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IN THE NAME OF GOD: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do Título de "Mestre em Letras", e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

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To all of those who have been dreaming this dream with me and who have watched me make it come true.

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There are people […] who think that we cannot rule ourselves because the few times we tried, we failed, as if all the others who rule themselves today got it right the first time. It is like telling a crawling baby who tries to walk, and then falls back on his buttocks, to stay there. As if the adults walking past him did not all crawl, once.

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 301)

ABSTRACT

The contemporary Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, many times compared to Chinua Achebe, is internationally known for warning readers of the dangers of repeatedly being exposed to a single story (of a place, a people or a culture). She is also known, accordingly, for promoting both the reading and writing of fiction with perspectives that go beyond the stereotypical representations perpetuated historically by literature and by the media. Since her very first novel, *Purple Hibiscus,* published in 2003, Adichie's fiction has brought to surface, especially in the context of her native country, many postcolonial concerns, such as the issues of othering, identity, religious intolerance, language, stereotypes and authoritarianism, among other things. The present thesis, with the theoretical support of postcolonial literary criticism, promotes the reading, from a postcolonial viewpoint, of *Purple Hibiscus*. The purpose of this research is to study this novel, exploring postcolonial issues such as those aforementioned and with that examine how the writer, while giving us a new outlook of life in contemporary Nigeria, denounces the problems caused by colonialism. The analysis of the novel aims at observing how religious postcolonial Nigeria is depicted as a hybrid environment, and how Adichie sparks a discussion about the colonial history of religion in the country through characters who demonstrate religious intolerance and through those who question it. I also analyze linguistic aspects of the book and their connections with culture, as well as Adichie's language use in the novel and its relation to the multilinguistic state of postcolonial Nigeria and to her project of telling African stories. Moreover, the analysis also approaches how the belief in linguistic superiority, as expressed by some characters, points to a colonial heritage based on racism and othering.

Keywords: Postcolonial theory, colonialism, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, African literature

RESUMO

A escritora contemporânea Nigeriana Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, muitas vezes comparada a Chinua Achebe, é internacionalmente conhecida por alertar leitores sobre os perigos de ouvir uma única história repetidas vezes (seja de um lugar, de um povo ou de uma cultura). É também conhecida, por promover a leitura e escrita de ficção com perspectivas que vão além das representações estereotipadas historicamente perpetuadas pela literatura e pela mídia. Desde seu primeiro romance, *Purple Hibiscus* (*Hibisco Roxo,* em português), publicado em 2003, a ficção de Adichie tem trazido à tona, especialmente no contexto do seu país nativo, questões de alteridade, identidade, intolerância religiosa, língua, estereótipos e autoritarismo, dentre outras coisas. Esta dissertação, com o suporte teórico de crítica literária pós-colonial, promove a leitura, de um ponto de vista pós-colonial, de *Purple Hibiscus*. O propósito desta pesquisa é estudar este romance, explorando questões pós-coloniais como as mencionadas anteriormente e com isso examinar como a autora, enquanto nos dá uma nova perspectiva da vida contemporânea na Nigéria, denuncia os problemas causados pelo colonialismo. A análise do romance teve como objetivo observar como a religiosidade na Nigéria pós-colonial é representada como híbrida e como Adichie desencadeia uma discussão sobre a história colonial da religião no país através de personagens que demonstram intolerância religiosa e por aqueles que a questionam. Também são analisados aspectos linguísticos do livro e suas conexões com a cultura, bem como o uso da linguagem de Adichie no romance e sua relação com o estado multilinguístico da Nigéria pós-colonial e com o projeto da autora de contar histórias africanas. Além disso, a análise também aborda de que forma a crença na superioridade linguística, como expressa por alguns personagens, aponta para uma herança colonial baseada em racismo e alteridade.

Palavras-chave: Teoria Pós-colonial, colonialismo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, literatura africana

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INTRODUCTION

Africa was under the colonization and oppression by European nations for many years, officially starting with its formalization[1] in the 1880s and ending in different years according to each country. Around the middle of the 20th century, along with the independence of most countries, African postcolonial studies emerged, as well as a stronger interest in the kind of literature that would resist colonial influence. At this time, writers were concerned about the social and political conditions of their nations and became more active in denouncing them. With that, Africans were interested in telling their own stories, their own accounts of Africa and African life in a way that was more connected to their culture and principles than the way in which Western writers had been writing about the continent, since many of such writers still depicted Africans as a primitive and uncivilized people. Nigeria, one of the several countries that were occupied by the British, also underwent a long political and cultural control. After many years under the domination of the United Kingdom, the country reached its independence in 1960. Thus, both in the context of the struggle for independence and in a post-independence one, Nigerian writers are among those who have been engaging in writing about Africa and sharing their thoughts in relation to its culture, politics and the remains of colonialism, as has, for example, Chinua Achebe, the writer of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), known worldwide.

Much like her fellow senior compatriot, the contemporary writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also writes from a postcolonial standpoint. Adichie, who, differently from Achebe, grew up in a time in which her country was already independent but showed the legacy of colonialism in many aspects, writes from this perspective and engages in the tradition of reflecting upon the history of her country and upon Nigeria's contemporary condition as a result of its colonial past. Moreover, she also engages in the tradition of reclaiming agency over African stories, in turning her writing to Nigerian experiences and culture. Although her publications are quite recent, Adichie's works have received much praise internationally in the past few years for a number of reasons. She is well

[1] The formalization of Africa's colonization happened with the Conference of Berlin in 1894, but the continent already had a long history of being invaded by European countries before that, a history which "during the nineteenth century began to escalate into a scramble for territory during the late 1870s, for a complex of reasons" (Iliffe 193).

known not only for her writing, but also for her talks, such as the praised TED talk "The danger of a single story", from 2009, in which she addresses the problem of reducing people, their lives and cultures to single narratives or stereotypes, and repeating them as the only truth. In this talk, she also discusses the significance of stories and the impact they have in people's lives – for the good and for the bad –, as well as the importance of writing about things one recognizes.

Her fiction, likewise, brings more sides to stories that are normally seen from only one angle, providing different images of Africa – and, more specifically, of Nigeria – from the ones usually portrayed and reiterated by Western media. In Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun,* published in 2006, for instance, she tells a story that takes place in Nigeria a little before and during its civil war, focusing on the lives of characters who are ordinary civilians, and who are also dealing with the impact of the war in their lives. Moreover, in both *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a collection of short stories from 2009, and in her most recent novel, *Americanah*, from 2013, she addresses many different themes, such as those of identity, migration, family relations, racism and womanhood through the telling of stories about the lives of Nigerian characters, whether in Nigeria or in America. The world has highly acclaimed Adichie for the aforementioned works, but she was already celebrated for her writing before their publication, with her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, published in 2003, which is the object of this research.

Purple Hibiscus tells the story of the Achikes, a wealthy Nigerian family, who are very religious, and of the Achikes' children's process of growing up and struggling to discover their identity when faced with new perspectives about life, religion, family bonds and love. The novel is divided in four parts. The first of them is called "Breaking Gods – Palm Sunday" (from page 3 to 16), and, as we can expect from the title, in it we are taken to the religious event of Palm Sunday. We are introduced, in few pages, to the Achike family and their life with very strict Catholic practices and beliefs. The head of the family, Eugene Achike – or Papa, as the narrator calls him –, is a powerful man, recognized as a model citizen in his church and community, but a strict and intimidating figure at home. He is a religious fanatic man, and is – throughout the whole novel – portrayed as a colonial subject, once he, in many ways, seems to have internalized aspects of the colonizer's behavior. Eugene, who is a Catholic brought up by missionaries, does so to the point of refusing to have a relationship with his own father, for both of them do not share the same religion, and by emphasizing his belief on the superiority of the English language over his local one, Igbo, among other things. Beatrice –

or Mama – is the obedient and quiet wife and kind mother and Jaja, the older child, is a seventeen year old boy, who is a great pride to the family but who also seems to be starting to question and rebel. Finally, there is Kambili, the younger sibling, who is the narrator and protagonist of the story, a very quiet, submissive and timid teenage girl, to whom we get most familiar as we follow her thoughts throughout the novel.

In the second section, the longest one, "Speaking With Our Spirits – Before Palm Sunday" (from page 19 to 253), we are taken back a few months prior to the first part and follow the life of the characters, the events and the changes that led them to the day of Palm Sunday and to be the people they were then. We first follow a little of their lives at home in Enugu and then, during Christmas time, in the village of Abba, where the family also has a big compound. We are introduced, then, to Papa-Nnukwu, Eugene's estranged father (who – unlike his son – is not a Catholic), as well as to Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, who is a university professor, and her children, Amaka, Obiora and Chima. Ifeoma's family is quite different from the Achike one, as they are all much more easygoing and tolerant to differences, besides the fact that they belonged to a much lower financial situation. Then, we follow the time Kambili and Jaja spend at their aunt's place in Nsukka, a university town, where they get to experience a very different kind of life – more carefree and humble. There they are given a whole new sense of possibilities of understanding religion, family relations, love and how to conduct their lives. And they also meet Father Amadi, a kind Catholic priest, who, unlike the white serious and traditional priest they have at home, is a joyful and energetic Igbo man, whom they grow to like very much. Then we follow the return of the children to Enugu and to their lives there, which is much different after Nsukka, for they feel different. In this part, we also are given many demonstrations of Eugene's awful acts of violence in the name of God as well as learn about the coup that happens in Nigeria and are constantly reminded of its many consequences.

The third section, "The Pieces of God – After Palm Sunday" (from page 257 to 291), takes us back to the event from the beginning of the novel, giving continuation to it, but now the reader is aware of why the characters act the way they do. We now understand why the children are more inquisitive when it comes to the things their father says and does in the name of religion and, also, why their mother decides she has had enough and takes matters into her own hands, causing Eugene's death. Finally, there is the fourth part, "A Different Silence – The Present" (from page 295 to 307), which is a very short section which somehow works as

an epilogue, showing a moment a few years after the previous part. Things may not have been well for a while, since there were consequences following the death of Eugene Achike, with Jaja going to prison and Beatrice being depressed for her son has been paying for her crime. However, there is finally hope for better times and for genuine happiness in the family, as they receive news that Jaja must be released soon, and because they no longer have to deal with the fear created by the imposing figure of their father. Despite the ups and downs brought up along the novel, and the realistic tone of it, *Purple Hibiscus* is a story that ends with an optimistic view (at least to a certain extent), both for their private life, as they have a chance of being a happy family, and for the country, as it is said that the general who has been ruling the country had died.

The story is set in late twentieth century Nigeria, a time of post-independence in which the country's governmental situation was unsettled, as they were going through a military coup. Although the novel focuses on the personal lives of the characters, we have glimpses of what is happening in Nigeria as a country, not only culturally, but also in the political and economic sphere, as they also reach their private sphere in different ways. The political background of the story – and its consequences in the economy and in people's lives – is brought to the reader through impressions told by the characters, through complaints or through accounts of things that were seen or experienced, but discussion problematizing it is limited. Yet, it definitely leads one to think about the political and economic state of postcolonial Nigeria and perhaps even trace such problems back to its colonial past.

As the historians Falola and Heaton argue, although Nigeria achieved its independence in 1960, it was "a fragile one, unified under a federal constitution in which politically conscious ethnic groups vied for control of the central government through ethnically based political parties" (137). They discuss that although the country was united in the celebration of the independence from the British Commonwealth, which was the climax of many years of struggle for both freedom and democracy, Nigeria was still divided in many different ways as "[r]egionalism and ethnicity remained major problems barring the development of a national identity" (156). This division – and the problems that came with it – had its origins in the colonization of the country, for the colonizing process grouped in the same territory plenty of different indigenous peoples who did not share the same identity and who now still struggled to find a common one. According to Falola and Heaton,

> The geographical area now known as Nigeria was created by the British colonial administration in 1914, not by indigenous peoples themselves. Thereafter, the people within the borders of Nigeria were known to the world as "Nigerians," but in reality this designation meant little to most people, whose lives continued to be primarily centered on local communities that had existed for hundreds and thousands of years (158).

Moreover, besides the fear of domination that smaller ethnic groups had of the greater groups, the urban and rural areas developed differently, and the lower classes feared that with independence they had, as the idiom says, bought a pig in a poke and "had simply traded wealthy, elite British leadership for a Nigerian bourgeoisie that did not share their values or views on future prosperity" (156-157). Therefore, the foundation of their independence was not a stable one.

Furthermore, there was also the fact that although from 1960 onwards the country was to be politically independent, it remained much dependent when it came to its economy. Nigeria still relied majorly on export agriculture, which was largely controlled by European enterprises, and the industrial development of the country was limited, with the existent industry also being owned by Europeans. As the historians comment, the power of Europe over the country did not cease with Nigeria's political independence, which was "coupled with a continuing economic dependence, as the country was reliant on European knowledge, connections, and technologies and on international market conditions" (Falola and Heaton 157).

They also remember that during the first decade after its independence, the establishment of the country suffered a lot with military coups, corruption in politics and the lack of economic development. Despite the many efforts made in order to solve the problem of a lack of national unity, efforts that "were meant to bring Nigerians closer together politically, economically, and culturally, to promote commonalities and downplay differences" (159), they ultimately failed. Thus, the First Republic of Nigeria, from 1960 to 1966, was one in which "[o]fficial corruption, rigged elections, ethnic baiting, bullying, and thuggery dominated the conduct of politics" (ibid.). Yet, the pinnacle of the problems Nigeria went through was in the couple of years that succeeded the First Republic, with a civil war "that rent the country along regional and ethnic lines, killed between 1 and 3 million people, and nearly

destroyed the fragile federal bonds that held together the Nigerian state" (158).

Although the story of *Purple Hibiscus* is set many years after Nigeria's independence and civil war, it points out to difficulties that are a consequence of the many years of problems the country underwent. Many times these difficulties show the same pattern as they once did in the past. Throughout the story, there are hints of a corrupt government, one that is a result of a coup, and that fails at caring about the needs of the people, abuses of its power and shamelessly tries to silence those who disagree with it. Through Kambili's memory of the day the coup was announced, which her family learned through the radio, we learn a little about the political history of the country and understand more of Eugene's position on the matter, showing that despite his violent, authoritative and conservative ways at home, he was – privately and publicly – politically in favor of the Nigerian people:

> Papa pushed the chessboard aside and excused himself to use the phone in his study. Jaja and Mama and I waited for him, silently. I knew he was calling his editor, Ade Coker, perhaps to tell him something about covering the coup. When he came back, we drank the mango juice, which Sisi served in tall glasses, while he talked about the coup. He looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. Of course, Papa told us, the politicians were corrupt, and the *Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads. But what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy (24-25).

Here, even if through the point of view of a kid and what she hears her father say, one can observe an approach of the history of Nigeria, of its long experience with coups, of power overthrowing power and of how it all leads to corruption. There is even a mentioning of the country's civil war (also known as the Biafran War). In Eugene's view, what they are

going through is a result of a cycle that started long ago. Historically, as we have seen, this cycle has roots in the long colonial period the nation went through.

Along the novel, Kambili offers the reader brief descriptions of how things were after the coup, both in her personal life and in what she saw in the streets. She tells us of an atmosphere of criticism, of revolution, but also of fear, in which the newspapers sounded different, either more critical or more restrained, protestors on the street chanted asking for freedom and soldiers who walked around exposing their guns stopped and searched people and cars. Whereas the population grew cautious and critical, those in power seemed to grow more intimidating and suspicious. We learn, from the girl's gaze, about a state of fear, of abuse of power by the military, in order to intimidate the people – especially those who spoke up against the government. She talks of bribery and of psychological and physical coercion, which sometimes even led to death, which is what happens to the editor of Eugene's newspaper, who had been writing pieces denouncing the head of state. There is a state of fear, with a constant reinforcement that, in their context, one did not simply mess with the government.

There is also criticism to the corruption, which comes up in small comments the characters make, while going on with their days, about the misuse of money destined for the improvement of the citizens' lives or in complaints about their current state of scarcity of basic resources. The conducts of the new government had direct influence in the people's lives, whether it is in relatively minor things, or more directly, affecting them privately. The reader learns that many people – especially those who are not financially privileged – have been suffering with unemployment, lack of fuel, increase in the prices of goods and services, delay in payments, and constant power and water outage, among others. The Achikes' children, who are used to a very comfortable life, experience many of these problems when staying in the University town where their aunt Ifeoma lives, and even get to witness a riot in which students protested about the lack of resources.

These accounts – among many others in the novel – lead the reader to contemplate the political and economic aspects of postcolonial Nigeria, which, despite having had a long run after its independence, still struggles with a series of problems that began with colonization. Although it is a fictional work, through *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie revisits and denounces these problems, which were a reality in the 60s and which repeated itself through time up to contemporary days. A brief study of Nigeria's recent

history shows readers great possibilities of relating the political background of the novel and what was actually happening in the country, during the same period of time.

The novel is set around the 90s, a time in which Nigeria, as it happened in the novel, suffered a coup and in which a military head of state took over power. In actual Nigeria, it happened in 1993, and the man was called Sani Abacha, a General who, according to Falola and Heaton, "has been the most vilified of all Nigeria's post-independence rulers for his severe oppression in the name of personal power, the further decline of the Nigerian economy, and the relegation of Nigeria to the status of a pariah state in international affairs" (229). Similarly, the novel also mentions that the Head of State's actions led Nigeria to be suspended from the Commonwealth (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* 201), besides providing a depiction of the man as a very oppressive ruler. Besides, the 1990s, Falola and Heaton comment, were a time in which Nigeria's economy saw its decline, especially when, in face of Abacha's abusive regime, governments and corporations from overseas turned their back to the country and no longer invested in it (241-242). In addition, "[o]fficial corruption continued to plague the country as well, resulting in the loss of billions of naira that could have been spent to improve living conditions for Nigerian citizens" (242).

Having this in mind, the relation of the actual circumstances and the situation lived by the characters in Adichie's novel does not seem farfetched. *Purple Hibiscus* set a political background that demonstrates that the greed and oppression that was once a thing of the colonizer was now also a part of their own Nigerian rulers. And in addition, in a certain way, more than only denouncing the problems and revisiting a historical moment, talking about these issues, which have been a part of Nigeria's history and of the experience of many who lived through it, is also part of Adichie's enterprise of telling African stories.

Moreover, while we learn about the characters' lives and their private or public troubles, we also, and especially, are led to think about Nigeria in its cultural aspects, regarding, among others, its hybrid religious situation, the people's customs and food habits and their complex linguistic system. In the story, we are presented a country which, although with different levels of resistance and acceptance, negotiates different facets of its culture which are a product of a post-independence Nigeria, one in which colonial history and influence is still present, but also in which there is still a celebration of its pre-colonial legacy. It is a country which tries to negotiate different religions, but at the cost of intolerance from some parts; in which Christianism – brought to the

country by the colonizers – still may, but does not have to be antagonized with the other religions anymore. It is also a place whose language is plural and very rich, but over whom colonialism still exercises some power, with English – which, as Christianism, came with colonialism –, having gained a much more important status than other languages already spoken in the country. And, finally, the context presented is one in which cultural traditions are still kept alive despite the influence from the west, and which has allowed, to certain extents, the mixture of practices.

