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# Inculturated Catholicisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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When African nationalist writers of the mid-twentieth century refer to Christianity they almost invariably represent it as being implicated in colonialism. Writers like Beti and Ngugi evidence this, and Ngugi in particular employs Christian mythology in order to displace it with a nationalism that is given spiritual dimensions. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* ([2005] 2006. Harare: Weaver) belongs to a new generation of novels that take for granted Christianity as part of contemporary African culture and although the novel criticises the Eurocentric and exclusive Catholicism of previous generations, and demands respect for Igbo spirituality, no attempt is made to recover traditional religion in everyday life or to inculturate Catholicism in religious practices that are no longer central to the majority of the people. Christianity can never be separate from the cultures in which it seeks to express itself, however, and the novel suggests that the Church should be inculturated in a post-modern Nigeria. The post-modernity of the novel is characterised by the migrations of people, a mistrust of large intellectual systems, and a recognition that intellectual life can hope only for local revelations and tentative conclusions.

**Keywords:** Adichie; African Catholicism; African fiction; African Postmodernism; African traditional religion; *Purple Hibiscus*

In Mongo Beti's great novel about missionaries in southern Cameroon, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, the cynical Zacharia explains to Father Drumont that for the first wave of converts Christianity was 'a revelation; a school where they could learn your secret,

the secret of your power, of your aeroplanes and railways . . . in a word the secret of your mystery' (Beti 1971, 30). The principal conversion in the novel is not that of the people, however, but of Father Drumont, whose conscience has to respond to his growing realization that his missionary work is deeply implicated in colonialism. Father Drumont wishes to witness to a religion that transcends cultural particularities and political initiatives, but as his understanding grows he tells a folk story that serves as a bitter parable of the actual relation between him and his church, and the colonial administration. The story is of the Saba who travel in pairs, one always far ahead of the other. The first brings disease and second brings healing and 'every coin [the second Saba] collects depends on his brother, who went ahead sowing misfortunes right and left' (p. 113). If forced labour on colonial projects reduces the people to 'humiliation and weakness and despair' (p. 37), the mission can propose itself and even be perceived as a refuge where strength, dignity and hope restore their wholeness. Conversion is a strategy that people employ to protect themselves from the brutal excesses of colonialism.

*The Poor Christ of Bomba* is set in the late 1930s and describes Catholic missionary methods as they developed in parts of Africa long before the Second Vatican Council began a frequently faltering process to decentre from Europe a Catholicism that forbade liturgical and doctrinal engagements with Protestant Christians, let alone with religions foreign to Europe. In what at the time seemed an innovative formulation, a Second Vatican Council Document of 1965, *Gaudium et Spes*, proclaimed that 'the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or customary way of life recent or ancient' (*Gaudium et Spes*, chapter 58). The theology informing such a statement would see this as nothing less than a rejection of Incarnation, when Drumont breaks xylophones and drums, because they are being sounded in the presence of a priest on a first Friday of a month (p. 51). 'I am not a white man, to you. I don't wish to be a white man to you,' he protests (p. 55), but he has no existence in the people's imagination independent of his race, and his Catholicism informs and is informed by the social and moral conventions of Europe or North America. '[H]ow should we live without our dancing?' asks a man who has protested the breaking of the drums. 'You whites have your cars, your aeroplanes, your trains . . . But we have nothing but our dancing. And now you want to take that from us' (p. 56).

Extravagant respect for the powers of the priests of the new order is a two-way process, however. If people long to access the mystery of Western technology they may well encourage themselves to believe that the objects of their traditional material culture have to be smashed and discarded so that cars and aeroplanes can fill the space that has been made. This is a familiar displacement by cargo cults all over the world and to counter these, the classic African writers of the 1950s and 1960s register significant compensatory acts of displacement, as a modern nationalism seeks to turn people away from Christianity and back to traditional worship, which colonialism has encouraged them to desert. In Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika, who was 'hanged on a tree' (Ngugi

[1967] 1986, 143), displaces the crucified Christ, and the eponymous grain that has to die for a new birth to occur shifts from being a scriptural metaphor of Christ and Christian conversion to a political metaphor of Kenyan insurgents, and a popular culture of resistance, which will make possible the birth of the new nation.

