is the last father figure remaining to Kambili. Eugene is dead, Father Amadi is in Europe, and Auntie Ifeoma (who defaults as a father figure because she performs the functions of both mother and father) has moved to America. Although he is not responsible for the death of his father, Jaja has moved into the fatherhood role by taking responsibility for the act. He shoulders his burden with stoicism and without any false hopes for a utopic future. Similarly, Nigeria has to shoulder the burden of its future along with the pain of its bitter past. Although Jaja has achieved the independence he fought for, as Nigeria is finally united after the Nigeria-Biafran War, it is with a high price. His incarceration takes a toll on him, mentally and physically, and Nigeria must face a broken nation.

Although not present in the novel as a physical entity, God is certainly a father figure. God notably works as a father archetype for all of the characters, but the irony is that God—the most overarching of all possible father figures—is an absent father. Although religion is a major aspect of the action in *Purple Hibiscus* (the novel itself being organized around Palm Sunday, the day Christ rode into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion), *deus ex machina* is notably absent from the novel. All of the events that take place are the result of human action. Prayer and ceremony are offered, but God

never ostensibly steps in to answer his penitents. The traditional religion of Nigeria is dying, but the European Christianity taking its place has no room for its new converts. As Amaka questions, “it’s about time Our Lady came to Africa. Don’t you wonder how come she always appears in Europe? She was from the Middle East, after all” (*Hibiscus* 137-8). Jaja begins to assert his independence from God concurrently with his burgeoning understanding of God’s inability (or unwillingness) to aid his children; he questions why God had “to murder his own son so we would be saved[.] Why didn’t He just go ahead and save us?” (*Hibiscus* 289). As Jaja witnesses the flight of Ifeoma and her family (who helped Jaja to strive and blossom toward his potential), he questions all father figures, who inevitably leave their children to fend for themselves. God is no less culpable than any other father figure in this scenario.

In this sense, God is impotent. So, too, are all of the other father figures in the novel. God, mighty and all-powerful, leaves His children to create Him in their own images; Kambili “imagined God calling [her], his rumbling voice British-accented. He would not say [her] name right; like Father Benedict, he would place the emphasis on the second syllable rather than the first” (*Hibiscus* 180). When God himself is no longer omnipotent, the other father figures also lose the mythical proportions often given to them by children. Papa-Nnukwu dies as his culture is bastardized and lost. Eugene is murdered by his own child in an inversion of the Abraham story—Jaja does not kill Eugene because God tells him to do so, but because Eugene was playing God. Auntie Ifeoma must leave the country for the sake of her biological children and ideals, leaving country and surrogate children Jaja and Kambili behind. Even Jaja, the character closest

to the actual future of Nigeria and therefore the most relevant father figure for Kambili, is imprisoned, losing not only years of his life but also his spirit.

All of the father figures are essentially rendered null in the creation of Nigeria's future. The pure indigenous history is irrecoverable, and colonialism collapses under its own weight. Unification of the divergent Nigerian parties was a dream that died in the face of war. Democracy is equally unattainable, for the Nigerian soil is not hospitable to democratic ideals. The future is in the hands of the children, and squarely so. The fathers had their change to create and change the world when they themselves were children. Nigeria will emerge into a united concept of selfhood as the children do.

*Purple Hibiscus* is not a "Biafra" novel. It does not attempt to retell the horrors experienced during that conflict. Adichie, however, does not shy away from her identity as a Nigerian but rather uses the history of Biafra to describe a new Nigeria. Adichie uses children—who, by definition, have yet to achieve a fully defined identity—to explore the options of a national identity for Nigeria. Their models of fatherhood are Eugene, a pure colonialist who represents the divided nature of Nigeria and the governance in the pre-independence period; Father Amadi, a man whose gentle blend of his indigenous and colonizing cultures represent the failed ideal of a unified Nigeria; and Ifeoma, whose boisterous independence ultimately has no place in Nigerian society. However, as each of these models eventually leaves or dies, Kambili and Jaja must come to realize that any ideas of "purity"—whether pure nativeness or pure Westernness—cannot work in the real world. They must take the best parts of each as they form their own identities. It is through this idea of hybridization that identities are formed. Jaja and Kambili negotiate their own futures, which, while certainly not free from problems,

are allegorical to the current state of Nigerian politics and still maintain hope for a better future.

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