Although, as previously seen, we can perceive an approach to postcolonial Nigeria in its political and economic aspects, it is especially in the way culture is represented and how the characters relate to it that we observe how Adichie leads us to think critically about this complex Nigeria that no longer is colonized but still faces its legacies, and whose many sides demonstrate that, as a country that has suffered foreign influences but still conserves its tradition – although with a resignification –, it is not only one thing, but rather many; it is multifaceted.

For that reason, *Purple Hibiscus*, besides being a contemporary and engaging story about family relations, also brings to light many postcolonial concerns, especially the consequences, both in the family and in their country, of the arrival of the British in Nigeria, many years prior to the story. Thus, one could consider this novel as having a postcolonial agenda, as it invites the reader to contemplate the effects of colonialism in the modern world, as well as the intent of providing more sides to the long-told single story of Africa. The novel is also in dialogue with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in the sense *Purple Hibiscus* engages with the context and many issues discussed by Adichie's predecessor in his story, while at the same time going beyond it and exploring such issues in an era of different challenges, that of post-independence.

Taking this into consideration, this MA thesis aims to study this novel, exploring postcolonial issues such as otherness, religious hybridity and intolerance, language and culture, among others, and with that examine how the writer denounces the situations caused by colonialism, while at the same time giving us a new outlook of life in Nigeria – one that differs from the condescending images perpetuated historically. Moreover, throughout this thesis, there will be some observations made in relation to how Adichie's work connects and differs from other African writers, especially Chinua Achebe and his novel *Things Fall Apart*.

This work presents a close reading of *Purple Hibiscus*, analyzing its ideological agenda, through the identification of postcolonial elements in Adichie's novel, such as the observance of a country with hybrid

religious and linguistic aspects, the portrayal of characters who need to face the legacies of colonialism or who seem to endorse it. I examine if, and if so, how, Adichie's novel portrays the operations of colonial othering, taking into consideration, specifically, the effects of colonization in contemporary Nigeria; I analyze how the concept of mimicry and the issue of the internalization of the colonizer's cultural practices can be identified in some of the characters and, then, investigate in which way this internalization might be connected to the issue of religious intolerance; I investigate if, and if so, how, the use of the Igbo language in the novel works as a resistance tool or a mere demonstration of the multilinguistic situation of contemporary Nigeria; I observe what strategies Adichie uses to talk about the complexities of post-independence Nigeria; and I analyze how Adichie approaches Nigeria as a postcolonial space in the terms of its hybridity, whether in religion, language or customs.

This is done with an opening chapter focusing on important topics of postcolonial theory. In it, I bring discussions by theorists on issues such as the depiction of African natives by western colonizers, othering in colonial times, religion and language as colonizing tools and the debate regarding the use of English versus the local language in African postcolonial texts, the concepts of mimicry and hybridity, the understanding of what it means to be "postcolonial", and criticism on African postcolonial literature and on Adichie's work. Then, the thesis follows with two chapters aimed at the analysis of *Purple Hibiscus*, one targeting religion and the following one targeting language. In the first analytical chapter, I approach how the portrayal of religious intolerance in the story may trace back to colonial practices, how religious postcolonial Nigeria is depicted as a hybrid environment and what this suggests, and how Adichie sparks a discussion about the colonial history of religion in the country through the characters who question it. The second chapter of the analysis is turned to linguistic aspects of the book and to their connections with culture. I discuss Adichie's choice of language in the novel and its relation to the multilinguistic state of postcolonial Nigeria, and I analyze how she uses both English and Igbo to tell African stories (in the terms of stories about Africa from the perspective of an African) and also how the belief in linguistic superiority, as expressed by some characters, points to a colonial heritage based on racism and othering. At the end, there is brief chapter with the concluding remarks, disclosing the discoveries made throughout this research regarding Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and its postcolonial approach, as well as suggestions for further research on the novel.

I understand that carrying out this research holds its significance for a number of reasons. Although African literature has been studied in Brazil for quite a while, especially regarding literary works in Portuguese, there is still room for academic studies focusing on literatures from Africa in its different forms and languages, but most relevant, for this present work, literatures written in English. I believe this work is of relevance because it promotes a debate of African, and, more specifically, Nigerian literature in our context, something that has fortunately been growing but still needs to gain more and more space. It brings new horizons to the discussions in Brazilian Academia and internationally, and it contributes to the knowledge and understanding of such area of study. The specific contribution to the research produced at PPGI, which includes works on African literature, such as Célia Regina Santos' MA Thesis *Decolonizing African Discourse: The Work of Chinua Achebe* (1995), is that this present research can also provide an insight into contemporary African fiction being produced by a new generation of African writers.

CHAPTER I

From Objects to Subjects: Postcolonial theory and African Postcolonial literature

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958, a couple of years before Nigeria's independence from the British empire, is a masterpiece internationally known for the way it deals with the themes of tribal life, clash of cultures and the arrival of colonizers in Africa, depicting the life of the Igbo village of Umuofia before, during and after the arrival of British colonizers in Nigeria. At the end of his novel, when characters – who are Igbo villagers – discuss the lack of understanding the white man has towards their customs and how 'the white man's religion' is taking over their own, one of them argues:

> [H]e says our customs are bad, and our brothers who have taken up his religion also say our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (176)

This passage of Achebe's novel – in which readers follow the story of the British taking over Nigeria and imposing aspects of their culture and, consequently, religion there –, although fictional, is one that recalls part of the long and multifaceted history of colonialism by Europe. As the scholar Ania Loomba states, "[c]olonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history" (7-8). Indeed, despite its differences regarding the many places and times in which it occurred, the history of colonialism is one that, in a general sense, was geographically violent and consists of much oppression. As Robert Young reminds us, people who defend colonialism may argue that it has brought benefits for modern times, but it happened at the cost of a great deal of suffering by different peoples as well as the destruction of indigenous cultures (*An Historical* 6), a suffering that was terrible to many in order to benefit the greed of few. Colonial history, according to him, is one

> […] of slavery, of untold, unnumbered deaths from oppression or neglect, of the enforced migration and diaspora of millions of peoples – Africans, Americans, Arabs, Asians and Europeans, of the appropriation of territories and of land, of the institutionalization of racism, of the destruction of cultures and the superimpositions of other cultures (*An Historical* 4).

This history (or, yet, histories) and the struggles within it concern Postcolonial theory, whose critique embraces not only the delineation of its impact (whether socially or culturally) in the present-day but also its reconsideration, especially from the point of view of those who underwent its influence (for instance, people from former colonies, where the colonial force is still rather perceptible). Therefore, the postcolonial is interested in how much that colonial history has affected the power structures of today, and in how much the world nowadays still remains under its violent disturbances (*An Historical* 4).

In this context we find Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), a novel which, set in a Nigeria after the historical period of colonialism but one which is still to a certain extent imbricated by its atmosphere, explores – even if sometimes in a subtle manner – some of the many consequences of colonial discourse and practice in the present time, which are, among others, those of political disorder, cultural negotiation, linguistic ambivalence, religious fundamentalism and, especially, as Madhu Krishnan puts it, "a re-invention of tradition in the name of contemporary inclusion" (19-20). The novel, by a contemporary African writer whose depictions of Nigerian Igbo life in her works – besides touching the matter of postcolonial struggles – depict Africa as a space of "darkness and light, compassion and violence, rife with complexities and nuance like any other place, and connected to the rest of the world in a dense network of intellectual and cultural exchange" (Krishnan 20) is told, as it was previously mentioned in the introduction, through the perspective of a teenage girl from Igbo ethnicity in a strict Catholic family of a powerful and rigorous father, a girl who learns to silently question issues of religion, authority, culture and love which she had always seen through a limited point of view. Adichie's work, which seems to fit Young's explanation of the postcolonial, also allows for another account of contemporary Africa (by an African herself), by becoming, in a postcolonial key, "a voice that helps in the vindication of the voiceless who are better categorised as the once colonised people of

the world" (Ukande 54). This also emphasizes what Sophia Ogwude affirms is an aspect by which the author can be exceptionally distinguished, which is "the celebration of contemporary Nigerian life regardless of all odds" (122).

Having that in mind, this chapter will start by presenting an overview of colonialism and its mechanisms of operation, then follow to the concept of postcolonialism by exploring previous works on the matter and delineating the issues which revolve around its theory. Finally, it will also bring a discussion regarding the field of postcolonial African literature and one on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and where she is located in this space, as a Nigerian author writing in a context of post-independence.

1.1 Colonialism and its aftermath

Europe, Nicholas Birns recalls, colonized a great part of the planet, starting around the time of Christopher Columbus up to the mid-twentieth century, and it operated "out of mercantile, ideological, and religious motives; differently spurred by economic survival and great-power rivalry, sometimes pursuing their goals unsystematically and sometimes as a deliberate instrument of policy" (223). By 1900, European nations ruled – directly or not – most of the world, for even countries that were not officially colonized by them were subjected to the influences of the West and to transformations because of it, and "[c]olonial attitudes became deeply braided into the Western way of thought" (223).

On a similar note, Young has mentioned that much of the inequality that we have in the world today is related to the division between the West and the rest of the world, a division which "was made fairly absolute in the 19th century by the expansion of the European empires, as a result of which nine-tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by European, or European derived, powers" (*A Very Short* 2)[2]. On this matter, as discussed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, among the issues which existed during the colonial period, there was that

[2] Although the Argentinian theorist Walter Mignolo recognizes the strengthening of expansionary efforts in the 19th century, he argues that the beginning of this division and control that configured modernity in Europe and coloniality everywhere else happened in the 16th century (similarly to Birns's argumentation that the process of colonization started around the time of Columbus' explorations). As Mignolo says "The Americas, above all in the early experiences of the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, and the Andes, established the model for the imaginary of the Atlantic circuit. Beginning with this moment, we find transformations and adaptations of the model of colonization and of the religious-epistemological principles that were imposed from then on" ("Coloniality at large" 26-27).

of Europe seen as the center with everything that was not part of it considered the margin, "a periphery of culture, power and civilization" (*Post-colonial Studies* 32). According to them, this dualistic contrast was necessary for the existence of colonialism, for the foundation of the empire required the presence of the colonized with which there would be a relationship based on hierarchy, similarly to that of the civilized and the savage. If the colonized are savages, backward and at the margin, then there is the need of a savior. For that reason, the mission of enlightening these colonized peoples by bringing them from the margins to the center was one of the main arguments for the political and economic abuse carried out by colonialism. Albert Memmi also comments on the necessity of this contrast in colonialism, by saying that "just as the bourgeoisie proposes an image of the proletariat, the existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested" (123). These opposing images were advantageous for the colonizer, since they worked as excuses for their actions.

In colonial discourse, the native is the other, which, by and large, means "anyone who is separate from one's self" (Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies* 154). In this discourse, the idea of others is necessary for the definition of what is natural and thus constitutes the norm, as well as for self-identification. The thought of natives as primitive and as cannibals is present in some of the anthropological discourses used as a way to stamp the native as the other. For Ashcroft et al. that is done by instituting the dualistic contrast between the colonizer, or civilized, and the colonized, or savage, and proclaiming the dominant and legitimate status of the ways and mindset of the colonizer (*Post-colonial Studies* 154-155). These theories, which portrayed the colonized people as inferior and incapable of taking care of themselves, were mostly based on the concept of race, and used as a means of legitimizing colonial and imperial rule (Young, *A Very Short* 2). As Lois Tyson points out, the colonizers assumed their culture as vastly superior to that of the colonized, and thus, disregarded the way of living of the latter. With the colonizers' belief that they were at the center and the colonized at the margins, they regarded themselves as the model of what was right, and the natives, being different, were seen as the other, substandard, as not completely human (420).

Regarding the way the colonizer depicts the native, Frantz Fanon asserts that it was as "a sort of quintessence of evil" (*The Wretched* 41), that the natives were portrayed not merely as those who did not have any values, but also as the repudiation of them. They are depicted and seen as, among other negative things, wicked, the destructive agent, deforming

everything that is beautiful and moral, for it is in them that all the malicious influences are stored (*The Wretched* 41). European travelers, when in contact with these new and foreign worlds, Loomba comments, interpreted them "through ideological filters, or ways of seeing, provided by their own cultures and societies. But the impetus to trade with, plunder and conquer these lands also provided a new and crucial framework through which they would interpret other lands and peoples" (64). Consequently, she resumes, black Africans, for instance, were considered as resembling beasts due to medieval and religious associations of their color with something impure, dirty, and due to its support to the justification for colonizing and enslaving these people (64).

According to Young, starting from the 1860s, British imperialism was associated in its essence to the reinforcement of a cultural ideology based on race. Both imperialism and the idea of a civilizing mission involved a notion of racial superiority, once the central difference between what was defined as savages and civilized people – which justified the need of a civilizing mission – was based on the simple differentiation between whites and non-whites. This differentiation was built around the use of degrading terms that belittled those who were not Europeans, as indicated by the growth of the use of the terms such as the very offensive 'n-word' (*An Historical* 32-33). If at some point the British system intended not to interfere so much in the local cultures (to the point, for instance, of changing some of their social structure by establishing hierarchies within the local communities, of imposing the European language and religion, or of changing some of their ways) although today it can be regarded as a more liberal spirit, it was actually due to the belief on the racist notion that the natives were not capable of being at the same educational level as the Europeans – and, thus, needed colonial rule permanently. Association with European ways (such as the adoption of their cultural values) made it possible for some of the locals to have a certain level of autonomy, but, at the same time, it introduced a concept of hierarchy for those of the races deemed inferior (*An Historical* 32-33), giving them a higher status the more similar they were to the colonizer.

Aimé Césaire, one of the first intellectuals to engage in the criticism of colonialism, addresses the reasons for colonization by arguing that, contrary to what was claimed then, colonization was "neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law" (32). For him, the process of colonizing countries is not an innocent one,

and those who justify it are sick and "morally diseased" (39), since colonizers have a history of hypocritically acting as barbarians towards the natives at the same time they preached they colonized in order to civilize and stop barbarism (40-41). The Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o shares a similar view when he argues that even though there were missionaries and intellectuals of the empire who professed to the opposite, what colonial missions had as their objective was to come into the possession of a territory belonging to a people and this territory's fruits. And whether it occurs by directly occupying the land, as it happened in some colonies of settlement, or indirectly, by setting up a government in the place, through which they would exercise control, the outcome is the establishment of an economic organization, and, as a result, of a system of classes, which can be controlled by the colonizers (Wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* 11-12). Europe, then, as well as its capitalist mode of production, developed by means of exploiting and underdeveloping African countries, whose territories Europe divided and occupied in order to have control over raw materials as well as to create markets; and from where, among other things, they not only extracted commodities such as sugar and gold but also used the local people themselves as mercantile good. Moreover, for the domination and exploitation of African territories to be whole, the colonizers tried to control the peoples' cultures, targeting their "education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping in this way to control a people's values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self" (Wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* 11-12). By doing so, they could enslave and exploit people who were led to believe they were supposed to be enslaved and exploited.

As mentioned above, one of the aspects targeted by colonialism to gain more control over the local population was religion. The religious project, Mary Louise Pratt recalls, aligned with a geographical one, was already put to practice starting from the times of navigational mapping, in which emissaries claimed the lands through the baptism of places with Euro-Christian names (33). Christian identities were established, Ania Loomba explains, from a contrary position to other religions such as Judaism and Islam and the religions that were considered heathen. Thus, religious difference "became (often rather confusedly) an index of and metaphor for racial, cultural and ethnic differences" (93). Whether or not a mere justification for colonial domination, religious missions played an important role in the whole process of colonialism. The religions of colonized subjects were frequently belittled and seen as irrational beliefs or paganism, and, therefore, used as a reason for what the colonizer

claimed was their mission to civilize (Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies* 188). As Ohadike comments, "[t]he role of Christian missionaries in the conquest of Africa is sometimes underestimated. Missionaries were the first foreigners to venture inland in fairly large numbers, and their accounts of what they found helped stimulate imperial ambitions" (xli). Religion was, thus, an important tool for the development of colonial discourse. Also on this matter, Fanon states that in the colonies, the Church is that of the white people, that of the colonizers, and, therefore, it does not invite the colonized to follow the conducts of God, but to follow those of the dominant people, that is, of those colonizing them. Moreover, every so often this religious dualism leads to the native being dehumanized (*The Wretched* 42), once the native would be associated with their religion, which was regarded as lower and demonic by the colonizers, in contrast to the deemed sacred and respected one of the White people, who were, by affiliation, supposedly just as superior and moral.

As the historian John Illiffe states, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of European missionaries in Africa was probably above ten thousand, and "[t]heir chief role was to build the church, whereas pioneer evangelisation was mainly done by Africans. Some of these African evangelists had no specific mandate or training [..., o]thers were catechist-schoolteachers, often with bare literacy" (233). In addition, around 1910, the number of Christians in Africa was up to seven million; twenty years later it had more than doubled, and in the following twenty years it doubled again. The process of evangelization happened very fast and was usually aggressive. As Iliffe mentions,

> Early twentieth-century missionaries had little sympathy for the gradual Christianisation of African customs. They might appropriate indigenous symbols, as the White Fathers used the god Mukasa's drum-call to summon people to church, but the crucial test for Christian converts was to 'throw away their idols'. Yet Africa was no *tabula rasa*. In practice, adaptation took place, but it was done by the converts themselves while experimenting with the new religion and reconciling it with inherited beliefs and practices (233).[3]

[3] The intolerance with which the Africans were told to get rid of their religions is one that recalls the increase in the violence that takes place in Brazil in contemporary times. As Cilma Laurinda

Such seemed to be a way of negotiating religion (even if quickly and harshly) with the local people in order for the colonizers to achieve their objective, which was to convert natives to Christianity. It allowed the local population to see how the white people's religion could work for them, in their context and also allowed them to still feel to some extent rooted to their tradition, and thus, not running the risk of being pushed away from the colonizers' goal of religion conversion.

The control of people's religion was part of the cultural imperialism imposed by the European during colonial times, and the same happened with education, once through both areas colonizers could somehow 'gain' the native and have them collaborate with the project of colonization, rather than hinder it. For education and religion were associated during colonial times (and typically they would be taught together)[4], both Christianity and literary classics such as Shakespeare, Ania Loomba comments, were made available to those regarded as heathens and uncultured through the use of English books (such as the Bible and literature in general), which were deemed as an authority (78). Through this tool, the authority of European (or English) culture was reinforced as well. Within the colonies, because of the common assumption that

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Freitas e Silva comments, in the Brazilian context, where the demonstrations of religious intolerance also trace back to the colonial period, the religious discourses of Christian churches often demonize afro-Brazilian practices, referring to them with disrespect (105). Silva recollects the case of "Mãe Gilda", an "iyalorixá" (a priestess from the Candomblé religion) who in 1999 suffered verbal and physical aggression and attacks to her own house, where sacred objects were broken (105-106), all due to prejudice against her religion. A feature on religious intolerance in Brazil, by Danilo Molina, from the Brazilian magazine Carta Capital, points out that by the end of September 2017, only in the state of Rio de Janeiro, 79 complaints regarding attacks to religions of African origins (whether to the members or to the spaces of practices – the *terreiros*) were registered. *Terreiros* were invaded and many religious idols and liturgical objects were destroyed. According to Molina, the intolerance in Brazil goes beyond borders, for many cases have been registered in other places of the country: 27 occurrences of violence against these religions had been registered in 2017 in São Paulo by the time of the publication of the feature (in October); in Blumenau, Santa Catarina, few weeks before Oktoberfest, posters with neonazi content were spread around the city, threatening black people and adepts of afro-Brazilian religions; and in 2016, 776 occurrences were registered in the country. (For more information: www.cartacapital.com.br/diversidade/a-intolerancia-religiosa-nao-vai-calar-os-nossos-tambores)

[4] Similar was some of the process during the European expansion in Latin America, where, according to Silviano Santiago, the learning and substituting of languages and the religious conversion walked side by side, starting with realistic religious theatrical representations, which happened in both Portuguese, the colonizer's language, and Tupi-Guarani, the native's language. In these representations, there was also the negotiation of religious and cultural symbols, when the human body was presented being punctured by arrows. Both the linguistic and the religious codes, for the theorist, are bound by the project of these theatrical plays of substituting them for the European alternate (13-14).