Ngugi publicly rejected Christianity (Ngugi 1972, 31), and Beti lived for over thirty years in the secularized African Diaspora in France. In their novels both observe and employ acculturation, to use the anthropologists' word. Acculturation describes the processes in which cultures newly in contact with one another adopt the other's beliefs and cultural features, and use or modify them for their own purposes. To transfer the term to literature, *A Grain of Wheat* is an acculturated text in that its narrative depends on Christ's sacrifice and redemption as its structuring myth, but simultaneously it denies these the all-sufficiency Christians would claim for them. Instead Kikuyu myths and rituals displace the Christian myth, and these permit a new narrative of national salvation structured around the sacrifices that mark a heroic Kikuyu history. Acculturation presumes initial oppositions of stable cultures which familiarity, bred over time, corrodes into partial syncretism.<sup>1</sup> Christianity, at its most intolerant, saw indigenous religions as literally diabolical or, more tolerantly, misguided superstitions and even now many Christians regard the syncretism of popular religion as an erroneous dilution of doctrine.

Acculturation, however, would be an inappropriate term for the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who is the literary grandchild of Beti and Ngugi, and belongs to a generation for whom Christianity in its many manifestations is as much a part of African cultures as traditional religions are or perhaps were. In an interview about her work, she says that she grew up a Catholic and then adds and 'still am although I am what may be called a Liberal Catholic' (Anyia). Catholicism whether shaped by pre-Vatican II orthodoxies, or the more diverse positions that the Council made room for, is the religion of most of the characters in *Purple Hibiscus*, and the novel describes a Christian society that, rather than seeking to be informed by indigenous spirituality, debates doctrinal positions or liturgical practices within Catholicism. How so-called 'pagans' should be regarded is only one issue within those debates. In the interview, Adichie ponders what she calls 'colonized religion [and] how people like me can profess and preach a respect for their indigenous culture and yet cling so tenaciously to a religion that considers most of that indigenous culture evil'. But this is hardly acculturation. Adichie's tenacious loyalty is to Catholicism; indigenous culture is regarded respectfully but with detachment. What particularly interests her, she says in the same interview, is what she calls the 'streak of intolerance I see masquerading as faith [in all religion] and the way we create an image of God that suits us' (Anyia). Although Adichie implies that such a solipsistic God subverts any question of a universal deity, 'an image of God that suits us' can be read more positively, and her remark used to serve as a way of introducing the concept of inculturation. The term itself was coined only in the 1970s, and theologically it is rooted in the central Christian belief of Incarnation, the belief, in

Peter Scheneller's words, that 'Jesus was born, lived and died in a particular context or culture. He learned the language and customs, and in and through these he expressed the love and truth of God' (Scheneller 1990, 20). Christianity should aspire to do neither more nor less in the particular contexts and cultures where it exists. In the Catholic Church, inculturation informed the thinking on evangelization of both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, although Paul never used the word. Speaking before the letter as it were, he effectively defined inculturation when, addressing the Catholic Bishops of Asia, he said the 'Church must make herself in her fullest expression native to your countries, your cultures, your races' (quoted Manathodath 1990, 55). John Paul, addressing an audience in Nairobi, saw in inculturation a dialectical process when he spoke of it as 'a reflection of the incarnation of the word, when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought' (quoted Schineller 1990, 43).

The titles for the different sections of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* are 'Breaking Gods: Palm Sunday' (Adichie [2005] 2006, 1), 'Speaking with Our Spirits: Before Palm Sunday' (p. 17), 'The Pieces of Gods: After Palm Sunday' (p. 255) and 'A Different Silence: The Present' (p. 293). Palm Sunday is the first day of Passion Week in the Church's liturgical year, and the broken gods of the first section refer in part at least to the broken Christ whose crucifixion will be commemorated on the following Friday. On this Palm Sunday, Jaja, the brother of the narrator Kambili, rebels against the authority of their father, the first gesture of the boy's defiance towards a Catholic orthodoxy that Eugene Achike has imposed on his family, a perepeteia in the narrative that will allow Kambili to question those orthodoxies, and the ideological baggage they carry with them. In a novel in which 'Father Benedict refer[s] to the pope, Papa and Jesus – in that order' (p. 4), how deity manifests itself can be easily misunderstood. Jaja's rebellion begins with a refusal to take communion, claiming that the wafer taints his breath, and the touch of the priest's hand on his mouth nauseates him. These physical sensations are more powerful for him than a spiritual encounter with the 'host', the alternative word to wafer which, as Eugene has taught his children, comes 'closer to capturing the essence, the sacredness of Christ's body' (p. 6). As that semantic distinction suggests, Eugene's God can never manifest itself in the ordinary, or more precisely the Nigerian ordinary. If God lies outside the familiar and the immediate, the colonial church can implicitly locate it in Europe, and Europe can become another false God whose worship is recorded in a devotion for all things European.