European education and being able to read in their languages set the colonizers in a higher position, "literature could indicate an unbridgeable gap between colonisers and colonised peoples. But the effort to convert the natives also assumes that the latter can be transformed by the religious or cultural truths enshrined in the colonial texts" (Loomba 79). There is, then, some contradiction in the attempt to discipline, educate, civilize or co-opt the colonial subject, the other (79), for that would imply the possibility of native peoples reaching and being in the same level of education and sharing the same beliefs as the colonizers and thus setting them in a position of equals. Contradictory or not, another important aspect of the domination of the empire over the colonized was through education, and, consequently, language control.

The educational system, during colonial times, introduced an acceptable usage of the language from the metropolis as the model and undervalued everything that varied from it. Consequently, language turned into a tool for the conservation of a power system grounded on hierarchy and for the creation of conceptions of what was legitimate (Ashcroft et al. *The Empire* 7). Today, this linguistic imperialism still shows its strength for the use of English (as well as other European languages from colonizing countries) is preferred over local languages. For this reason, the matter of language generates great discussion in postcolonial studies. As W. H. New reminds us, “[w]riters themselves have been among the clearest observers of their own linguistic environments, and among the clearest commentators on the relation between the language they live with, the culture they live in and the world they create” (307). That has generated opposing views regarding the use of language in the cultural productions of postcolonial subjects.

On the one hand, we have writers who appropriate the language of the colonizer, and on the other, we have those who have abandoned the colonial language in favor of the native one. Through the appropriation of the language of the empire, it is possible for writers who speak from former colonies to interfere in the discourse of the oppressor and to insert realities closer to what they experience, or make use of that language to share with a broader reading public how their world actually is from their point of view. Differently, the argument in favor of the refusal of writing in the colonial language is that in postcolonial societies the access to these languages is likely to be limited to the elite. Thus, they argue that the use of such languages does not reach the majority of these societies but rather ensures that most of the audience is outside of such postcolonial communities (Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies* 16).

This conflict of opinions regarding the use of the colonizer's language is reflected, for instance, in the positions taken by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Achebe argues that even if English, as well as other languages from colonizing countries, have been forced upon African nations, "there is certainly a great advantage to writing in a world language" (“English and the African Writer” 346) and that it would make the literature from a place much more accessible to the rest of the world. For him, literature could work as a medium of international exchange, as long as writers make the best use of it, altering the language to suit their cultural needs. In his words, "the English language will be able to carry the weight of [his] African experience" (349).

Wa Thiong'o, in opposition, argues that the languages of their colonization were the main vehicle of their soul imprisonment. Thinking of the context of his country, Kenya, he recalls the time when the colonizers elevated the status of English over their languages, as well as they did with their cultures, values and practices. According to him, "the bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (“The Language” 287). He also claims that their native languages were connected to who they were, their culture, to their worldview, and that they were more than just words. According to him, then, writing in a Kenyan language, refusing to write in English, besides being a way to convey the culture and history of a community, is "part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples" (290).

These two distinct opinions imply different strategies of language use through which, as Ashcroft et al. point out, postcolonial writing defines itself. According to them, that – which is a demand of the “crucial function of language as a medium of power” (*The Empire* 37) – happens by means of the apprehension of the language of the center (that is, of the colonizer) and of relocating it in a discourse which has been completely adapted to the colonized place. The strategies are called abrogation and appropriation. The first one is the denial of the privilege of the colonizer's language, and "involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (*The Empire* 37). Abrogation entails a repudiation of the manners of the imperial culture, of its aesthetic, and its misleading conception of a standard of correctness when making use of the language, as well as the belief of the fixedness of meaning in the words.

Appropriation, differently, is the mechanism in which the language is seized and made to "'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience", as language is turned into a tool and employed in different ways to communicate diverse cultural situations (*The Empire* 37-38). Regardless of the position a writer takes in the matter of using or not the empire's language and regardless of which strategies they use, as W.H. New states, "there is general agreement in all these stances about one thing: language affirms a set of social patterns and reflects a particular cultural taste" (303). That being said, those who make use of the language of another culture, New reinforces, recognize that they can be defined by it. However, many widely read postcolonial writers who do use English have gone beyond simply using the language; "they have also modified it, in the process of generating literary possibilities" (303).

Still on the matter of languages and regarding the case of African people, it is important to remember how imperialism had an impact on local languages even outside the dualism 'English versus Native languages', an impact which sometimes led to a change in the long preserved social structure of some communities, by compressing dialects and bringing groups together. As Iliffe notes, the missionaries – who, besides their Christian duties were also in charge of teaching –, shortened the number of African dialects, which was very big, to a few written languages which were each supposed to designate a tribe. According to him, tribes such as Yoruba, Igbo, Ewe, Shona, among many others, were organized in this way and "[t]his linguistic work relied on African intellectuals who made many of the translations, staffed the churches and primary schools propagating tribal languages, recorded the traditions composing tribal histories, and expounded the customs forming tribal laws" (239-240). Ohadike, on this matter, but regarding specifically the situation of the Igbo people, attributes the creation of a more unified tribal identity and its relation to language to the colonial period as well, but he states that it was due to the venturing of Igbo people, who had many dialects, into lands further from their homes and to the concentration of this people in urban centers and in spaces of work and study (xix).

1.2 Mimicry, Ambivalence and Hybridity: The postcolonial subject and the space in-between

Within postcolonial studies, there are three important and complementary concepts related to the understanding of the postcolonial (and colonial) subject and, thus, highly relevant to this research, which

are: mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity. The Indian scholar Homi K. Bhabha, in his *The Location of Culture* (1994), explores mimicry (in the context of colonization) as the mimicking, from the part of the colonized, of the ways of the colonizer in an effort to resemble them. In his words, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (86), which could be understood as an attempt of colonial subjects at standardizing themselves through the imitation of the European, an attempt at becoming a copy of those who are in a position of power and at being recognized as a part of such group. Yet, this copy would be a new version, a different repetition, which would still set the colonized apart from those they aim at being like. According to Tyson (421), mimicry is a reflection not only of the desire of the colonized for an acceptance by the colonizers but also of the shame they felt regarding their own culture, because they were taught to perceive it as inferior to that of the colonizers. However, as Ashcroft et al. emphasize, one should remember that when such a thing happens, the outcome is not merely a replica of the characteristics of the colonizers, but, alternatively, a dim imitation of them, which can intimidate. That is because mimicry does not distance itself from farce, as it may seem like a parody of what is being mimicked (*Post-colonial Studies* 125), and as Bhabha puts it, "The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86). With that in mind, there may be a possible threatening effect of mimicry regarding the destabilization of colonial identities, which lies in how one appropriates the image of the colonizer and bends it in a way that serves the purposes of the colonized, undermining (even if one is unaware of it) some of the authority of the European self through the mockery existent within the negotiation of difference and recognition; and, thus, also lies in the simple act of resistance – unintentional or not – in never becoming quite the same as the one being mimicked, giving us an understanding of mimicry as something which is "at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance, from the disciplined to the desiring" (Bhabha 120).

The phenomenon of mimicry is ambivalent. Ambivalence, in the theory of colonial discourse, "describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized" (Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies* 10). It is an ambivalent relationship for the colonized is not only and entirely in resistance to the colonizer. The concept of ambivalence proposes the idea that colonized subjects struggle with an oscillating relation of both complicity and resistance, and do not simply relate to only either of them (10). As stated

by Robert Young, that happens, for instance, when, by the means of education, a native culture is superimposed by the colonizing one, having, as a result, an "uncertainty, a blurring of cultural boundaries, inside and outside, an otherness within" (*A Very Short* 23), which is the condition of ambivalence.

Another important term in this discussion is that of hybridity, which regards "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft et al. *Post-colonial Studies* 108), referring, then, to an in-between space of cultures, which can take various forms, such as political, linguistic, cultural and racial. Bhabha has addressed this matter by mentioning the existence of a space beyond, an intervening space, that is new in the sense that it is not part of the continuum of past and present, but rather, a "revisionary time" and "an insurgent act of cultural translation" (7).

This idea of hybridity, of a place in-between, has also been approached by the Brazilian theorist Silviano Santiago, who argues that a new society spurs from colonization, a society whose main feature is the twisting of the idea of a unity and is, according to him, "contaminated in favor of a subtle and complex mix of the European element and the native one – a kind of progressive infiltration carried out by savage thinking"[5] (15). Although he mostly refers to the space where Latin-American literature happens, for it is the product of peoples living in this locus of mixtures and impurities (being Latin America a land that underwent a long period of colonization), this space is one that can relate to the realities of former colonized peoples in a broader sense, one that is "[b]etween the prison and the transgression, between the submission to the code and the aggression, between the obedience and the rebellion, between the assimilation and the expression" (26)[6]. Helen Tiffin has also commented on this space of impurities by mentioning that postcolonial cultures cannot achieve the purity from pre-colonial times, for they are now inevitably hybridized, "involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (95).

In my understanding, the idea of hybridity and of a space in-between allows for a subject that dismantles some of the antagonism between colonizer and colonized, whose identities do not need to remain

[5] My translation of "contaminada em favor de uma mistura sutil e complexa entre o elemento europeu e o elemento autóctone – uma espécie de infiltração progressiva efetuada pelo pensamento selvagem".

[6] My translation of "entre a prisão e a transgressão, entre a submissão ao código e a agressão, entre a obediência e a rebelião, entre a assimilação e a expressão".

in opposing positions, but rather fuse into a new being, one that is neither of the other two, that is not necessarily worse or better, but a different, new version. A new being that could, to quote the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa[7] "continually walk out of one culture and into another" and who is "in all cultures at the same time" (99). Yet, in this space in-between, these hybrid subjects can also sometimes try to deny this mixture, as a way to stay true to their origins and to recuperate their traditions, resisting against the influences of the assimilating culture (in the context of colonization, that of the colonizer), which are many times associated with a history of suffering and exploitation; or sometimes, even try to deny it for the opposite purpose, as has been mentioned in the discussion on mimicry.

According to Young, those in a society dominated by the colonizer are subject to an uncomfortable hybrid existence, because they struggle trying to live as two opposing people at the same time. And the negotiation between these two – or more – conflicting identities is "part of the process of becoming white, changing your race and your class by assimilating the dominant culture. Except that, though you may assimilate white values, you never quite can become white enough" (*A Very Short* 23). As I will discuss in the following chapters, this process of assimilation is something which we can observe, for instance, in the character of Eugene Achike, in *Purple Hibiscus*, who is described by his sister as "too much of a colonial product" (13), and who, with effort, abandons the customs of his ancestors in favor of the Western and Christian one. The character, when in public, also prefers the speaking of British-accented English, which he thinks sounds more civilized, rather than his native language, Igbo, and demands that his children speak it too.

1.3 What does one mean by 'postcolonial'?

Ashcroft et al., in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, propose a view of Postcolonialism similar to that given by Young, as that which deals with how colonialism affected nations and cultures and the outcome of such contact. Despite its early chronological meaning, regarding the post-independence historical period, "from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural

[7] Gloria Anzaldúa has also commented on the possibility of a hybrid being, especially in the context of the borders (in her case, of Mexico and the United States), which are spaces where there is a multiplicity of cultures, languages and values, even if such spaces tend to divide peoples. Thoughts on this matter, among other issues, are present in her collection of essays and poems *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

effects of colonization" (168). Thus, the word (as well as its hyphenated version, post-colonialism), according to them, is used today in broad and differing ways. These encompass the study of the various ways through which European colonialism performed, whether the process of territorial conquest, the empire's colonial discourse and how it operated towards the construction of subjects, how those subjects resisted, or, last but not least, the different responses to colonialism and its legacy in communities that both have and have not gained their independence. Although it has been mostly used targeting the cultural production of these 'postcolonial' spaces (independent or not), it is becoming used in a broader way in studies of historical, political, sociological and economic nature, regarding the impact of European imperialism upon the world today in such fields (169).

Ania Loomba, accordingly, suggests thinking of postcolonialism not only as the period which came after colonialism and which signed its end, but more as the resistance to colonialism's patrimony and to the oppression caused by it. This position, she argues, would allow us to include as postcolonial subjects those people who have been, because of colonialism, displaced geographically and now live within metropolitan cultures. Furthermore, it allows us to connect both the historical resistance to colonialism and the present-day resistances to imperialism and to the power of Western culture (16). As Ashcroft et al have commented, there is still, among critics, a great debate over the prefix 'post' in the term postcolonialism. The meaning of 'post' as 'after' colonialism has been, according to them, "contested by a more elaborate understanding of the working of post-colonial cultures which stresses the articulations between and across the politically defined historical periods, of precolonial, colonial and post-independence cultures" (*Post-colonial Studies* 169).

Young has also commented on that, by noting that although the postcolonial may mean what comes after colonialism and imperialism in the sense of the conquest and domination of lands, it does not mean after imperialism when the word is used in the sense of the "system of power relations of economic and political domination" that exists today (*An Historical* 44). It is important, then, to remember that the period of colonial rule may have ended, but that does not mean that the power of colonialism has stopped to be exercised over ex-colonies (whether ideologically, politically, economically, etc.) which is why there is a need for postcolonialism. The postcolonial commemorates, according to the theorist, the triumph over the colonial and the 'post' in it marks numerous historical victories that must not be forgotten. However, at the same time, as in a paradox, it still strives against the remains of colonialism in the

present and, thus, it "describes the conditions of existence that have followed in which many basic power structures of the systems have yet to change in any substantive way" (*An Historical* 60).

This distinction between the time period and the whole thinking regarding such time and its legacy has also been addressed by Lois Tyson, who recalls the debate over the fact that the term postcolonial may suggest that colonialism has been left in the past, when in reality that has not happened. She explains that although colonialism is not practiced as it used to be up to the half of the twentieth century, "through direct, overt administration of governors and educators from the colonizing country[, t]oday, through different means, the same kind of political, economic, and cultural subjugation of vulnerable nations occurs at the hands of international corporations" (425). She argues that postcolonial criticism, as a theoretical framework, pursues the understanding of political, social, cultural, and psychological operations of colonialist ideologies and of those who are contrary to them (418), which gives us an understanding of postcolonialism as something that can be related to the present as much as to the past, for these operations are still currently working[8].

A postcolonial theoretical approach aims, as Robert Young suggests, at changing thoughts and behaviors, in order to achieve a more balanced and fair relation between different peoples and, therefore, is considered disconcerting by some, for "it disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power" (Young, *A Very Short* 7). It is also concerned with showing that other views and knowledges, rather than only those from the West, should be regarded just as seriously and as important (2). Thus, the orientation of postcolonial critique may, according to him, adjust to the different political priorities of the times;

[8] Such operations are related to the concept of coloniality of power, coined by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, who has discussed that what we understand for globalization is the result of a long process which has constituted America and Eurocentered capitalism as a global power. As Quijano argues, this model of power has as one of its main axes the classification and ranking of people regarding the idea of race, "a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism" (533). According to him, although this racial axis originated in the colonial period and has a colonial character, it turned out to be much more lasting than colonialism (533). Accordingly, the Argentinian theorist Walter Mignolo differs coloniality of power from colonialism taking the latter as the colonial period, which had an end (through the processes of decolonization) whereas coloniality is still "alive and well in the current structure of globalization" ("The geopolitics" 82). Mignolo deems coloniality as a side - and a dark one - of modernity; in his words, it is "a colonial matrix (or order) of power" ("Coloniality: the darker side" 42) which has justified the crimes and violence that have occurred over the years in the name of modernity (44). Coloniality of power is, then, a common feature that connects the modernity of the sixteenth century with its version of nowadays ("The geopolitics" 83).

however, it still bases itself and seeks inspiration in the subversive activism of the past (during colonial times) which was "dedicated to changing those who were formerly the objects of history into history's new subjects" (Young, *An Historical* 10).

In order to do so, postcolonial theory works, according to Young, towards undoing the ideological heritage of colonialism not only in the ex-colonies but also in the West itself. Such a work comprises a decentralization of European control and intellectual supremacy, and an analysis of eurocentrism, challenging its assumptions of Western superiority and the notion that the male white perspective is the natural criterion. The dislocation of Western knowledge comprises academic knowledge and a reevaluation of its connections to colonial and racist beliefs, contesting the way Western history incorporates world histories, confronting the canon (whether historical, literary, philosophical or sociological) for excluding non-metropolitan writings, and promoting debates between Western and non-Western cultures. (*An Historical* 65).

This questioning of Western knowledge, especially towards peoples from the East, is what Edward Said promoted with his most famous work, *Orientalism* (1978). The book, which criticized the homonymous system of knowledge[9], was dedicated to analyzing the representations of the Orient in Western writings, the construction of the oriental subject through the discourse within such writings (and, today, within media in general), and the authority of the West over the Orient. According to him, an analysis of Orientalism calls for an examination of "not only scholarly works but also works of literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies" (23), for all texts are, although they vary according to genre and to their historical period, rooted in the world and carry ideologies.

The project of postcolonial writing, thus, has been, in the words of Helen Tiffin, "to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world" (95). Therefore, postcolonial writing engages in the process of dismantling the European discourse and hegemonic systems and is characteristically subversive, which is why "postcolonial literature/cultures are thus

[9] Said describes Orientalism as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient–dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3).

constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices" (96). And so, one could understand that Postcolonial theory and writing create an opportunity for recuperating the voice and history of peoples whose expression has been historically overshadowed by the West, by addressing the impact of colonialism and the responses and resistances to it, by interrogating the colonial discourses that have been harmful to such peoples and by celebrating the postcolonial societies and their cultures. Hence, Postcolonial literature is itself another important tool of response to colonialism, for it allows issues to be discussed, peoples and stories not to be forgotten, discourses (of both past and present) to be understood and questioned, and new points of view to be created, at the same time it has the artistic potential of entertaining, evoking emotions, changing minds and creating connections with its readers. And as will be discussed in the next section, that is the kind of work that Chimamanda N. Adichie seems to be producing and promoting through her stories, which have as their main purpose, as funny as it may sound, the simple yet – in this context – subversive, act of telling stories.

1.4 Postcolonial African literature and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

As previously discussed, colonialism has, in one way or another, molded the lives of a great part of the world's population today. Literature, among other types of art, is one of the main ways through which we can perceive the effect colonialism has had on the everyday experiences of people (Ashcroft et al. *The Empire* 1). Therefore, considering that literary texts not only have the potential to formulate colonial discourses, but also to work against them (Loomba 66), we can think of postcolonial literature as something that has the power to appropriate, contest and reverse oppressive ways of representation and colonial thoughts (63). Postcolonialism, then, as Young mentions, has been responsible for shifting the views of non-Western people and of their relation with the West, as it is seen by the dominant group. It is, in his words, a way of "turning the world upside down [and of] looking from the other side of the photograph" (*A Very Short* 2).

As Eloína dos Santos reminds us, colonial literature was concerned with spreading both the theories that defended the superior status of Europeans and the civilizing mission of the empire, which was one of its justifications for colonization, and, accordingly, this writing made use of stereotyped language in order to negotiate the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Thus, according to her, "the empire was,

mostly, a textual practice: colonial bureaucratic reports, advertisements, political treaties, diaries, decrees, letters, adventure novels, all contained imperial ideas of racial pride and national power"[10] (343). Local texts were used in order to establish a system and facilitate the control of the colonies. Therefore, Santos argues, postcolonial literature is more than only that which came after the colonial period, but something that also came with it, in order to do what has been discussed in this chapter regarding postcolonial theory, which is to both examine and resist colonialism and its way of thinking (343). As she states:

> By giving expression to the experience of the colonized, postcolonial writers seek to subvert, both thematically and formally, the discourses that underpinned colonial expansion: the myths of power, race and subordination, among others. Postcolonial literature shows the deep marks of exclusion and the cultural dichotomy during imperial rule, the transformations wrought by the European cultural domain and the ensuing conflicts[11] (ibid).

On this matter of literature as an effective tool for dismantling colonial discourse, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o states that whether or not writers are aware of that, their work is connected to the struggles that shape their society, be they political, ideological, cultural or economic (xii). The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shows this attitude in her writing, as, according to Linda Yohannes, she positions herself as a nationalist regarding how she feels about Africa and Nigeria's colonial history, and her writing features themes that indicate a commitment to the social struggles of Africa (16). Yohannes argues, however, that even if showing postcolonial traits and seeming to engage in the resistance to colonialism, Adichie's fiction does so in a subtle way, unlike the more explicit work of other African writers (63). For Yohannes, that happens because the author is part of a generation of African writers that grew up in a time after independence but has lived with the heritage of colonialism,

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[10] My translation of: "O Império foi, em grande parte, um exercício textual: relatórios de burocratas coloniais, anúncios, tratados políticos, diários, editais, cartas, romances de aventura, todos continham ideias imperiais de orgulho racial e poder nacional".

[11] My translation of: "Ao dar expressão à experiência do colonizado, os escritores pós-coloniais procuram subverter, tanto temática, quando formalmente, os discursos que sustentaram a expansão colonial: os mitos de poder, raça, subordinação, entre outros. A literatura pós-colonial mostra as marcas profundas da exclusão e da dicotomia cultural durante o domínio imperial, as transformações operadas pelo domínio cultural europeu e os conflitos delas decorrentes".

thus, standing more in a position to reflect upon colonialism rather than in one to rail at it (66).

This generation of African writers, of which Adichie is part, is known as the third generation, which, according to Kurtz, in a general sense, differs from the previous ones in how: their work has been turned to more recent disturbances; they are concerned, like their predecessors, with matters of cultural and national identity, but have, as a result of growing up with different contemporary genres and categories, a broader stylistic and thematic range; they show an interest in experimenting linguistically; and, finally, they try to come to terms with the legacy of their past and strive "under an obvious but understandable anxiety of influence, as the giants of Nigerian literature who preceded them cast long shadows" (25).

Indeed, as Na'Allah et al. state, African literature written in English and French in the way it developed in the twentieth century had as its main concern the urgency of a production of stories that went beyond the single story of the time of conquest and discovery of a continent of uncivilized natives and the subsequent civilizing mission. There was a motivation not only to tell different stories but also to question the authorized version of the African story – for long told by the West (201). Moreover, as Gláucia Renate Gonçalves comments, the first two generations, whose novels displayed a tendency towards realistic depictions of specific places and points in history, were "generally committed to a fictional representation of the external social and political situation" (31). According to her, with the approach of the 1970's, a time when many colonies had already achieved their independence, African writers turned their focus to issues of the present, rather than only looking to the past, for they had been "indeed worshipping freedom and independence, since it was only then that they had known and experienced such state. But independence is now a present condition, even if chimeric. Social issues are now seen under a new light" (32). With writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, and others of their generations, the world, as Cláudio Braga comments, was able to experience an interesting literary universe, one which was concerned with colonial issues in the African continent, through "narratives that problematize the sociocultural perspective of peoples who have undergone processes of domination, colonial subordination and the decolonization resulting from their political independence" (57).

The earlier generations of African writers, then, interrogated and/or rewrote canonical narratives by the European, tried to recuperate stories which had been lost and gave voice and agency to those who were

put at the margins and silenced (Na'Allah et al. 201). In the present-day postcolonial world of the twenty-first century, there is a question of whether a balance of stories has been achieved or is close to and "the struggle against the single story and the struggle for narrative authority first staged against colonialism and its discourses of Africa was later to be waged against the postcolonial African state and its political and discursive apparatus" (ibid). There is, then, besides the preoccupation of recuperating the voice which had been 'stolen' by the West and of reconstructing the (many times distorted and maligned) image of Africa which had been painted by outsiders, one preoccupation of addressing the present-day African spaces, and how they function – with their complexities – in a time of post-independence.

Purple Hibiscus is a text that dialogues with works of previous generations of Nigerian writing – especially with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* to which it seems to refer from the very first sentence. Adichie connects not only with his novel, "but also [with] the broader context of his well-known public positions on the role of the English language in African literature. *Purple Hibiscus* engages the literary traditions of the past even as it struggles to find its own way" (Kurtz 26). Indeed, Adichie's novel, similarly, tackles the issues of language, religion, patriarchy and dilemmas of cultural identity, but it does so in different ways that go beyond those of fifty years before. The way I see it, Nigeria is now depicted differently from works such as Achebe's novel, in which the country is represented as being occupied by the British and first coming to terms with the reality of having a foreign culture imposed over them. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Nigeria is a hybrid space in which many aspects of the European culture (such as language, religion and social practices) are part of the country's context and in which rather than struggling not to let these influences reach them, the resistance rests more in questioning how such influences have impacted their local culture; and these differences may reflect in the writing of novels. According to Onyemaechi Udumukwu, "[i]n spite of its half-century experience as an independent nation state from British Colonial rule, Nigeria is a nation in the process of becoming" (187) and, thus, the Nigerian novel has been somewhat responsible for recording the country's transformational process. That is what *Purple Hibiscus* does, while "it links the private troubles of home with the public crises of nation. Adichie narrates the stories of a Catholic family, the Achikes, and their connection to the worlds of township, professional life, economics, news, religion, and culture in Nigeria" (Strehle, 106), telling of things that, like in Achebe's

story, although at a different time and in different ways, fall apart both at home and in the community (118).

There has been, according to Ukande, as one of the results of the colonial encounter between the West and Africa, a conjunction that is based on the binary idea of superiority versus inferiority that regards the West as the master and civilized and Africa as the servant and barbaric. Therefore, African writers have worked in order to change this perception, by producing works that both stimulate the appreciation of African culture and history by African people themselves and present to the West the sovereignty of African identities and culture, while also showing them that rather than something that came with colonialism, civilization was already characteristic of Africa (52). That is why, for instance, African literature has been, mostly since *Things Fall Apart*, "concerned with rehabilitating the much-maligned image of Africa through a restoration of dignity and origins along with a simultaneous exposition of the debilitating violence of colonialism, both as a case of physical imposition and psychic trauma" (Krishnan 14). We can see that in much of Adichie's work, considering that the writer, who has gone public on her ideas concerning the need to talk about Africa as much more than the stereotypical and patronizing depiction that the West – and consequently the world – has, is at the same time engaged in writing about the place, and more specifically her country of Nigeria, in ways that point to the problems the country faces, mostly due to its colonial past. Indeed, I recognize, both her talks and writing tackle the necessity of re-thinking Africa as well as the stereotypes through which people have been presented as the sole truth, and also the need to tell good and entertaining stories, of the most varied themes, which bring the Nigerian experience to the focus and address different issues the country has met, which I believe is quite significant in matters of representation.

The theme of colonialism, its consequences and the cultural conflict between the colonizer and the colonized have been, then, recurrent and increasing in African novels. One of the many ways this conflict manifested – as previously seen in this chapter – was through the "conversion to the Christian religion with its ripple effects, especially religious intolerance and its often disheartening disavowal of much of our African cultural beliefs and ways that it bred on the part of these new converts" (Ogwude 110). Thus, that has been one of the main topics tackled by these novels. That is, as stated by Daria Tunca, the case of much of Adichie's work, for in them the preoccupation she has with the extremes that religion has got to in Nigeria is persistent, and many facets of this matter have been explored ("The confessions" 52) – as is, for

instance, the case of fanatical Catholicism in *Purple Hibiscus*. According to Tunca, Chimamanda Adichie's "compulsive engagement with Nigeria's troubled ethnic and religious situation—an uneasy state that owes as much to the nation's colonial past as to its present mismanagement—bespeaks her deep-seated belief in the ability of literature to act as a medium of social and political change" (ibid). That is a statement I agree with, considering the aforementioned possibility of postcolonial literature of changing points of view – leading to a change in action – whether intentional or not. I believe Adichie, as someone who is aware of the multifaceted religious state her country presents (but one in which many people may still perceive Christianity as superior), may feel the need to address both its positive aspects as well as its possible problems, which is something the analysis chapter shall approach.

On this religious issue, Tunca also states that Adichie's first novel delves into the differences and similarities of religions in the country nowadays and suggests that there should be no superiority of any of them ("Ideology" 129). Indeed, the novel presents different religious possibilities by showing characters who, although they have different religions, and despite the obvious differences in their beliefs, share similar values, principles and practices; and characters who have made space to accommodate some of these differences into their own religious life. Through that, the author seems to suggest the importance of spirituality regardless of which religion one follows, and the possibility of treating them as equivalent things, with neither being better than the other – which dismantles the assumption that Christianity (and, especially, Catholicism) is superior, whereas the Igbo religion should be undervalued (which is what the character Eugene, the fanatic catholic father, defends). In fact, Adichie continues to approach religion in her later works, such is the case, for instance, of the short story "A Private Experience" from her book *The Thing Around Your Neck.* In this story, two women of different ethnicities and religions, while escaping from a violent conflict between the two groups – Igbo Christians and Hausa Muslims, find themselves hiding together in an abandoned store and sharing not only the space and time they spend there, but also stories, which set them closer together as human beings. According to Cláudio Braga, the moment of learning and collaboration between the two characters indicates "a spontaneous rejection of the violence and religious intolerance that take place outside, which represent a historical rivalry that divides Nigeria, causing conflicts,

tensions and deaths" (60)[12]. This shows that Adichie's commitment to underlining the importance to resist religious intolerance and the oppression of a religion over the other (or of a culture, for that matter) goes beyond her work in *Purple Hibiscus*.

It is especially within issues of religion (although also through the matter of language, among others) that we can see how some concepts such as mimicry and hybridity work in the novel. The former, for instance, in characters who deny their Igbo culture and religion and imitate the ways of the British, sometimes to extremes. And the latter, in characters who make room for differing religious practices in their lives; in the representation of a Christian religion which has been accepted in their context as a given and is shown "not as a foreign and alien religion" but rather "depicted as 'organic' in the Nigerian society" (Yohannes 48); and in the possibility of a Catholic church which allows for some of its practices to incorporate Igbo traditions (such as the singing and dancing). These circumstances point to some of the complexities existent in the postcolonial state of Nigeria, presented as a space of cultural ambivalence, which Adichie brings to her novel, and which I shall discuss further in the chapter of analysis.

Taking what has been said about the author into consideration, we can understand that Adichie, although she may do that from a more contemporary outlook, engages in the process of telling stories that fight against the historically authorized accounts of Africa and seems to fit the group of voices Na'Allah et al. mention when they state that "[i]f there is a lesson to be learned from the story of African literatures and cultures and their struggle against the single story from the short century to the present, it is this: that the danger of the single story and its dominance is not about to go away but neither are the voices raised in its contestation" (202).

[12] My translation of "uma rejeição não premeditada à violência e à intolerância religiosa que ocorrem lá fora, e que representam uma rivalidade histórica que divide a Nigéria, causando conflitos, tensões e mortes".

CHAPTER II – "Come All Ye Faithful" – Analysis of Religion in *Purple Hibiscus*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as I have previously introduced her, is someone who does not seem to shy away from discussing controversial matters, from speaking up about current social and political issues and from inserting the discussions of these issues into her writing, in the middle of beautiful and inspiring anecdotes of love, growth and external or internal conflicts. Having her home country of Nigeria as the setting for most of her stories, the issues she represents in them are many times related, in one way or another, to the country's colonial history. As a knowledgeable person and one who grew up in a Nigeria that gained its independence in October 1960, only about seventeen years prior to her birth, Adichie is well aware of the colonial past her country lived through, as well as of circumstances of more recent times which are part of its colonial heritage. Although Nigeria's independence happened a while ago, we can trace many aspects of its multifaceted contemporary space to colonialism, such as the country's hybrid religious and cultural scenario and its complex linguistic system.

With that in mind, it is not completely unexpected that her work may bring, even if only slightly sometimes, Nigeria's colonial history and its legacy in the modern context of the country. *Purple Hibiscus*, as her first published novel, already demonstrates Adichie's interest in exploring the complexities of contemporary Nigeria and how they are unavoidably intertwined to the history of colonialism in the country. It displays, in a story told from the perspective of a teenager in a family full of problems, which could simply be seen as a coming of age narrative, a preoccupation with engaging in topics that lead to the contemplation about Nigeria's postcolonial status. The story, for which, as well as with other works by the author, Adichie has won awards, is one that leads us to think about how religion, language, culture and politics work in the context of contemporary Nigeria and in relation to how it once worked during the country's colonial time.

One of the complex aspects of postcolonial Nigeria that we can observe in the novel is that of religion, not only due to its hybrid aspects but also due to the problems and resistances it suffers in a country that still seems to struggle to define its identity, negotiating the past and the present. Therefore, this chapter tackles some of the issues presented in the theoretical chapter again, now in the context of the story told in *Purple*

Hibiscus, especially regarding religion and its connections with colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, analyzing how religious practices are shown in the novel and how they may relate to a hybrid cultural present and to a colonial past. Although many of the topics overlap – not only between the issues of this chapter but also with the ones in the following one, about language –, I will discuss them separately, making their connections when necessary. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, religion and education, and, therefore, language teaching and learning, walked side by side in the process of colonization and still hold many connections nowadays in postcolonial societies. However, in order to better organize the analysis, they will be approached in different chapters.

2.1 *Purple Hibiscus* and its approach to Religion in the Achike family – a colonial origin of hatred

We do not have to read much into the novel to see how religion plays a big role in the story. As seen in the introduction, even the titles and subtitles of the sections that structure the novel refer to religious circumstances, and to a religious date – Palm Sunday – that guides the readers through the novel giving them a sense of a timeline. From the very beginning of the book we are led to partly understand how the Achike family functions and, consequently, to understand the importance of Catholicism for them. First, we learn that Eugene – Papa – takes his beliefs, and, especially, the Catholic Church and lifestyle very seriously, being an important man of the church who does not tolerate when people from the congregation do not show commitment to the Catholic sacraments or way of life as he does. Then, little by little, from the first section of the novel, we observe how important the Catholic religion – in very specific terms – is for the Achike family and how it controls almost every part of their lives, especially through the actions of Eugene, who displays great disappointment and irritation when his kin fails at demonstrating how devote they are or when they do anything he considers a sin. In the following sections of the book, likewise, we are led to understand more and more of not only how but also why Catholicism has such a weight in their lives, especially in Eugene's behavior.

Right at the opening scene of the novel, the religious context is already established and the first sentence starts with a clear reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a novel in which religion – as well as cultural – tradition is also one of the central issues, and which narrates the process of Christian conversion that happens in the Igbo village of

Umuofia by the missionaries. We are told that "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the ètagére" (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 3). A couple of pages after that, it is mentioned that Eugene – who is an oblate at the church the Achikes go to (3) – is bothered when a person misses communion and that he reported it to the priest when someone did it two Sundays in a row, for there was the belief that "nothing but mortal sin would keep a person away from communion two Sundays in a row" (6), which explains why he would be especially bothered by the actions of his own son. Thus, at the very start of the novel we can already expect that the sacrament is a big deal to the family, and especially to the father, so much so that missing it would cause anger in Eugene, and then infer that, accordingly, their religion must be of great significance to them. Furthermore, since the novel mentions that it is by Jaja's act of missing the sacrament that "things started to fall apart", it is possible to perceive that the power and prestige of the Catholic Church, and, consequently, the power Eugene exerts over his family, will be gradually questioned along the novel.

In fact, the above mentioned reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*[13] in the beginning of *Purple Hibiscus* may have a greater meaning if we also look at the whole picture of Adichie's and Achebe's novels, and observe the similarities between them and some of their characters. In both *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus*, the head of the family – who, in Achebe's novel is named Okonkwo – is a man who becomes powerful despite his underprivileged childhood and despite his father, who he disregards. In both stories, these characters are also very important men in their community and would be someone who somehow represents religious values and traditions in that community. Moreover, they both act violently against their family (wives – in Okonkwo's case, more than one – and children) if they think they are not behaving appropriately (according to their customs). Therefore, despite the different time settings and positions towards Christianism, Eugene resembles Okonkwo in these many ways. Okonkwo was a very intense man, in his own ways, obsessed with work and the following of the village's tradition. Eugene's intensity

[13] Although the objective of this thesis is not to develop a comparative reading between Achebe's and Adichie's works, as mentioned in the introduction, some observations will be made regarding the connections and differences between both novels. The comments on them might help illustrate the issues being portrayed by Adichie in contemporary Nigeria and the way they are interrelated to how other Nigerian writers have narrated their stories.

is reflected mostly on his relation with religion and on how it affected his life and his family.

His family, in *Purple Hibiscus,* is described as one that does much more than simply attend the Sunday masses at their local church and occasionally say their prayers at home. Their Catholic practices are a big part of their daily lives. The Achikes listen to Catholic music in their car after church (31), when the family goes on road trips, they all pray the rosary, taking turns (54) and their Sundays, at home, are reserved to the thinking of God (31). Even the children's education is affected by it for both of them go to Catholic schools; Jaja to a school for boys, St. Nicholas, and Kambili to one for girls, Daughters of the Immaculate Heart (22). Besides, they are made to read selected parts of the Bible in order to comment on them during family time (32). Before their meals, the Achikes pray for a long time. The prayers are always said by Eugene, who sometimes would even make up titles to Mary, the Blessed Virgin himself – "[h]is favorite title was Our Lady, Shield of the Nigerian People", which he believed could help set his country, which was facing many problems, in a better path (11). Eugene Achike is a man recognized as a distinguished citizen at St. Agnes, the church his family attends, and gives constant donations to it. Father Benedict, the priest at this church, regularly praises Eugene during mass, not only for the great financial aid he gives to the congregation and Catholic community (5), but also for his political position and his action concerning the difficult political situation of the country and his work with "*The Standard*", a newspaper he runs, through which he and his editor speak up against the government (4-5). He is not just another good man in Church, but rather, someone who holds some social prestige (due to his constant financial contribution and his economic status as a wealthy and powerful man). Eugene is admired and respected in his Catholic community, much as Achebe's Okonkwo was in his village, Umuofia, for his great achievements as a wrestler, for his hard work as a farmer, which made him wealthy, and for his wives and children; things which led him to be considered "one of the greatest men of his time" (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 8).