The literal breaking that occurs in the first section is a group of ceramic ballet dancers smashed when Eugene throws his leather-bound missal at Jaja and instead hits the figurines. A missal contains the calendar, readings and rubrics of the Roman liturgy, a shaping of each year in an alternative time scheme to that of familiar secular time, and a striking image shows Eugene's missal lying on the floor together with the shattered representations of alien dancers. Kambili notes that until Jaja's rebellion their mother (who is routinely abused by Eugene), Jaja and she speak 'more with [their] spirits than

with [their] lips'; now Jaja's defiance has provided them 'with a freedom to be, to do' (p. 16). Christian theology claims that Christ's death makes possible the resurrected and transformed humanity of Christ, and the different silence of the last section of the novel refers to the transformation that has occurred in all the characters because false gods have been displaced. Among these are a colonial church and a pre-conciliar church, both of which' as Adichie implies in the interview from which I have quoted, encouraged their converts to see in them privileged sites of the revealed God. Gods need to be broken if societies or individuals are to recognise Christ's presence within themselves and their societies, and if they are to refuse to bow idolatrously to mere representations of a deity. Palm Sunday is the commemoration of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem, which is his first public enactment of his messianic identity, and if he is the messiah, once promised and now come, his advent will mark the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. What that covenant will look like in African Catholicism is something that *Purple Hibiscus* reveals.

The second section, 'Speaking with Our Spirits', occupies nearly three-quarters of the novel; the spirits are as protean as the gods of the earlier section, and include the unspoken words that the Church's authoritarianism, and Eugene's, have refused to incorporate in the language of family life. But there are other spirits in this section, and as they are encountered, they allow the silent communication of the first section to be replaced with the spoken words of lived human relationships. The missionary tradition in which Eugene has been raised encouraged mimicry of all things European, because these possessed a particular power to invoke the true God. His parish church is built to a European design, and Kambili is accustomed to thinking 'that God's presence dwelled more in St Agnes [than in any other Nigerian church], the iridescent saints on the floor-to-ceiling stained-glass windows stopped God from leaving'. God, however, is not tied to stained glass and altar steps that 'glow like polished ice blocks' (p. 28). A visiting priest who we later learn is Father Amadi, the exemplary priest in the novel, breaks into an Igbo hymn during mass — worship in vernaculars was one of the earliest signs in Catholicism of inculturation — but Eugene has taught his family that only Latin or English are appropriate languages to communicate with God, and as the congregation takes up the hymn, the Achikes sit silently, intentionally set apart from their fellow worshippers (p. 28).

Eugene's world is one that seeks to exclude, confident that it is inhabited by an elect. His 'compound walls, topped by coiled electric wires, [are] so high I could not see the cars driving by on our street' (p. 9). He approves of the 'Daughters of the Sacred Heart Secondary School' because the walls surrounding it 'were very high, similar to our compound walls, but . . . topped by jagged pieces of green glass with sharp edges jutting out' (p. 45). When the children visit their grandfather who has refused to become a Christian, they are instructed to eat nothing because both father and children know that before he eats the old man will have asked 'Ane, the god of the land, to eat with him' (p. 65). The narrative draws a contrast between Eugene's Christian home, walled against the



world, and what he would call the pagan home of his father. ‘Papa-Nnukwa’s house had a verandah, which was bounded by rusty iron bars’ and his bathroom is ‘a closet-sized building of unpainted cement blocks with a mat of entwined palm fronds pulled across a gaping entrance’ (p. 63). The scale of house and outhouse partly shows the old man’s poverty, which he has clung to rather than ‘throw away his chi in the thatch shrine in his yard’ (p. 61). ‘Chi’ is sometimes interpreted as ‘personal god’, but the concept carries with it connotations of individual identity and destiny (Achebe [1964] 1978, 27; Jell-Bahlsen 2000, 41–44). Rusty bars and gaping entrance may signify poverty, but they also allow Papa-Nnukwa’s house to be open to and inclusive both of the Igbo pantheon as well as the impoverished community of which the old man is part. By retaining his chi, Papa-Nnukwa has retained contact with the spirituality of his ancestors, and through him Kambili is momentarily exposed not only to the spirits of Igbo traditional religion but, in a novel as conscious as this one is of class divisions in Nigerian society, to the spirits of the Nigerian poor.