Yet, much like Okonkwo, who rejects his father's ways and tries his best not to be like him (13), Eugene also does not have a good (or any) relationship with his own father – Papa-Nnuwku – and has a great aversion to him for he has not converted to Catholicism as Eugene did in his youth. From the start, the mentions of Papa-Nnuwku give us an idea of how much of a heathen he was seen by the family – especially by Eugene – and this view stays strong throughout a big part of the novel, until the children start questioning their father's ways. The first time

Eugene's father – who is of Igbo religion – is mentioned in the story is as "especially not his Godless father, our Papa-Nnukwu" (39). Although it is said by Kambili, she is only repeating what she has learned from her father, as that is how Eugene sees him. In a different passage, Kambili mentions that at the end of a long prayer Eugene "prayed for the conversion of our Papa-Nnukwu, so that Papa-Nnukwu would be saved from hell" (61), emphasizing the image of a pagan they have of him, an image that is reinforced by Eugene in many different passages. When in Abba, Eugene's hometown, the children are only allowed very short visits to their grandfather, in order to greet him, but they are forbidden to eat and drink anything and must not stay longer than fifteen minutes (61). Eugene himself never visited him and only allowed his children because – after complaints by Papa-Nnukwu – the villagers urged him to do so (61-62).

Eugene's disapproval of his father's lifestyle is clearly connected to his hatred of religions that are not Christian and his displeasure even with churches that are Christian but do not follow the Catholic doctrine, and some prejudice towards religious teachings that are done by people who are not white. Much of it, as hinted by many different passages in the novel, has to do with colonial thoughts that have been adopted by the character over the years, after he joined the missionaries in his youth. As I have discussed in the theoretical chapter, one of the cultural aspects which was imposed on local people during colonial times was religion, and more specifically, Christianity. Its establishment was done with the undermining – and, many times, demonizing – of other religions, for they were the faith of the people the colonizers deemed as the "other", inferior and uncultured. With the teaching of the missionaries, the local African people were invited – or, rather, made, as it was often not a pacific process – to follow the church of the white colonizers, which is the event Okonkwo observes happen in his village in *Things Fall Apart* (143-144) and is what we see has happened with Eugene Achike. More than following the church of the white missionaries, Eugene internalized their behavior in a way that led him to make his own father the uncivilized other. For him, while those who have adopted Catholicism, as he has, and follow it by the book, are, as in the image of the colonizers, the saints, those, who, like Papa-Nnukwu, still cling to local traditions, are the direct opposite. As Lois Tyson comments, othering is the "practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human […] and it divides the world between "us" (the "civilized") and "them" (the "others" or "savages")" (420). This practice was very common in the colonialist discourse, which

assumed the superiority of the colonizers – or of the Europeans –, and is a practice that today relates directly to the idea of Eurocentrism (419-420). Eugene's internalization of this discourse would be a result of mimicry, which, as discussed previously, Bhabha describes as the mimicking of the colonizers in an attempt to resemble them, to be recognized as a part of that group, but in which the result "is almost the same, but not quite" (86). Thus, in his attempt to act like the Catholic missionaries, the colonizers, Eugene distances himself from those whose image – such as his father's – he deems opposed to the one he targets. He takes it to extreme ways, treating his father as the other, something different from himself, inferior, devilish, as the colonizers once did with his people. In fact, his extremity, which revolved around being violent, punishing his children and wife, cutting relations with those who did not fit what he deemed right and forcing those around him to act a certain way, points to his ultimate attempt to be more than just "almost the same". Eugene aims to be the closest he can be of the target figure he has in mind, that of the white colonizing missionary.

We can understand a little of how Eugene's feelings towards the Catholic church function and where they come from when he is talking to Kambili about his time growing up, which was strongly marked by the presence of Catholic missionaries and, consequently, of Catholic teachings. He says,

> "[…] I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshiping gods of wood and stone. I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was a houseboy for the parish priest for two years. Yes, a houseboy. Nobody dropped me off at school. I walked eight miles every day to Nimo until I finished elementary school. I was a gardener for the priests while I attended St. Gregory's Secondary School."
>
> I had heard this all before, how hard he had worked, how much the missionary Reverend Sisters and priests had taught him, things he would never have learned from his idol-worshiping father, my Papa-Nnukwu (47).

Eugene attributes his success to the Catholic missionaries, which may explain his strong bond with the church – or even some sort of debt to it. Because back in his youth they were a contrast to the figure of his father, it also helped to antagonize Papa-Nnuwku, as if he were everything

the Catholic church was not, for as long as he did not convert. Such antagonizing construed towards what his father represented is similar to that which Okonkwo had in *Things Fall Apart*. The village man resented his father's failure and weakness, constant in Okonkwo's youth, and made it a point to hate everything his father loved and represented, such as gentleness and idleness (13). Whereas Okonkwo changed his future through hard work, Eugene did so not only through that, but especially, through his association with the Catholic church and with European ways. Although there is no direct mention regarding a specific act of teaching or imposition of the missionaries that may have led Eugene Achike to think and behave the way he does, we still understand that his way of thinking possibly suffered direct influence of the white missionaries, not only regarding religious beliefs, but also preference over language and skin color.

One of the main ways through which we can relate Eugene's views of religion – and consequently, of his father and of those who differ from him – to colonial thoughts is the comparison between the treatment he gave his own father, Papa Nnukwu, and his wife's father, emphasized here from Kambili's point of view:

> It was so different from the way Papa had treated my maternal grandfather until he died five years ago. When we arrived at Abba every Christmas, Papa would stop by Grandfather's house at our ikwu nne, Mother's maiden home, before we even drove to our own compound. Grandfather was very light-skinned, almost albino, and it was said to be one of the reasons the missionaries had liked him. He determinedly spoke English, always, in a heavy Igbo accent. He knew Latin, too, often quoted the articles of Vatican I, and spent most of his time at St. Paul's, where he had been the first catechist. He had insisted that we call him Grandfather, in English, rather than Papa-Nnukwu or Nna-Ochie. Papa still talked about him often, his eyes proud, as if Grandfather were his own father. He opened his eyes before many of our people did, Papa would say; he was one of the few who welcomed the missionaries. Do you know how quickly he learned English? When he became an interpreter, do you know how many converts he helped win? Why, he converted most of Abba himself! He did things the

> right way, the way the white people did, not what our people do now! (67-68).

Eugene is especially fond of his father-in-law because he was one of the people who willingly let themselves be taught by the white missionaries and who learned to act like them, as if that was a sign of superiority. Here the connection Eugene makes between whiteness and supremacy is very clear, taking us once again to think of the process of othering so common during colonial times. Everything associated with the white culture, with the colonizer, is of superior value whereas those who differ from it – in this case, through language, religion and through the color of their skin (although the latter seem to be of secondary importance to Eugene, for there is no matter of choice in it) – are "the other". He reinforces his internalization of the colonial discourse in the approval of the Mimicry of his father in law. Eugene applauded the man because he applauded the European ways.

One can also observe that in the association Eugene – and, consequently, his family – has with the church he attended, which was especially "white" in many aspects. Father Benedict, the priest at St. Agnes, is a white British man, to whom people still refer as the new priest, although he had been at the church for seven years. The narrator explains that by associating it to the fact that he is white. She comments, "He still looked new. The colors of his face, the colors of condensed milk and a cut-open soursop, had not tanned at all in the fierce heat of seven Nigerian harmattans. And his British nose was still as pinched and as narrow as it always was, the same nose that had had me worried that he did not get enough air when he first came to Enugu" (4). Besides, the priest is one that insists on the 'whitening' of the service. According to the narrator, "Father Benedict had changed things in the parish, such as insisting that the Credo and kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable. Also, hand clapping was to be kept at a minimum, lest the solemnity of Mass be compromised. But he allowed offertory songs in Igbo; he called them native songs, and when he said "native" his straight-line lips turned down at the corners to form an inverted U" (4). With this, he draws a line between Igbo practices and pure-European ones. The white priest hints some displeasure with what he relates to "native" culture, setting it in an inferior position, and leading those who follow him to do the same. Eugene repeats such thoughts, for when Father Amadi visits their church and sings in Igbo, he expresses great discontent towards the young priest. For instance, past their surprise, when the congregation starts singing with him, the following happens, "Slowly they joined in. I watched Papa purse

his lips. He looked sideways to see if Jaja and I were singing and nodded approvingly when he saw our sealed lips" (28).

The Achikes' religious experience was, thus, very white. So much that Kambili has been taught to think of Jesus as a uniquely white figure. We can see that in her reaction when Father Amadi, who is someone very willing to help the community as he can and plays football with poor children whose family cannot even afford to send them to school anymore, says he sees Christ in their faces. Kambili, who is so used to the westernized image of Jesus which they had in her church back in Enugu takes the comment too literally and seems rather confused, "I looked at him. I could not reconcile the blond Christ hanging on the burnished cross in St. Agnes and the sting-scarred legs of those boys" (178). In a different passage we had already been told that the altar at St. Agnes had a "blond lifesize Virgin Mary mounted nearby" (4). Kambili is so used to thinking of the Virgin Mary and Jesus as white, that she notices the difference when she sees a painting her cousin Amaka makes of them as dark-skinned (118).

Thus, one can expect that Kambili's and Eugene's – and possibly of those who attend the same church or have had the same teachings – perception of Christianity is a white one. Once again, we are led to contemplate their religious experience when Kambili is having a conversation with Father Amadi about why he became priest. She starts imagining his response and in the middle of her thoughts, which revolved around the "calling" the sisters at her schools said the students would receive, there is a comment which we can trace back to the whitening and westernization of Christianity in her context. She thinks, "Sometimes I imagined God calling me, his rumbling voice British-accented. He would not say my name right; like Father Benedict, he would place the emphasis on the second syllable rather than the first" (179-180). She was taught to believe in a God that was so distant from her reality as a Nigerian kid that he could not even be able to pronounce her name right. Rather, he would do it similarly to Father Benedict, with a British accent. The god she was led to believe in was one that seemed foreign, that seemed white.

Therefore, religion – in Eugene's terms – in the Achike's household is so strong that the strict religious views have also been greatly marked on the children, especially through Eugene's constant reinforcements and intimidation. In the Achike family, perhaps more than something that brings them peace, hope and help them become better people, it is something that censures them, that imposes them rules. For instance, Kambili and Jaja have even been taught to look in the mirror for

no more than enough to check if everything is alright because of the belief that vanity is a sin (174). Also, when staying at her aunt's place, where before meals they say grace shortly rather than saying a long prayer as the Achikes do, Kambili finds herself worrying and wondering if while on the phone with her father he can tell that she had eaten after saying a too short prayer (122). The children also sometimes – prior to their visit to Nsukka, before everything changed – reproduce the same thoughts that their "Papa" would have and perpetrate, as we see when Aunt Ifeoma advises Kambili to wear trousers before going on a ride in order to be more comfortable. After refusing, the girl thinks, "I wondered why I did not tell her that all my skirts stopped well past my knees, that I did not own any trousers because it was sinful for a woman to wear trousers" (80).

Many reasons for this is because there is always zero tolerance from Eugene's part when it comes to breaking Catholic traditions, so much is his internalized need to be as Catholic as he can be (and as much like the white missionary). For instance, he once gets angry and violent when he finds out that Kambili ate before mass, breaking the Eucharistic fast, and punishes her even though he learns that she had bad cramps and needed to eat in order to hold the pain medicine (100-102). We have a more extreme example when he once gets rather irritated and disappointed when his wife, who is pregnant and feeling sick, asks to wait in the car and relax while the family goes to the priest's house to visit him after mass (29-30). So much was his disapproval that in the prayers during lunch that day, referring to Beatrice, "he asked God to forgive those who had tried to thwart His will, who had put selfish desires first and had not wanted to visit His servant after Mass" (32). Not long after that, there are indications of serious domestic violence towards her, because of the "sinful" car incident, which leads to "Mama" having to go to the hospital and losing the baby (33-34).

Violent acts like that were not an unusual thing in the Achikes' household, for Eugene physically punished his wife and children whenever he thought they were being sinful. In a different occasion, Papa punishes Kambili severely – he spills scalding water over her feet – because he finds out about the time she spent in the same house as Papa-Nnukwu – when she was visiting her aunt Ifeoma in Nsukka –, once she did not tell Eugene about her grandfather coming to Ifeoma's house before he could take the children away (193-195). Later, more punishment comes when he finds out that she is keeping a painting her cousin Amaka made of Papa-Nnukwu before he died. Enraged, Eugene kicks her body – which is laying on the floor – repeatedly and does so while relating her act of bringing the painting to his house as a sin: "Get

up! Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire" (211). The punishment is so violent that Kambili ends up seriously injured in the hospital (209-211).

Eugene's violence also seems to relate to his feelings regarding the loss of control over his family. Everything needs to be the way he wants it to be, which is why, for instance, the children have very strict schedules – made by Eugene – to follow at home, with a specific time for everything, such as studying, praying and eating (23). Eugene also closely monitors and controls their school life, getting exceptionally upset whenever they are not their classes' top students, even if they still do outstandingly well (38-42 and 46-47). The violence towards his family, which Eugene justifies in the name of God, as well as his strictness in his household, especially regarding the following of rules, resembles once again an attitude of Okonkwo, who, in Achebe's story, is very harsh with his own family in the name of prosperity and reputation, especially if he believes they are being lazy or disrespecting his image. Besides, both men are stubborn and do not seem very much open to dialogue, especially within their own compound. If we consider their social position in their community, Okonkwo as this wealthy hard-working villager and Eugene as the educated, wealthy and very dedicated oblate, one can understand that they do so in order to maintain their status. The following of rules and tradition has a purpose; it grants them greater possibilities of preserving their prestige. In Eugene's case, it especially relates to his need to be seen as the perfect Catholic, which he also needs his family to be. And his view of the perfect Catholic, as we have seen, is that which relates to the way the white missionaries promoted it, as the opposite of anything that resembled the local, deemed as pagan. Thus, for Eugene, being harsh with his children and wife means he is also somehow protecting them from "barbarism" and "paganism", which were qualities once associated to what was not Catholic – and not white. And by doing so, he finds a way to protect his own status. If we take once again the concept of mimicry as the attempt – or means – to be recognized as the colonizer, we can further understand Eugene's violent insistence in trying not to be like what the white people saw as the Other. Besides, considering what Bhabha has also mentioned (and I discussed above) regarding the fact that the mimicking of the colonizer is never enough, for the colonized reaches only as far as "almost the same, but not quite" (86), we can perceive Eugene's

insistence on his extreme ways as a form to deal with such colonial anxiety once, despite all the imitation, he could still be faced as the other (whom he disapproved) or as not Catholic enough. Paradoxically, considering he is an Igbo descendant, Eugene obsessively tries, through mimicry, to avoid the contamination of his Catholic practices by Igbo culture.

Therefore, the idea of "things falling apart", which in Achebe's novel, with the arrival of the missionaries, relates to the big change of things – in both the religious practices and the views of the community – , and to the loss of control of Okonkwo, who no longer had power in a community that now started to differ from him, in Adichie's novel also relates to change and to a loss of control. The words "things started to fall apart", which open *Purple Hibiscus*, represent the big change that happened in the Achikes' household and life – in how the children started to question and open their minds regarding their own and other religious practices, as well as question their father's behavior, which also represented some loss of the control that Eugene had over them.

If Eugene repels anything that strays from his view of the perfect Catholic, which, in his context, besides the lack of strictness in following the doctrine, also means the traditional Igbo religious practices, other Christian manifestations that did not resemble his church, and, possibly, although not mentioned in the story, other religions, his sister does the opposite. While Eugene represents this need to maintain a status and certain – although misled – idea of purity, Ifeoma, as well as her family, represents something different – a more 'hybrid' characterization. The woman, unlike her brother, embraces the Catholic religion, but also accepts the Igbo practices; she negotiates her religious views in a way that incorporates them both in different levels. While Eugene represents exclusion, Ifeoma is welcoming. She points to the mixed aspect of the postcolonial culture, which, as Ashcroft at al. argue, "is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the 'grafted' European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity" (*The Empire Writes* 220), an aspect about which I shall discuss along the following section of this analysis.

2.2 Religious hybridity in *Purple Hibiscus* – Nigeria of many faiths

Besides how emphasized the topic of religion is when it comes specifically to the life of the Achikes, and besides the approach to

mimicry and colonialism highlighted through the portrayal of Eugene, we are also shown, throughout the whole novel, how important religion is for the Nigerian population as a bigger group. However, differently from how it occurs with the Achike family, in which we can see a huge favoritism of the Catholic Church, the religious "big picture" of Nigeria is depicted as one that opens space for different practices and manifestations. For instance, in what seems to be some sort of contrast to the character of Eugene, there is his father, Papa-Nnukwu, an old man who still is willfully attached to the values, beliefs and practices of Igbo traditional life and religion. Besides the image given by Eugene (and, as a result, by his own daughter, sometimes) of him as a godless man, he is shown in the novel as a very religious man. He is someone whose compound reserves a place for a shrine to the gods he believes in (66-67), who offers food to the gods (65), and who still strongly believes in the spirits represented in the masquerade of the Aro Festival – a very traditional religious feast (85-87). Moreover, it is also mentioned that he says his prayers at dawn dedicated to, according to Kambili, "gods or the ancestors; I remembered Aunty Ifeoma saying that the two could be interchanged" (167), calling the name Chineke repeatedly.

Thus, Adichie seems interested in exploring the complexities of Nigeria in terms of religious practices and doctrines, as a result of colonialism. Both Eugene and his strict Catholic views and community and Papa-Nnukwu and his beliefs in traditional Igbo religion are part of the same context. Although the practices may be antagonized by some people – as is the case of Eugene towards his father's –, and despite the resistance that Papa-Nnukwu demonstrates towards Catholicism, there is room, although not always pacifically, for both of them in the Nigeria depicted by Adichie in the novel. Rather, there is room for much more than that. For instance, there is the mention of different Christian churches that do not follow the Catholic doctrine. We only hear about them through Kambili's thoughts – which have long been influenced by her father's views – or through Eugene, who disapproves of any church that is not like his own. Thus, they are depicted as "mushroom churches" – new Christian churches that are rapidly spreading in Nigeria –, marking the difference between a very traditional Catholic church from the new Evangelical churches. A differentiation of Catholic churches from other Christian denominations is first presented at the beginning, with a comment by the narrator regarding the behavior of the congregation. She comments that "[t]he congregation said "Yes" or "god bless him" or "Amen," but not too loudly so they would not sound like the mushroom Pentecostal churches;

then they listened intently, quietly" (5). And when a priest – who we later learn is Father Amadi – is visiting St. Agnes church, there is disapproval from Eugene towards his not too traditional behavior and, in his words, he comments – with prejudice – about other Christian churches. He says, "That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him" (29). Although there is some hostility towards these churches and they are only vaguely mentioned in the novel, we know that it is due to the characters' extreme Catholic views and, regardless of that, we are aware of their existence in this context as well. Thus, although through the novel we are more exposed to the Achike's Catholic life, we can understand that Christianity in the country goes further than that, as well as does religiousness as a whole. The Nigeria that in the story holds festivals such at the Aro Festival, gathering big crowds to see the masked people dancing in name of Igbo spirits (85-87), is the same that gathers lots of people to see the alleged image of Our Lady on a tree, of people who go on a pilgrimage as a sign of Catholic faith (273-275), and is the same that serves as home for plenty of Christian churches whose denomination differs from the Catholic one. All of these situations, rather than novelty or a foreign thing, are presented as a common part of the country's daily life.

Beyond the fact that we are dealing with a context that allows and points out to the existence of different practices, there is also the incorporation of such practices or the acceptance of them into people's daily lives. For instance, we are further led to contemplate religious complexity in Nigeria – not only in terms of the coexistence and of the interweaving of the different religious practices, but also in relation to how people negotiate them – when Aunty Ifeoma suggests taking the children to the town of Abagana, to look at the mmuo in the Aro festival (73). Although Beatrice insists that "Eugene will not let the children go to a heathen festival" (73), Ifeoma comes with "Heathen festival, kwa? Everybody goes to Aro to look at the mmuo" (74), which gives us a sense that even in a country that has accepted Christianity as part of their reality, they still can keep their cultural values, no matter if they trace back to religious ceremonies. Either way, Beatrice keeps insisting in Eugene's disapproval (74) which shows that Eugene has a great resistance towards the hybrid facet which still clings to Igbo culture.

Ifeoma, a sensible university lecturer who, unlike her brother, is not wealthy, but whose upbringing was similar to Eugene's, as they both grew up with their father being a strong believer in Igbo traditional

religion and who, like her brother, also went to the missionary school, is a Catholic woman. She regularly attends masses at her local Catholic church, has a good relationship with her local priest and says her prayers at home with her children. Yet, unlike it is with the Achike family, and, more specifically, with Eugene, these things do not stop her from acknowledging the existence and importance of traditional Igbo practices, even if they relate to religion. So much that there is the mentioning of her allowing her own son to take part in a traditional ceremony of initiation:

> "You didn't do the *ima mmuo*, did you? Obiora did it two years ago in his father's hometown."
>
> "No, I didn't," Jaja mumbled.
>
> I looked at Jaja and wondered if the dimness in his eyes was shame. I suddenly wished, for him, that he had done the ima mmuo, the initiation into the spirit world. I knew very little about it; women were not supposed to know anything at all, since it was the first step toward the initiation to manhood. But Jaja once told me that he heard that boys were flogged and made to bathe in the presence of a taunting crowd. The only time Papa had talked about ima mmuo was to say that the Christians who let their sons do it were confused, that they would end up in hellfire (87).

As previously stated, the Nigeria Chimamanda Adichie writes about here is one in which both people like Eugene, with strong Catholic beliefs, and people like Papa-Nnukwu and those participating in the festival fit, even though such coexistence happens in a way that may not be entirely pacific, as for instance, for Eugene, there is a great separation between the practices and one is superior to the other, and for Papa-Nnukwu there is still great resentment towards the Christian religion in the country because of its origin. There are also people like Aunty Ifeoma, who is a Catholic, but does not see a problem in welcoming the hybridity that results from this space of multiple cultures – and religions. The Postcolonial Nigeria represented in *Purple Hibiscus* (in terms of its culture and religion) is in a zone "in-between", a new society which, as Santiago argues, has suffered a progressive contamination that leads to a mixture of the European and the local, and in which the idea of a unity has been significantly disrupted (15). It is, in the words of Homi Bhabha, an "intervening space" (7), a space of mediation between the past and the

here and now, a space in which the past is renewed. Therefore, many people in this in-between zone are led to negotiate, accommodate both the new and the so-called past, which is what we can see happening with many characters in the novel, who, in their context, inhabit such a space and who, unlike Eugene, have embraced the mixture in it and do not resist the contamination from either of the sides, the new or the past.

These people who seem to have adopted the hybrid religious aspect of Nigeria are probably those to whom Eugene refers as "confused". The existence of such people is reinforced through the novel. For instance, we find out that Eugene Achike has his reservations even with The Igwe, who – we can infer from the context – is in the highest point in the hierarchy of the Igbo village and is a figure of authority. As told by Kambili, "The Igwe's palace was a few minutes from our house. We had visited him once, some years back. We never visited him again, though, because Papa said that although the Igwe had converted, he still let his pagan relatives carry out sacrifices in his palace" (93). Such passage not only emphasizes Eugene's disapproval of anyone who welcomes those whom he deems "pagan" or with anyone who shows a certain respect for those who are not servants of God, but also punctuates that the incorporation of Christianity into peoples' lives does not necessarily mean that it puts a stop to the acceptance of local religious traditions. These people have accepted the new religious practices – Christianity – but allow them to be somehow "contaminated" by their past, their tradition. Likewise, they let their past be "contaminated" by the new. There is no insistence on an idealized purity of either of the cultural practices – such insistence that is the attitude Eugene has towards Catholicism. Therefore, although many people have Christianity (Catholic or otherwise) as their religion in contemporary Nigeria, the novel underlines that these people may still expect the following of some Igbo traditional cultural and social practices, pointing out to how different levels of cultural traditions and religion intertwine, to the point that it may be quite hard to completely separate one from the other. Such is the case of the custom of taking more than one wife, especially if the first one cannot bear many children. Beatrice, when praising Eugene for his ways as a husband, comments,

> "[…] God is faithful. You know after you came and I had the miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons

> and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us" (20).

Such a practice is brought up in the novel again, in a conversation Beatrice is having with Ifeoma, in which she reminds her, "Did our own *umunna* not tell Eugene to take another wife because a man of his stature cannot have just two children? If people like you had not been on my side then" (75). That is a practice not allowed or expected by Christianism, yet it is one that has been suggested to the Achikes.

For people like Eugene, the acceptance of hybridity means some sort of confusion, because to be hybrid in terms of religion would mean that one is not purified from old pagan customs, and, thus, not Catholic enough - which, in his case, would probably have consequences in his social prestige as an important member of his Catholic community. There is also a great relation to the reinforcement of the colonial dominance in the resistance to this hybridity. As Santiago reminds us, avoiding religious plurality (which is also intrinsically connected with avoiding bilingualism) means imposing the colonialist power, for "[i]n the algebra of the conqueror, unity is the only measure that counts. One God, one King, one Language: the true God, the true King, the true Language" (14)[14], a colonial rhetoric used by the colonial power to perpetuate itself over hybrid cultures. Differently, Ifeoma (and people like her), as we have seen, understands hybridity as a space of possibility, and of – to recuperate the concepts by Santiago and Bhabha given above – changing the notion of unity (Santiago 15) and refiguring and renewing the past (Bhabha 7), and, thus, is able to observe similarities where they once may not have existed. In this scenario, being both, despite what people like Eugene think, does not mean being less, but rather more than one, a contamination of both, and it allows a complex resignification of what something once meant.

If we have in mind what Bhabha says about the hybrid space, as a "Third Space" in which "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; [and in which] even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37), hybridity may also be perceived in *Purple Hibiscus* in how it underlines the possibility of assimilating practices originating from different religions – practices that have been "read anew". In a passage in which Ifeoma thanks

[14] My translation of "Na álgebra do conquistador, a unidade é a única medida que conta. Um só Deus, um só Rei, uma só Língua: o verdadeiro Deus, o verdadeiro Rei, a verdadeira Língua".

Our Lady for taking care of Papa-Nnukwu – when he is sick – and helping him become healthier, Kambili questions her aunt about the Catholic figure interceding for someone considered by their church (or, at least, by her father) as a heathen. Ifeoma's answer shows her understanding of the possible religious harmony between two different religions/practices. As Kambili narrates,

> Aunty Ifeoma was silent as she ladled the thick cocoyam paste into the soup pot; then she looked up and said Papa-Nnukwu was not a heathen but a traditionalist, that 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 our saying the rosary (166).

Ifeoma seems to understand that theirs is a context in which the two practices do not need to be antagonized, but rather, can not only coexist but also be correlated. Later, when Kambili watches Papa-Nnukwu pray – for Ifeoma wakes her up to do so –, she (as well as the reader) sees how his prayers are similar in kind to those of any other religion, and how he wished others well, even people like her father, with whom he does not have a good relationship (167-168). It helps her see her grandfather less as the other and understand that he is not so different from her after all. We can also see assimilations made regarding the shrine Papa-Nnukuwu has in his compound, which reminds Kambili of a Catholic one. She describes that "[t]he shrine was a low, open shed, its mud roof and walls covered with dried palm fronds. It looked like the grotto behind St. Agnes, the one dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes" (66-67). Despite the obvious differences, because they are dedicated to different entities, even Kambili, raised under the harsh Christian teachings of her father, cannot help but see similarities between the two worship places.

The idea of hybridity in the terms of a mixture and of cultural contamination may also be perceived in the contrast between the churches the Achike family goes to in Enugu and the church in which Father Amadi says his masses, as well as, and especially, in the figure of Father Amadi himself. From the start we are told about the Catholic church the Achikes attend, which is presented as a traditional and majestic one, with a white British priest who insisted that the Credo and kyrie were recited only in Latin and that hand clapping and singing must be controlled (4). St. Agnes is a church with a beautiful and rich altar, with "iridescent saints on the

floor-to-ceiling stained-glass windows", and with a congregation who was used to the priests' "sparse sermons" and "monotone" (28). In contrast, during a visit to St Peter's Catholic Chaplaincy, in Nsukka with Father Amadi, one of the first observations Kambili makes of the church, comparing it to the very conservative church she went to in Enugu, is that – besides the fact that its altar is not as rich looking – the women there do not cover their hair in such care as they did at St. Agnes. She also comments on the fact that some of them also wear trousers. Both things would scandalize her father, she says. (240). In St. Peter's they also sang in Igbo and clapped their hands vigorously to the songs (241). Such observation leads us to think of the difference between her home church, a more conservative one and this one in which we see a more open and modest aspect.

In St. Agnes, unlike what happens in St. Peter's, we observe a Catholic Church that has tried to resist the contamination by Igbo culture, perhaps because it is led by a white British priest who has only been to Nigeria for a few years, – which explains Eugene's fondness of it, for he denies hybridity and pursues purity. And yet, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter, "Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised" (Tiffin 95), which is the case of Nigeria. Besides, as Santiago argues – while referring to Latin America, which is also a Post-colonial and hybrid space –, where the hybrid element reigns, the concepts of unity and purity are demolished, they lose their weight and their signal of cultural superiority (16). Thus, Eugene does not seem to understand that, in his context, as an ambivalent place, "hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha 37). Therefore, while there is no possibility of going back to pre-colonial cultures, for there has been the contamination by the culture of the colonizer, the opposite also cannot happen, once the colonizer's culture has also suffered influences and is part of the mixture. The congregation of St Peter's, on the other hand, especially while led by Father Amadi, seems to not only understand but also welcome this impurity and mixture; there is an acceptance of the transformation.

Amadi is a priest that seems to have embraced the possibility of exercising Catholicism without having to stick to strict practices and of accepting the insertion of the Nigerian cultural context to it. When he visited St. Agnes, for he was invited by Father Benedict to say mass there, Kambili, who still did not know him, comments that "halfway through his sermon, he broke into an Igbo song: "*Bunie ya enu*". The congregation drew in a collective breath, some sighed, some had their mouths in a big

O" (28). The congregation was certainly not expecting him to do such thing for their experience at that church was a different one. Further in the story, the first time Kambili meets father Amadi, his modern complexion at first sight gives her a sense of discomfort, as she has been used to the traditional. She narrates, '"Good evening," I said and then added, "Father." It felt almost sacrilegious addressing this boyish man – in an open neck T-shirt and jeans faded so much I could not tell if they had been black or dark blue – as Father" (135). Father Amadi dresses more comfortably and that itself may seem different for someone who expects a priest to present himself very formally. He is a young priest, with "new" (at least for Kambili) ways of dealing with Catholicism, and could be seen as a symbol representing the new religious state of Nigeria, one that allows a mixture of traditions and values. A little later, she remembers that he was the priest who once visited her church and remembers how her father felt about him: "I remembered then, the young visiting priest who had broken into song in the middle of his sermon, whom Papa had said we had to pray for because people like him were trouble for the church. There had been many other visiting priests through the months, but I knew it was him. I just knew" (136). And after that, the feeling of "ungodliness" about him is emphasized whenever she learns that he does things a normal laid-back person would do, rather than a strict traditional priest: "I could not help staring at him, because his voice pulled me and because I did not know a priest could play football. It seemed so ungodly, so common" (148), but she also seems drawn to him. Father Amadi is a priest that does not seem to automatically relate anything that is "pagan" with a sin, which is what Eugene does. When Kambili once confesses to him that she committed a sin for she had shared a room with her grandfather, a "heathen", the priest disagrees with her when it comes to it being a sin and points out that she only thinks this way because her father has taught her to (175). The young priest demonstrates that one could be a Catholic without going to extremes.

Through Father Amadi (and also through Ifeoma) we can especially think of what Linda Yohannes claims when she says that in *Purple Hibiscus,* despite the clear acknowledgment that Christianity – and, more specifically, Catholicism – in the Nigerian context has its origins in colonialism, it is not depicted as an alien religion, as it is in Achebe's work (48). Indeed, in contemporary Nigeria, about which Adichie writes, the Christian religion is not alien anymore as it has been incorporated in the daily lives of many Nigerians. Differently, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, written in and about a different - and earlier - time, for instance, it was still depicted as this outsider's practice that was

being imposed on people, recuperating some of the actual history of conversion which Nigeria went through. In Adichie's generation of writing, the religion has changed and been through a process of indigenization through time and "is therefore nearing the stage of seeming and being depicted as 'organic' in the Nigerian society" (48). Therefore, whether through the natural depiction of different traditions and practices existing in the same space, when none of them seems foreign, through a context that allows the correlation of different religions and practices, or through the existence of people who – unlike Eugene, once through his character the novel also depicts the problems that surface from the sense of "purity" – incorporate the differing aspects in their lives, leading to a result which is neither "pure" nor "impure", but, rather, a "mixture", we can observe how Adichie demonstrates religious hybridity in postcolonial Nigeria.

2.3 "Shouldn't we be moving ahead?" – Resistance to the colonial discourse in religion in *Purple Hibiscus*

Beyond being a space that points out hybrid aspects of postcolonial Nigeria, and one that traces back to colonial history in order to explain practices of mimicry and othering, *Purple Hibiscus* also brings – through some characters – discussions that indicate resistance to colonial discourses and tradition. That is done, mainly, through arguments towards religious conversion in Nigeria. We are first led to think about that through Papa-Nnukwu. As a man whose relationship with his son has gone to pieces because of great disagreements regarding religion and cultural practices, he seems to blame the coming of catholic missionaries to Nigeria for the origin of his family disunion. In the following passage, while talking to his daughter and grandchildren about the expectations his people has in life and the requests they make to their god regarding family, he ends up ranting about his situation and mentioning the missionaries:

> "This is what our people say to the High God, the *Chukwu*," Papa-Nnukwu said. "Give me both wealth and a child, but if I must choose one, give me a child because when my child grows, so will my wealth." Papa-Nnukwu stopped, turned to look back toward our house. "*Nekenem*, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on

> my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries" (83).

Although he did not agree with nor understand the teachings of such missionaries, Papa-Nnukwu allowed young Eugene to learn from them. From his words it seems like his resistance to them was once only individual, but that it grew to something greater when he noticed the impact their arrival and discipline had on people and, especially, on his own son. We are provided – through his words – with a brief description of how the arrival of the missionaries in his community happen, as we also learn a little more about his beliefs and resentment:

> "Still, I say it was the missionaries that misled my son," he said, startling me.
>
> "We have heard this many times. Tell us something else," Aunty Ifeoma said. But Papa-Nnukwu kept talking as though he had not heard her.
>
> "I remember the first one that came to Abba, the one they called Fada John. His face was red like palm oil; they say our type of sun does not shine in the white man's land. He had a helper, a man from Nimo called Jude. In the afternoon they gathered the children under the ukwa tree in the mission and taught them their religion. I did not join them, *kpa*, but I went sometimes to see what they were doing. One day I said to them, Where is this god you worship? They said he was like *Chukwu, that* he was in the sky. I asked then, 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 I knew that the white man was mad. The father and the son are equal? *Tufia*! Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal."(84).

Although Papa-Nnukwu's main bitterness towards the missionaries seems to be regarding his personal relation with Eugene, we later learn that he also regrets that his own people, of Igbo ethnicity, have become missionaries as well and do the Catholic work of converting people. When Papa-Nnukwu finds out that Father Amadi, the young Igbo priest, will be working as a Catholic missionary in other countries, he

seems surprised and frustrated, showing his disappointment with the situation:

> "*Ezi okwu*?" Papa-Nnukwu looked up, his milky eye on Father Amadi. "Is that so? Our own sons now go to be missionaries in the white man's land?"
>
> "We go to the white man's land and the black man's land, sir," Father Amadi said. "Any place that needs a priest."
>
> "It is good, my son. But you must never lie to them. Never teach them to disregard their fathers." Papa-Nnukwu looked away, shaking his head (172).

Papa-Nnukwu is a simple man and although much more may be inferred from his objections, his complaints are simple as well, regarding only the distancing and disrespect of family members due to religious conversion, something he experienced himself. Yet, the criticism to the missionaries and to the ways the priests conducted things in the colonial time assume a different character in the snarky comments made by Ifeoma's children – Amaka and Orioba – who were knowledgeable and grew up in an environment in which they were stimulated to question. Every once in a while, there is some teasing comment – although not hostile – from them, especially in conversations with Father Amadi, that lead the reader to think of the actions of the church (or, in a general sense, of the colonizers) when the British occupied Nigeria.

Amaka, for instance, makes a funny comment regarding something Father Amadi says, and her words seem to be embedded in criticism. Right after Papa-Nnuwku comments on the priest's upcoming missionary work in a different country, Obiora makes a remark relating religion and oppression, and the Father replies, jokingly: "You know there is a saying that it is not just the naked men in the market who are mad?" Father Amadi asked. "That streak of madness has returned and is disturbing you again, *okwia*?" (173). Although everybody seems to understand the playful tone of his words, Amaka is quick to respond to that with some sort of accusation: "Obiora laughed, and so did Amaka, in that loud way it seemed only Father Amadi could get out of her. "Spoken like the true missionary priest, Father," Amaka said. "When people challenge you, label them mad."' (173). One can easily relate her words to the colonial practices of othering perpetuated by colonizers – and missionaries helping

the mission – who pointed the native as irrational and uncivilized, for they differed from the white people in so many aspects. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, those who started to assimilate to their ways were better accepted in the colonial society, whereas those who challenged the impositions were marginalized.