If in this section of the novel Kambili learns to communicate with unfamiliar spirits, a key episode in these encounters is a procession of masks to which Eugene’s sister Ifeoma takes the children and Papa-Nnukwa. Such masquerades Eugene designates as ‘*Devilish Folklore*’ (Adichie [2005] 2006, 85), but for the first time in the novel we see people acting publicly as a group, momentarily coherent in an inclusive culture that renders unimportant both class, gender and individuality: ‘The crowds around the cars were so dense that there was no space between people and they blended into one another, wrappers blended into T-shirts, trousers into skirts, dresses into shirts’ (p. 85). A mask representing the powers of death and infertility moves past and the old man orders the women to avert their gaze. Ifeoma’s response to the old man’s command is to look amused at what is to her a superstitious fear, and speaking in English she says, ‘Don’t look, girls. Let’s humor your grandfather’ (p. 86). This is a more sceptical response to the spiritual authority and significance of the masks than is Eugene’s. He at least sees in them the possibility of diabolical power. Ifeoma’s tolerant amusement and use of English distance herself and the children not only from Papa-Nnukwa but from those in the crowd to whom the masks are objects of awe and reverence, and her words reduce the masks to picturesque remnants of a tradition that no longer speaks to contemporary Nigeria. The masquerade is a central episode in the novel, but its centrality lies as much in Ifeoma’s scepticism as in Kambili’s recognition of the supernatural power that tradition once accorded the masks. Jaja wonders aloud how people enter one of the larger masks so that it becomes mobile, a solecism on his part since the masks and their spirits are above human agency. ‘You are not supposed to say that there are people in there,’ (p. 87) Ifeoma laughingly reprimands him again in English. But both she and Jaja know that the movement of the mask is dependent on people, and their knowledge allows a further signification to the rusty bars of Papa-Nnukwa’s verandah. Like Eugene’s Catholicism, Papa-Nnukwa’s religion was once esoteric, its arcane mysteries accessible only to initiates. The rusty bars suggest that neither church nor shrine can be immune to the searching intelligence of a new generation.

Although she may regard the power of the masks sceptically, Ifeoma and her children in Nsukka 'lift the silence' (p. 16) that an authoritarian Church, mediated through a violent and authoritarian father, has imposed on Jaja and Kambili. Eugene's Catholicism separates his family from the rest of society; Ifeoma's Catholicism is as much a part of the rhythms of her life as are saving water and sourcing scarce kerosene, petrol and food from the market. There are morning and night prayers, the rosary is recited every evening and Igbo hymns are sung after each decade has been completed. More radically, she allows her son, Obiora, to be initiated into the Igbo spirit world by participating in the *ima mmuo* rituals, a rite of passage that Eugene has refused to allow Jaja to undertake. Ifeoma says of Eugene's vindictive neglect of their father that he 'has to stop doing God's job. God is big enough to do his own job. If God will judge our Father for choosing to follow the way of our ancestors, then let God do the judging not Eugene' (pp. 95–96). Ifeoma's God transcends the religious divisions of different cultures, just as those divisions are transcended by Obiora's initiation, which does not prevent him observing a Catholic sacramental life that includes confirmation, the equivalent Catholic rite of passage. Eugene's children have been given their schedules to observe while they visit their cousins at Nsukka, but when Ifeoma finds Kambili consulting hers she confiscates it: '[I]t is my house, so you will follow my own rules,' she tells her niece (p. 20); and when Jaja says that they don't sing at home, Ifeoma retorts, 'We do here' (p. 21). The devotional life of Ifeoma's flat can be read as a manifestation of inculturation. Eugene has no more right than a Eurocentric church to impose patterns of worship on a house or land that belongs to neither him nor the church. Ifeoma's religious culture owes very little to Igbo traditional religion, and with its rosaries and prayers it is Igbo Catholic culture. The flat in Nsukka lifts the silence not in order to allow the voices of Papa-Nnukwa's spirits to be heard, but to allow Eugene's children first to experience the practices and expectations of a more open and indigenous Catholicism, and then to act out of their newly matured consciences.