Further in the novel, we find out what country Father Amadi is going to in order to do missionary work, which is Germany. Amaka makes a funny comment with historical implications when discussing the move the priest, who is a Nigerian man, is making to the place, which is a predominantly white country:

> "The white missionaries brought us their god," Amaka was saying. "Which was the same color as them, worshiped in their language and packaged in the boxes they made. Now that we take their god back to them, shouldn't we at least repackage it?"
>
> Father Amadi smirked and said, "We go mostly to Europe and America, where they are losing priests. So there is really no indigenous culture to pacify, unfortunately."
>
> "Father, be serious!" Amaka was laughing" (267).

Although once again the atmosphere is of playfulness and their comments are made and taken in good nature, one cannot help but notice a judgement in her words regarding the whitening of religion practices in her country and that the conversion was a process rooted in racist beliefs. Later, Obiora also makes a humorous remark about it, "Obiora looked up at him and intoned, "From darkest Africa now come missionaries who will reconvert the West." Father Amadi started to laugh. "Obiora, whoever gives you those heretical books should stop'" (279). Again, the issue of race and religion when it comes to the history of Catholic conversion is brought up, which indicates they are quite aware of their past and may not accept it lightly. It is important to remember that both Amaka and Obiora are Catholics, devotees and very comfortable in their religion. They are part of the new generations – such as Adichie herself – that were exposed to Christianity as a common part of their lives and, therefore, consider it as so, rather than as something alien, but who question some of its practices and who remodel it according to their experience. Thus, their criticism lay not simply on the Christian teachings and practices, for they have embraced them themselves, but rather in the

history of Christianity in their country, which is one loaded with racism and othering. Although they are living in a time in which that is – supposedly – a thing of the past, its complications come up enough times in their lives that they end up talking about it. Such is the case of Amaka's Confirmation as a Catholic. The girl has a special resistance to this sacrament because she is being asked to do it in terms she does not agree with, for these terms would reinforce the history of power of the colonizers over their culture.

We are first hinted that they are supposed to choose a name for their confirmation and that such name must be an English ("white") one when Kambili is remembering when she did hers:

> I thought about my own confirmation, last year at St. Agnes. Papa had bought my white lace dress and a soft, layered veil, which the women in Mama's prayer group touched, crowding around me after Mass. The bishop had trouble lifting the veil from my face to make the sign of the cross on my forehead and say, "Ruth, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." Ruth. Papa had chosen my confirmation name.
>
> "Have you picked a confirmation name? I asked.
>
> "No," Amaka said. (203-204).

Later we find out that Amaka has been showing resistance to choosing an English name for her confirmation and has been stalling Father Amadi whenever he asks her if she has chosen a name (241). Not long after that, in a different occasion, when Father Amadi once again asks Amaka to choose a confirmation name, she is even more resolute on her choice of not taking an English name. She is very much aware of the history of such practice and how embedded it is in othering and colonial practices and although both her mother and Father Amadi, who are reasonable people and also aware of such problems, insist that the choice of name is just a tradition and that the girl would not even use the name later, Amaka still refuses and ends up not even doing her confirmation. As the passage goes:

> He handed Amaka a piece of paper and told her he had written some suitably boring names on it, that she had only to choose one and he would leave. After the bishop used it in confirming her,

> she need never even mention the name again. Father Amadi rolled his eyes, speaking with a painstaking slowness, and although Amaka laughed, she did not take the paper.
>
> "I told you I am not taking an English name, Father," she said.
>
> "And have I asked you why?"
>
> "Why do I have to?"
>
> "Because it is the way it's done. Let's forget if it's right or wrong for now," Father Amadi said, and I noticed the shadows under his eyes. (271-272)

Amaka, then, starts lecturing them on the origins of such practice, even if her mother – who is an educated person – and Father Amadi demonstrate that they too are aware of the problems behind it and that although they also see problems with it they are only simply asking her to make things easier:

> "When the missionaries first came, they didn't think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn't we be moving ahead?"
>
> "It's different now, Amaka, don't make this what it's not," Father Amadi said, calmly. "Nobody has to use the name. Look at me. I've always used my Igbo name, but I was baptized Michael and confirmed Victor."
>
> Aunty Ifeoma looked up from the forms she was going through. "Amaka, *ngwa*, pick a name and let Father Amadi go and do his work."
>
> "But what's the point, then?" Amaka said to Father Amadi, as if she had not heard her mother. "What the church is saying is that only an English name will make your confirmation valid. "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 "Paul" and "Peter" and "Simon"?"
>
> Aunty Ifeoma was getting annoyed; I knew by her raised voice, by her snappy tone. "*O gini*! You don't have to prove a senseless point here! Just do it and get confirmed, nobody says you have to use the name!"

> But Amaka refused. "*Ekwerom*," she said to Aunty Ifeoma – I do not agree. (272).

Later, when Kambili talks about the ceremony for the sacrament of confirmation, in which Amaka did not take part, she mentions that "[t]hey all had pieces of paper pinned to their clothes, with names written on them. Paul. Mary. James. Veronica" (273), all English names – or, if one so thinks, names that sound white. The passage ends with the characters – who are all shown throughout the novel as being very reasonable and well informed – without coming to an agreement, and with that it is reinforced that, although *Purple Hibiscus* portrays Christianity as a part of people's lives and the religion is not "demonized" in the story, Adichie's novel shows the importance of a thinking that challenges the colonial discourse through characters such as Amaka, who try to resist the Eurocentrism which is still prevalent. Through Amaka's persistence, Papa-Nnukwu's speeches and the children's sarcastic comments, us readers are led to contemplate on the history of Christianity – or, more specifically, Catholicism – in Nigeria and on how much of the colonial discourse it may still carry, even in a time in which the religion is already a somewhat ordinary part of the country's context. The novel makes readers aware of the complexity of the issue of religion, once even if Christianity is commonplace, some of the characters in the novel still recognize that this religion perpetuates, at some levels, some colonial practices. In a way, characters such as Amaka problematize the continuous imposition of Eurocentric ways through religion, considering that although colonialism is, theoretically, a thing of the past, it keeps on perpetuating itself through certain contemporary practices.

With this, and also having in mind the previous discussions on religion and mimicry and on religious hybridity, we are led to understand *Purple Hibiscus* does more than depict a country whose current culture is complex and in which the people's ways of dealing with such complexities may differ. The novel also leads the reader to contemplate these circumstances, their origins and their consequences before wrapping their minds around them, and to understand that there are opportunities to resist colonialism, even if through the simple questioning of its recurring discourse and through the opposition to everyday practices that may reinforce such discourse, as the characters in the novel do. Furthermore, with Adichie's approach to religion – and, as I will discuss following, to language as well – the author points to the fact that culture

is not static, and that this aspect may be observed and regarded in many different ways.

CHAPTER III – "Speaking with our spirits" – Analysis of Language and Culture in *Purple Hibiscus*

Much like the religious situation in Nigeria brought up in the story, which is, to a certain extent, a result of the colonial past the country went through, the linguistic system of the place in the present-day also observes many influences of the history of colonization, leading to a complexity that points to the country's current hybrid aspects. Taking that into consideration, in this chapter I analyze how language – both English and Igbo –, as well as its relations to culture, is approached in *Purple Hibiscus*, also observing the discussions the story brings regarding language and the country's colonial history and contemporary time. Moreover, recuperating the debate brought in the theoretical chapter on the matter of African writers using English in their works, I also examine Adichie's position on the matter and how it relates not only to the country's current linguistic state but also to the purpose of telling stories about Africa, from an African perspective, which can reach and educate Western audiences.

3.1 "English is mine" – Nigeria's linguistic hybridity in *Purple Hibiscus* and the debate on the use of English

As I discussed in the theoretical chapter, there is disagreement regarding the use of language in African literature, with sides that either defend or go against the use of the former-colonizer's language – such is the case of English – for reasons that vary from the resentment towards the history of colonization to the intention of spreading African literature to a greater public nowadays. As we have also seen, there are different mechanisms used by authors when it comes to language use that may work as resistance strategies for both sides – the uses of appropriation and abrogation. In regards to the first matter, we can start by mentioning that Chimamanda Adichie is known for writing her works in English. That is the case of *Purple Hibiscus*, and it is also the case of her later novels and short stories. The author has discussed the issue in an interview to Ada Azodo (2008), from the University of Indiana Northwest, leading us to imply that her position on the matter of language is closer to that of Chinua Achebe, who favors English, but as a strategy to favor African Literature. Yet, Adichie's use of English also points to a criticism on education in Nigeria. When asked by Azodo about her choices of language use and what she thinks about the use of indigenous languages in African literature, she answered:

> I'm not sure my writing in English is a choice. If a Nigerian Igbo like myself is educated exclusively in English, discouraged from speaking Igbo in a school in which Igbo was just one more subject of study (and one that was considered 'uncool' by students and did not receive much support from the administration), then perhaps writing in English is not a choice, because the idea of choice assumes other equal alternatives. Although I took Igbo until the end of secondary school and did quite well, it was not at all the norm. Most of all, it was not enough. I write Igbo fairly well but a lot of my intellectual thinking cannot be expressed sufficiently in Igbo. Of course this would be different if I had been educated in both English and Igbo. Or if my learning of Igbo had an approach that was more wholistic. The interesting thing, of course, is that if I did write in Igbo (which I sometimes think of doing, but only for impractical, emotional reasons), many Igbo people would not be able to read it. Many educated Igbo people I know can barely read Igbo and they mostly write it atrociously. I think that what is more important in this discourse is not whether African writers should or should not write in English but how African writers, and Africans in general, are educated in Africa (2)[15].

She criticizes the fact that there is not much choice left for African writers – or anyone in her generation in general – regarding language use, once the educational system in her country has made such choice long ago, which she seems to lament. And, in her words, one can also sense a slight criticism to the origin of such problem. That, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, certainly has its roots in a past that valued the colonizer's culture over the local one, a past that imposed a view in which Igbo – or African, as a whole – culture was inferior to those of the west, to the white people. As, Ashcroft at al. comment, during colonial times, "in India and [in] African countries the dominant imperial language and culture were privileged over the peoples' traditions" (*The Empire* 25).

[15] The pagination used here and in the following excerpts of the interview is in conformity with the version made available online by the professor and interviewer Ada Uzoamaka Azodo on her page on the website of the Indiana University Northwest:
www.iun.edu/~minaua/interviews/interview_chimamanda_ngozi_adichie.pdf

English is an organic part of their culture now and this contrasting view may be a thing left in the past, yet, one cannot deny that it happened through a process that was racist and oppressive.

Nevertheless, telling African stories goes beyond the matter of language and to Adichie that is what matters, regardless of which language the stories are being written in. And, as she mentions in her interview, for her generation, English has become a somewhat common part of the culture and of their daily experience, and it is, thus, also part of the African stories to be told. As she says,

> I do not believe in being prescriptive about art. I think African writers should write in whatever language they can. The important thing is to tell African stories. Besides, modern African stories can no longer claim anything like 'cultural purity.' I come from a generation of Nigerians who constantly negotiate two languages and sometimes three, if you include Pidgin. For the Igbo in particular, ours is the Engli-Igbo generation and so to somehow claim that Igbo alone can capture our experience is to limit it. Globalization has affected us in profound ways. (2).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Adichie shows this aspect of the negotiation of languages in contemporary Nigeria through her characters. In the novel, it is very common to find characters who are bilingual, like many people in Nigeria today are brought up to be. The protagonist herself, as well as other characters such as the rest of the Achikes, Kambili's aunt's family and father Amadi – the Igbo priest –, among others, are people who, throughout the novel, speak both Igbo and English, choosing the language according to the situation. That is a point that leads us to think of one of the country's hybrid aspects of its contemporary time. As pointed out in the theoretical chapter, as a result of the imposition of the English language (or of the white culture in general) over the Nigerian population during the time of British ruling, Nigeria – like many other countries in the African continent – saw the rising of the preference of the use of English over its many other local languages for it was a sign of status and of assimilation of white culture and values. As a consequence, nowadays, English is an official language in the country, sharing space with other languages such as Igbo and Yoruba. As Falola and Heaton indicate, despite the fact that, in Nigeria, a

place of a highly diverse population – with over 200 different ethno-linguistic groups –, more than 250 distinct indigenous languages are spoken, "English has been the official language of the country since 1960. [And] Pidgin, a combination of indigenous languages and English that developed through hundreds of years of contact with British traders and later with colonial authorities, is also commonly used" (4). Thus, as we have also seen from Adichie's interview, many who grew up after the country's independence carry this hybrid aspect of speaking more than one language or a "new" version of the languages.

In fact, that can be perceived in the novel through the differentiation of Papa-Nnukwu's Igbo to the one spoken by the generation of his grandchildren, pointing to the fact that much like their English may have Igbo influences, the opposite may also happen: '"I hear that you came in yesterday," he said. His lower lip quivered, as did his voice, and sometimes I understood him a moment or two after he spoke because his dialect was ancient; his speech had none of the anglicized inflections that ours had" (64). Through the character of Papa-Nnukwu, an elder who still keeps Igbo cultural traditions alive, we can see some signs of resistance to the English language and also a contrast with characters such as his grandchildren, who are used to speaking both and intermingling them, or such as Eugene, who demonstrates a preference over English.

These differences may be seen as a matter of generations and of the historical time the characters lived through. Papa-Nnukwu (as the elders in Achebe's novel) witnessed and resisted the arrival of white missionaries and their culture, and, thus, as an older man who lived his life in Igbo values and who did not have any teachings of English, restricts his language use to Igbo, without any interferences of other languages. Eugene, who, in his youth, lived in a time in which it was advantageous to him to adapt, regards the use of English as an important thing and makes sure it is as close to the English he learned from the missionaries as possible, which is indicated in his constant attempt to imitate the British accent and in his insistence that his family must use English publicly – which we shall discuss further in this chapter. And the children, who grew up in a time in which the use of both languages was a common part of the country's culture, negotiate them in their daily lives, making use of both, whether in turns, mixing them together, or adapting one to the other.

Such is the case of this multilinguistic generation that the conversations portrayed in the novel switch from English to Igbo and vice versa throughout the whole story, despite the fact that Adichie's novel is mostly written in English (even when the characters are said to be

speaking Igbo). Apart from the bits that are written in Igbo, many times the reader cannot be aware of whether the characters are speaking in English or Igbo, unless it is specifically mentioned in the novel as it is in the following passage:

> "Sightseeing?" Papa asked. He spoke English, while Aunty Ifeoma spoke Igbo.
>
> "Eugene, let the children come out with us!" Aunty Ifeoma sounded irritated; her voice was slightly raised. "Is it not Christmas that we are celebrating, eh? The children have never really spent time with one another. *Imakwa*, my little one, Chima, does not even know Kambili's name." (77).

The unawareness may occur because if there is no information about which language the characters are speaking (as there is in the quote above), the conversations can simply be a sort of translation of what is being said in Igbo into English. Although the novel is written mostly in English, the context of the story is a community in which multilingualism is a reality. Thus, the reader who is conscious of such context may go through the novel with the presumption that, unless specified, the characters may be speaking either of the languages, or even a mix of both of them in the same sentences. Or we have a case such as Papa-Nnukwu's, who is a man that does not speak nor understand English, yet, with the exception of specific words and sentences in Igbo, his lines are usually written in the former, allowing the English-speaking-reader to understand what he means. There is no constant indication that he is speaking in Igbo, but the reader expects it from the knowledge about the old man's inability to speak English.

Nonetheless, although the novel uses the English language to convey the words and statements even of only Igbo-speaking characters (whether we have been informed or not), the Igbo language has a great presence in Adichie's novel. Igbo words are present in the middle of English sentences, mostly without a translation, leading the reader to use some strategies to understand it, such as looking for information through the context – which is possible most of the times –, looking it up elsewhere, or even giving up on understanding and moving on with the reading. We have that, for instance, in the following passage: "No, I am fine. I am an old man now and my height is gone. I would not have fit in this car in my prime. In those days, I plucked *icheku* from the trees by just reaching out high; I did not need to climb" (84). It is not difficult to understand from the context given that the word in Igbo refers to a fruit.

Yet, in "Our water only runs in the morning, *o di egwu*" (121), unless we are familiar with the Igbo words, we have no means of understanding what it means as the context does not help. We see the language used like that – without a translation – plenty of times throughout the story, for things such as food, endearing ways of referring to someone, words related to religion, music, greetings, expressions of surprise and cursing, among others. That somehow gives the reader a sense of involvement in the characters' experience and, as Yohannes argues, "diffuse[s] and gloss[es] [Adichie's] texts with native culture" (57), for not only the Igbo language but also the Igbo-influenced style of writing reflect a native Nigerian culture; reflect the belonging to that specific culture.

Many times, however, the author offers the reader a more explicit explanation of what has been said right after the word or sentence in Igbo, as we see here, for instance in "'*Ke kwanu*?" I asked, although I did not need to ask how he was doing" (11) and in ""Thank you, *nna m*," she called out to Jaja, who was cleaning her car parked in front of the flat. I had never heard her call Jaja "*nna m*," "my father" – it was what she sometimes called her sons" (155). Although there is no such thing as a glossary in the novel, these explanations give the reader a feeling of being able to use one, and help them to understand these words when they appear in the story once again. Sometimes there is even a linguistic pondering by the characters themselves regarding the use of specific words, bringing our attention to them and teaching the reader about them, "Father Amadi included Jaja and me in the conversation, asking us questions. I knew the questions were meant for both of us because he used the plural "you," *unu*, rather than the singular, *gi*, yet I remained silent, grateful for Jaja's answers" (136).

Along the novel, we also observe the attention brought to the use of pidgin English and of English spoken with a very thick Igbo accent, also demonstrating signs of this generation who is linguistically hybrid. For instance,

> "*Omelora*! Good afun, sah!" they chorused. They wore only shorts, and each one's belly button was the size of a small balloon.
>
> "*Kedu nu*?" Papa gave them each ten naira from a wad of notes he pulled out of his hold-all.
>
> "Greet your parents, make sure you show them this money."
>
> "Yes sah! Tank sah!" They dashed out of the compound, laughing loudly" (55).

> "Gudu morni. Have you woken up, eh? Did you rise well?"
>
> "Gudu morni. Did the people of your house rise well, oh?"' (58).

In both passages, English is written in a way to show how the people from the village may speak it, the different spelling imitates the people's pronunciation, emphasizing their accent and, thus, giving the conversations an extra layer of the "local". We can see this demonstration of the possibility of speaking English in different ways again in the following passage:

> Shouts and yells accompanied the singing. A solo voice rose, and the crowds cheered. The cool night wind, heavy with the smell of burning, brought clear snatches of the resonating voice speaking pidgin English from a street away.
>
> "Great Lions and Lionesses! We wan people who dey wear clean underwear, no be so? Abi the Head of State dey wear common underwear, sef, talkless of clean one? No!" (229).