That a local Catholic culture is defying the austere Eurocentric Catholicism of Eugene's house is confirmed by the pilgrimage to Aokpe, where the Virgin Mary is supposed to have appeared, and around which a popular cult has grown up, which in the novel is a Christian alternative to the procession of the masks. When Ifeoma proposes taking the children to Aokpe on a pilgrimage, Eugene grumbles that 'the church has not verified the authenticity of the apparitions', but his sister invokes a higher authority than the church's. '[W]hat matters is why we go, and it is from faith,' she says (p. 99). That remark is informed by inculturation, for the faith of the people is known through 'their language, their signs and symbols', to use Paul VI's words (quoted Schineller 1990, 43), and inculturation understands that it is through these that the local church must know itself. Father Amadi, like the official church, refuses to commit himself on whether the Virgin Mary has or has not appeared at Aokpe, but his agnosticism is balanced by an inculturation that closely resembles Ifeoma's. 'I don't believe we have to go to Aokpe or anywhere else to find her', he says. 'She is here, within us,



leading us to her Son' (Adichie [2005] 2006, 138). Finding Mary among the people, and moving through the people's faith in her to Jesus, incarnates in the society these figures of Christian devotion and Christian worship respectively, inculcates both them and the Church among the faithful gathered at Aokpe. One of Father Amadi's commitments is to coach a soccer team made up of boys from a poor neighbourhood of Nsukka. 'I see Christ in their faces, in the boy's faces,' he explains, and Kambili realizes that she cannot 'reconcile the blond Christ hanging on the burnished cross at St. Agnes and the sting-scarred legs of the boys' (p. 178). Later he remarks that the boys 'don't need me to believe in them as much as I need it for myself'. When Kambili asks what he means, he explains: 'Because I need to believe in something that I never question' (p. 226). The Nigerian poor have a perpetual presence that no-one can doubt; even the strongest faith may sometimes grow indifferent to a deity that is apparently absent from the pressing concerns of immediate life. There is a social logic in the Incarnation, and the Church's failure to observe it is demonstrated when a local diocesan regulation insists that Amaka take an English name as her confirmation name. 'What the Church is saying is that only an English name makes your confirmation valid' she protests. "'Chiamaka" says God is beautiful. "Chima" says God knows best, "Chiebuka" says God is the greatest. Don't they all glorify God as much as "Peter" and "Paul" and "Simon"?' (p. 272) That is the question that inculturation both asks and answers.

When they finally make the pilgrimage to Aokpe, the details echo those of the procession of masks. There is the same crush of cars and sense of community, and '[p]eople were packed so close that the smell of other people became as familiar as their own' (p. 274). Kambili's faith is rewarded by seeing the vision in the sun, but she also sees it in the face of a man next to her and then 'she was every where' (p. 275). Each of the family seems to have experienced something slightly different, and it is left to Ifeoma to sum up what has happened: 'Something from God was happening there,' she says (*ibid.*).

But something from God is happening in all religions. In a spirited exchange between the old man and Ifeoma, she refuses to let him lay the blame for Eugene's neglect on the missionaries. She knows she is an exemplary daughter and asks, 'Did I not go to the missionary school, too?' He agrees and asks, 'Where would I be today if my *chi* had not given me a daughter?', and only half-teasingly says that his spirit will intercede with *Chukwu*, and 'Let your spirit ask *Chukwu* to hasten my promotion to senior lecturer', is her response (p. 83). By appealing to his *chi*, and assuming that any widow requires a new and caring man, Papa-Nnukwa positions himself — ironically I think — in a traditional religious and social discourse that is unable to comprehend the ambitions of a modern professional woman like Ifeoma. His irony is countered by Ifeoma's equally ironic assumption that Papa-Nnukwa's *chi* will intercede with *Chukwu* to intervene in the corruption of Nigerian politics, and the university's highly politicised system of promotions. But this exchange does not simply show two discourses playfully acknowledging their mutual incomprehensibility. *Chukwu* is both the supreme deity of

the Igbo pantheon,<sup>2</sup> as well as the name Igbo Christians use for God. This is an obvious example of inculturation, although in appropriating the name Christians discarded many of the beliefs and legends that traditionally clustered around Chukwu. However interpreted, Chukwu transcends doctrinal and ritual divisions, and in invoking Chukwu father and daughter are united without either compromising his or her beliefs.

After Papa-Nnukwa dies, Kambili takes possession of a painting of her grandfather which Amaka has made. The painting, smuggled home, and looked at furtively from time to time by Kambili and Jaja, gives Papa-Nnukwa continuing life, and becomes a pagan presence that has intruded in Eugene's house despite the walls, and the prayer and study schedules. 'It's mine' (p. 209), both children exclaim, when Eugene discovers the painting, laying claim as it were to a heritage from which Eugene has tried to sever them; and Kambili curls in a foetal position protecting the pieces of the painting that Eugene has torn. His shouts of 'Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire' are directed both at her and the painting, and he kicks and beats her until she loses consciousness (p. 211). The scene is more than another example of Eugene's abuse. Her foetal curve is seen above the 'earth-tone colors' that have been used to represent Papa-Nnukwa's body and the two together symbolise a Nigerian tradition that will be reborn in generation after generation as traditional religion manifests itself in new ways. Adichie's literary predecessors may typically have made this scene a closure to a novel: a young girl regrets her deviation to the religion of colonialism and returns to the spiritual soil of traditional religion. But *Purple Hibiscus* does not end with Kambili defending the image of her grandfather.

Throughout the novel, the public side of Eugene's Catholicism manifests itself in promoting a culture of liberal democracy that opposes unaccountable authority wherever it is exercised by the state. In a novel full of silences — one meaning as I have mentioned of 'speaking with spirits' — his newspaper is the only one that breaks the silence the military government has imposed on the press. '[H]e used the *Standard* to speak for truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising,' says Father Benedict. 'Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom' (p. 5). Benedict is preaching on Palm Sunday, which as I have mentioned liturgically anticipates the New Covenant, but if he appears too prejudiced a witness as his parish is partly financed by Eugene, Father Amadi also testifies that 'The *Standard* is the only paper that dares to tell the truth these days' (p. 136). Both priests use the word 'truth', and one aspect of secular truth is the new social order that Eugene hopes to initiate in Nigeria.

When one uses that vexed term 'culture' in a postcolonial context there is always a temptation to identify it with a cluster of norms, beliefs, rituals and material cultures that preceded colonialism and which some postcolonial cultural nationalisms seek to recover. But culture is not something fixed to be appropriated or lost, but rather describes processes that involve a series of negotiations between shifting positions and collective responses to different contexts. Both Eugene and Ifeoma are products of the highest levels of Western education which have allowed them to become influential figures in modern Nigeria, newspaper owners and industrialists like Eugene or university lecturers

like Ifeoma. Eugene defends liberal democracy in his paper, and Ifeoma's liberalism can be seen in her support for student activists against the university authorities, her impatience with an authoritarian church and her belated intervention in Eugene's tyranny over his family. The culture of Papa-Nnukwa and the masks belong to a generation that looks to the past. Amaka with teenage defiance may demand an Igbo confirmation name and boast that she listens 'mostly to indigenous musicians. They are culturally conscious; they have something real to say' (p. 118), but the musicians she names are as much influenced by Western as by indigenous music and their cultural consciousness grows from the cultural syncretism of postcolonial Nigeria, rather than the closed and innocent world which Papa-Nnukwa so confidently inhabits. Eugene's failure — and his is a vicious failure — is not only his intolerance of his father's traditionalism, but also his failure to enact in his own family the liberalism which he demands that the state should observe. Adichie describes herself as a Liberal Catholic, and the ideal Church that is developed in her novel is not a Church that seeks to inculturate itself only in local cultures whose values have been confirmed by the practices of generation after generation. A person like Ifeoma inhabits a modern world where ideas are tentative and conclusions provisional. We of the twenty-first century are accustomed to disjunctions, to beginnings that have no apparent end or purpose, and to the convictions of the moment. Eugene is wrong to claim that the church authorises his tyranny because he ascribes to the church a certainty that it cannot have, if it is to be true to the post-modern world in which it should be inculturated.

This post-modern world is signalled at the novel's end in a series of relocations and migrations, and their resulting diasporas are one of the material facts of a post-modern world. Ifeoma and her family move to America. Father Amada works as a missionary priest in Germany. Jaja is about to be released from prison where he has been imprisoned for claiming — probably falsely — responsibility for Eugene's death. But these movements do not anticipate new certainties and the beginnings of alternative permanencies. A letter to Kambili from Father Amada sums up how intellectually tentative this new world is: '[H]e wrote that he didn't want me to seek the whys, because there are some things that happen for which we can formulate no whys, for which whys simply do not exist and, perhaps, are not necessary' (p. 303). Instead the novel ends anticipating a series of disparate experiences that have no obvious causal connection, and refuse the narratives of either traditional religion or the meta-narratives of colonial modernity. When Jaja is released, Kambili tells her mother, they will take him to Nsukka where the silence was first lifted, visit Ifeoma in America, and when they return they will plant orange trees in their ancestral village and 'and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus' (p. 306–307). The eponymous purple hibiscus differs from the ubiquitous red hibiscus. Instead it is individual, exotic, perhaps a hybrid, and like all hybrids may well not run true to type. Purple used to be the liturgical colour of Palm Sunday, when the movement from the Old to the New Covenant is commemorated. But if there was an equivalent to the changing biblical Covenants in the transition from Papa Nnukwa's world to Eugene's pre-conciliar Catholicism, a shift from one set of certainties to another, the

novel anticipates no third covenant. Michael Paul Gallagher while acknowledging 'the fragmentation, impotence and narcissism in the lived culture' of post-modernity, also discerns in it a 'tone . . . of quiet searching, of a healthy suspicion of systems and of easy certitudes.' Postmodernity, Gallagher argues 'is impressed more by praxis than by grand theorizing' (Gallagher 1998, 95, 98).

The church that is present in the fragile uncertainties of a migrant people is a decentred church or rather a church that is correctly centred on Christ present in their very uncertainties. 'From darkest Africa now come missionaries who will reconvert the West' (Adichie [2005] 2006, 279), Obiora sardonically comments on Father Amadi's transfer to Germany, and Amadi explains that 'he will go where the Lord sends him' (p. 303). The congregation to which Amadi belongs, 'The Missionary Fathers of the Blessed Way,' is Achiche's own creation, and although in a Christian novel the Blessed Way must signify Christ who is self-referentially the Way, Adichie plays with the implications of the racial and political decentring of the Nigerian priest's new missionary field. Amaka asks whether now that blacks priests 'take [Europe's] god back to [Europe], shouldn't we at least repackage it?' and Amadi replies that '[T]here is really no indigenous culture to pacify, unfortunately' (p. 267). His regret is of course a joke as the task of the church is not to send its missionaries to pacify cultures by forming them in its own image, European or African. Amadi's task is to inculturate the church within a post-modern Europe.

After Eugene's death, Kambili no longer attends St Agnes, which as a child she believed was designed in such way as to keep God from leaving. Her new parish, St Andrew's, is presided over by another 'Blessed Way Missionary' (p. 304) a name that links to the migrations of the ending of the novel. Andrew was the first to be called as an apostle and fisher of men, and as patron saint of countries as diverse as Scotland, Greece and Russia signals a church open to the world. God is not held captive in one or another church, but is present in the world and must be discovered in the world.

## Notes

1 Ngugi appears to be advocating inculturation when he asks whether 'the core of Christian faith . . . must be forever clothed in the joyless drab and dry European middle-class culture' (Ngugi 1972, 35); but in his later writing he wants a Christianity emptied of all its content, and it is hard to identify the core Christian belief that could possibly be retained.

2 Although this is widely claimed, Horton argues that this monotheistic concept is a relatively recent imposition on a dualistic concept of the Igbo deity (1993, 172–173). Jell-Bahlsen blames 'mission-trained local and foreign-influenced scholars and artists' for depicting 'inhuman images' and trying to contain 'in temples' Chi-Ukwu, who 'is beyond shape and gender' (2000, 39).

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