We may notice that here, besides the different spelling bringing attention to the variations in the use of English, there is a direct mention of it. Moreover, we should also note that this passage refers to a group of university students during a riot, leading us to the understanding that the use of pidgin English is not a thing particular to villagers and lower classes but may be something of the population in general, even of those getting their education. Rather than a sign of lack of schooling, the use of pidgin is simply a hybrid part of some Nigerians' lives, which may or may not come up depending on the situation; perhaps somehow marking even more a sense of being "Nigerian" – a sense of being "local" – once such use differs from the concern with speaking perfect standard English and sounding like the Europeans (once colonizers). We observe that again when Obiora, the son of Ifeoma – who is a university professor –, inquires the agents who have burst into their house, '"How you go just come enter like dis? Wetin be dis?" Obiora said, rising, the fear in his eyes not quite shielded by the brazen manliness in his pidgin English" (231). The change in the way the boy speaks is emphasized in the story and the situation is very specific, one in which the character is afraid but wants to show manliness. Although it is not explained in the novel, the use of pidgin

seems to confer him some toughness or an intimidating aspect, which we could perhaps infer is due to the losing of some of the fancy yet delicate status Standard English had historically gained, or perhaps because it would set him in parallel position with the brave protesters he had heard a couple of nights before. Moreover, it also demonstrates that Obiora is just as much as Nigerian as the others, he does not differ from the protesters despite his family, associations, the way he was raised, and his education; he does not shy away from demonstrating his localness. Either way, here we have someone who is described in the novel as knowledgeable showing this language variation, again guiding us to think of the hybrid aspect of their English as being something not exclusive of specific groups, but which seems to accomplish different kinds of purposes which are connected to a sense of belonging and of being able to be understood by specific audiences.

As we can see, English may be the medium through which Adichie tells her story, and by appropriating and demonstrating how the characters negotiate the use of English in the novel, Adichie's work represents a context in which the use of such language has been closely connected to the place's culture. Taking into consideration the way Adichie handles languages in her novel, it is also important to have in mind what is said in her interview when she finishes answering Ada Azodo's question on the choice of language. Adichie says something which sounds very similar to what was previously mentioned – in the theoretical chapter – regarding what Chinua Achebe once said about having power over English and using it to their advantage and about English being able to carry the weight of his African experience ("English and the African Writer" 349). Adichie states,

> I'd like to say something about English as well, which is simply that English is mine. Sometimes we talk about English in Africa as if Africans have no agency, as if there is not a distinct form of English spoken in Anglophone African countries. I was educated in it; I spoke it at the same time as I spoke Igbo. My English-speaking is rooted in a Nigerian experience and not in a British or American or Australian one. I have taken ownership of English. (2)

By saying that, the author emphasizes the idea that now English is hers as well as part of Nigerian experience, as much as other local languages, and as much as it is in other countries colonized by the British or as in Britain itself. And thus, Nigerian writers who express themselves

mainly in English – such as Adichie – have power over it, and through it they may convey their stories, their culture and their experience. We can see that in practice in *Purple Hibiscus*, as I shall discuss in the following section.

3.2 Language and culture – Telling African – or rather, Nigerian – Stories

As I have pointed out in the interview, Chimamanda Adichie emphasizes the importance of telling African stories and that English is hers – and of the Nigerian population – for she has taken possession of it. The author reinforces that she has ownership over the English language, and argues that her experience with such language is a Nigerian one, differently from the expectation some people may have that the use of such language must only convey a Western perspective and is necessarily connected to Western experiences. She grew up in Nigeria, and – although she later pursued further education in America – she was also educated in her home country, and the things she experienced and learned there happened through both Igbo and English. Therefore, English is part of what she has lived and of what she knows, and, thus, is a means through which she tells her stories that are set in a Nigerian context. We can observe much of this throughout the novel, in which we are constantly shown how the writer makes use of English, many times intermingled with Igbo (always pointing to the complex linguistic system of the country) to communicate experiences and knowledges that are quite particular of her own context.

One of the many ways in which we can see that is through the various mentions of the harmattan season, which is something that may be common for some specific African regions, but is not a universal experience. As one of the passages show: “Her skin, usually the smooth brown of groundnut paste, looked like the liquid had been sucked out of it, ashen, like the color of cracked harmattan soil” (30). A comparison is being made here, which is especially understood by those who are able to experience harmattan, but can only be imagined by those who are not. It is a Nigerian experience told through the instrument of English. In a different excerpt, we have: “I would snuggle into Papa’s arms when harmattan thunderstorms raged outside, flinging mangoes against the window netting and making the electric wires hit each other and spark bright orange flames” (41). Although it is a very limited description, these lines give us some sense of the experience regarding its natural features,

and allow readers who have not been through harmattan a chance to conceive it further. The same happens in a different reference to it, "Dust-laden winds of harmattan came with December. They brought the scent of the Sahara and Christmas, and yanked the slender, ovate leaves down from the frangipani and the needlelike leaves from the whistling pines, covering everything in a film of brown" (53). With this passage, non-Nigerian readers – or any of those who have not experienced harmattan – are given more information about the dusty season. They are now aware of the time when it comes and of the things it may do and thus may be more familiarized to it, much like people who live in tropical areas do when they read about a snowy winter. The experiences are approximated to the reader through the descriptions, and with them, and the images of harmattan are created in English, somehow "reshaping" the language to express this Nigerian experience.

Through the use of English sprinkled with Igbo words, the reader can also reach a little further into understanding Igbo culture, traditions and folklore. For instance, it is through it that we are told a very traditional Igbo folk story about the tortoise and the reason why the animal has a cracked shell. Although it is Papa-Nnuwku who tells the story and we are aware that he is a man who cannot speak English, the story is in a way "translated" to the reader, allowing us to take part in the listening of the storytelling with deep cultural origins (157-161)[16]. Moreover, the passage in which the story is told shows that Papa-Nnuwku allows his children to participate, chanting sentences in unison, as if they were one of the characters, demonstrating the oral aspect of the storytelling tradition (160)[17]. English also allows the mention and understanding, albeit briefly, of a traditional dance, "Our yard was wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing atilogu, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual

[16] Purposefully or not, this story has many similar aspects to a folk story told in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* which, although not the same, also featured a tortoise and talked about the reason why it has a cracked shell. In Achebe's novel, the tortoise of the story is also a cunning one, tries to eat all the food it can have when it is in the sky and gains its cracked shell by falling from the sky (96-99). Interestingly, right before Papa-Nnukwu starts telling the story, Obiora comments, in Adichie's novel, that tortoises are specially featured in their people's folk tales (157), leading the reader who has read Achebe's novel to remember the story told in his book.

[17] Indeed, through the musicality in the chanting and the description of the telling of a folk tale, Adichie highlights the importance of oral tradition in African culture and points to the great presence of orality in African novels, something that she also does in different parts of *Purple Hibiscus* through the inclusions of singing. According to Gonçalves, oral literature is something very old among Africans, thus it is common for novelists to draw on orality when developing their works; they use different forms of it, "such as proverbs and songs; give fiction the same purpose of some forms of oral literature, such as the didacticism of folk tales and legends; or make explicit in novels the vital aspect of oral literature: performance" (33).

somersaults and land on the next dancer's shoulders" (9). Through its small description, we can picture the performance. The same happens through a brief description about the experiences Papa-Nnukwu had in the village where he lived:

> And so Aunty Ifeoma asked Obiora to spread a mat on the verandah, and we all sat and had breakfast with Papa-Nnukwu, listening to him talk about the men who tapped palm wine in the village, how they left at dawn to climb up the palm trees because the trees gave sour wine after the sun rose. I could tell that he missed the village, that he missed seeing those palm trees the men climbed, with a raffia belt encircling them and the tree trunk (162).

Again, there is the insertion of a very specific activity typical of Igbo villages, the collection of palm wine, and the ways in which it was done. The reader can picture it, whether familiar with the experience or not. These passages, told in English, not only point to that aspect of the ownership of such language by the author, and, thus of the possibility of using this language to tell these stories with an African – and more specifically, Nigerian – background, for English is a part of such background, or to the opportunity of bringing the reader closer to these experiences (such as the Harmattan season) and traditions (such as the dance and the storytelling). In recuperating these local and cultural knowledges, Adichie also seems to celebrate – in a language that reaches a broader audience, especially outside Nigeria – the African experience. She honors the history and customs of her Nigerian country, while she also accounts for the reality she has lived, writing about what she knows, and thus, giving more sides to the stories told about Africa. Such characteristic is actually one of the aspects mentioned and defended by Adichie in her talk "The Danger of a Single Story", where she discusses the importance of writing about what one recognizes and of not limiting the views of a place and people to single narratives. By presenting different perspectives to the stories told about Africa, and by writing about her experiences, Adichie is attempting to avoid the dangers she points out in her talk, that of reinforcing the single story. We continue to observe that in other moments of the novel, as we shall see in the following paragraphs of this discussion.

For instance, it is also through English that we are provided with a detailed description of the Aro Festival, a very traditional fest of Igbo culture and religion. First, we have an account of the crowd and of the

surroundings, with some bits of Igbo used for specific food and to the masked people representing the Igbo spirits – the muuo:

> When we got to Ezi Icheke, cars lined the road almost bumper to bumper. The crowds that pressed around the cars were so dense there was no space between people and they blended into one another, wrappers blended into T-shirts, trousers into skirts, dresses into shirts. Aunty Ifeoma finally found a spot and eased the station wagon in. The mmuo had started to walk past, and often a long line of cars waited for an mmuo to walk past so they could drive on. Hawkers were at every corner, with glass-enclosed cases of akara and suya and browned chicken drumsticks, with trays of peeled oranges, with coolers the size of bathtubs full of Walls banana ice cream" (85).

We are taken to the middle of the crowd, as if we too are watching the masquerade, and get to see what they see, the people and how they are dressed, the multitude of cars, the different foods being sold and the arrival of the *mmuo*. Then we learn about the spirts:

> "Look at this," Papa-Nnukwu said. "This is a woman spirit, and the women *mmuo* are harmless. They do not even go near the big ones at the festival." The mmuo he pointed to was small; its carved wooden face had angular, pretty features and rouged lips. It stopped often to dance, wiggling this way and that, so that the string of beads around its waist swayed and rippled. The crowds nearby cheered, and some people threw money toward it. Little boys – the followers of the mmuo who were playing music with metal ogenes and wooden ichakas – picked up the crumpled naira notes. They had hardly passed us when Papa Nnukwu shouted, "Look away! Women cannot look at this one!"
>
> The mmuo making its way down the road was surrounded by a few elderly men who rang a shrill bell as the mmuo walked. Its mask was a real, grimacing human skull with sunken eye sockets. A squirming tortoise was tied to its forehead. A snake and three dead chickens hung from its grass-covered body, swinging as the mmuo walked. The crowds near the road moved back quickly, fearfully. A few women turned and dashed into nearby compounds. (85-86)

Not only do we get a comprehensive account of two different mmuo – cultural characters of Igbo traditional religion – but also of how people react to each of them during the festival, as well as the cultural expectations regarding them. For instance, the fact that women are not supposed to look at an apparently fearsome mmuo, or that the female mmuo, which are taken more lightly, do not even approach the other ones. And again, Igbo is used here for specific cultural things, in the case of this passage, referring to musical instruments.

Another important way through which we see English put to use for the telling of stories embedded in African experience, stories told by Africans about Africa, is in the description and mentions of eating and cooking habits. Intermingled with Igbo words used for the specific food, we are told, in English, about how some food – typical of their Nigerian context – is made and eaten:

> Lunch was fufu and onugbu soup. The fufu was smooth and fluffy. Sisi made it well; she pounded the yam energetically, adding drops of water into the mortar, her cheeks contracting with the *thump-thump-thump* of the pestle. The soup was thick with chunks of boiled beef and dried fish and dark green onugbu leaves. We ate silently. I molded my fufu into small balls with my fingers, dipped it in the soup, making sure to scoop up fish chunks, and then brought it to my mouth (11-12).

The passages relating to food are plentiful, and with time one may even get used to the mentions of some of the items and dishes and their preparation. We have another instance in which we observe that, which is when Kambili is helping her aunt's family with the cooking, something that she never really did at home: "I was grateful when she called me back later to ask that I help her cut the ugu for the soup. I did not just cut the ugu, I made the garri also. Without her still eyes bearing down on me, I did not pour in too much hot water, and the garri turned out firm and smooth" (264). Food is an important part of a people's culture, and it is expected that it would come up so much during the story, once the story follows many parts of the daily lives of the characters. Sometimes, through the comments of the narrator regarding what they eat, we are even led to understand a little more of what people expect to eat for different meals, especially regarding their social class, as we see when Kambili, who is from a wealthy household, thinks about the food they eat at her aunt's place, where the meals were more modest: "Breakfast was okpa

that Obiora had dashed out to buy from somewhere nearby. I had never had okpa for a meal, only for a snack when we sometimes bought the steam-cooked cowpea-and-palm-oil cakes on the drive to Abba. I watched Amaka and Aunty Ifeoma cut up the moist yellow cake and did the same" (127).

In fact, besides the linguistic aspect of talking about Igbo cultural practices in English and of inserting Igbo words in them, if we observe the way Kambili learns more about the cultural aspects of food (their importance, their preparation, the physical work it takes to make them, etc.) when she is staying at her aunt's place, we may perceive a way through which Adichie, in her novel, reintroduces Igbo cultural practices as important and significant parts of Nigeria, so that younger generations might not forget them. For instance, in Eugene's household, the food is very distant from the family. The maid – who is never even named by the father, only called by him as "that girl" (12, 98, 258) – is the one who prepares the food, sometimes with the help of the mother, and the dishes are served in matching elegant plates and cutlery, fine china tableware, etc. The children themselves never had a chance to prepare it, nor do they learn much about it. They had culturally experienced food in a different way. Thus, in a way, in the book, Kambili and Jaja are introduced (or re-introduced) to some aspects of the Igbo culture through their experience of daily life with their aunt (who is not so much acculturated to Western ways – like Eugene and his household). That happens not only with food, but also with some of Igbo customs and stories, as we see when they listen to Papa-Nnukwu talk about his time in the village or tell traditional Igbo folk stories, when he is also staying at Ifeoma's place. Although Ifeoma's family does not experience Igbo culture in the same way that Papa-Nnukwu does, since he completely refused to acculturate to western ways whereas her family's ways are hybrid, her children are not prevented from learning about them, admiring their origins, and respecting them – differently from a 'colonized mind' (as Eugene's for example). Therefore, while Kambili is (re-)introduced to the Igbo culture, the reader (whether Igbo or not) also goes through something similar, remembering or learning about cultural practices.

In addition, food, and its understanding of it, is even used for references and metaphors, as we see in: "After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back" (52), and the reader's knowledge of it is essential to the grasp of the reference made. In this case, the metaphor would be especially understood by those who have experienced a poorly made fufu, or any fufu for that matter. And the cultural metaphors go

further than food. For instance, when Papa-Nnukwu comments that Kambili has grown up to the point of being able to have admirers, he comments: '"Kambili, you are so grown up now, a ripe agbogho. Soon the suitors will start to come," he said, teasing." (64). The Igbo word used here makes a very specific comparison which relates to a traditional performance in which masquerades imitate adolescent girls, the image of an Igbo maiden. In a different passage, when the ummuna wives are talking about the daughter of one of them being suitable to marry Jaja, the same word is used: '"The girl is a ripe agbogho! Very soon a strong young man will bring us palm wine!" another said" (91-92). These examples reinforce how the references made by the characters in their figures of speech are rooted in their cultural experiences.

And as I have mentioned in the previous section, sometimes, after the use of words or sentences in Igbo, the reader is provided with a translation. In some of these occurrences we can see once again English being used in order to give the reader a better understanding of Igbo culture, especially when the characters themselves ponder on what is being said and the use of language. In the novel we observe, for instance, the explanations of a title in Igbo communities, which lead us to understand some more about their social functioning. After a couple of passages in which Eugene is called "Omelara", Kambili comments: "We were always prepared to feed the whole village at Christmas, always prepared so that none of the people who came in would leave without eating and drinking to what Papa called a reasonable level of satisfaction. Papa's title was omelora, after all, The One Who Does for the Community" (56). It shows that the village maintains some sort of hierarchy and that those with a title are expected to live up to it. Moreover, the narrators' explanation for why and how he received such title also demonstrates a little of Nigeria's cultural hybridity:

> We used only the ground floor and first floor; the other two were last used years ago, when Papa was made a chief and took his omelora title. The members of our umunna had urged him for so long, even when he was still a manager at Leventis and had not bought the first factory, to take a title. He was wealthy enough, they insisted; besides, nobody among our umunna had ever taken a title. So when Papa finally decided to, after extensive talks with the parish priest and insisting that all pagan undertones be removed from his title-taking

> ceremony, it was like a mini New Yam festival. Cars had taken up every inch of the dirt road running through Abba. The third and fourth floors had swarmed with people (58-59).

Here we have someone who has adapted to "western" ways, which is the case of Eugene, and refrains from participating in Igbo activities that he deems "pagan", but who still, even if only with the permission of the church, and with the religious aspects of the custom being removed, maintains some cultural traditions of Igbo villages, such as that of holding a title (a practice which is also very emphasized in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which depicted a time in which the hybridization of the culture was yet to happen).

Explanations also happen for terms of kinship. In the following passage, after the use of an Igbo word commonly used between family members who still maintain traditions, there is also an explanation and a questioning of its use:

> The first time I heard Aunty Ifeoma call Mama *"nwunye m*," years ago, I was aghast that a woman called another woman "my wife." When I asked, Papa said it was the remnants of ungodly traditions, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife, and later Mama whispered, although we were alone in my room, "I am her wife, too, because I am your father's wife. It shows that she accepts me" (73).

Besides showing how Eugene associates anything that is related to traditional Igbo values with something not so good, the use of the term (which is repeated many times throughout the novel) and its explanation point out to a cultural-linguistic aspect. We can understand, from it, that it is common for the Igbo to refer to other family members, such as in-laws, with names that, in a western context, are used for different family relations, and that it is done so in order to indicate closeness and affection. Something similar is observed when Kambili observes and comments on the way Ifeoma refers to her brother: ""Thank you, *nna m*," she called out to Jaja, who was cleaning her car parked in front of the flat. I had never heard her call Jaja "*nna m*," "my father" – it was what she sometimes called her sons" (155). Both Kambili and Jaja, prior to their visit to Nsukka, were not as close to Ifeoma's family, and the observation on how Ifeoma refers to the boy after the children are spending some time with them indicates a growth in intimacy.

It is also quite noticeable sometimes that in translating what people are saying in Igbo into English, or in demonstrating the English spoken, the sentences are made to acquire a very characteristic structure, which may sound a little awkward to the western reader. Yet, they convey the message in a way that would sound closer to what the people from the culture would say: "At Ninth Mile, Papa stopped to buy bread and okpa. Hawker descended on our car, pushing boiled eggs, roasted cashew nuts, bottled water, bread, okpa, agidi into every window of the car, chanting: "Buy from me, oh, I will send well to you"' (54). In "I will send well to you" we notice a sentence that indicates the person will wish the buyer well and that buying from him shall bring good fortune, but it is said in an uncommon way to the average non-Nigerian reader. We can observe the same for things said regarding Papa-Nnukwu's death, which point to specifically cultural ways of speaking: "*Ewuu*, so he has gone to rest, *ewuu" (190). Although it is said in English, the sentence "He has gone to rest" indicates, an appropriation of the language, in order to gloss it with Nigerianess, as also happens in a translation of a idiomatic expression:* "[H]e kept looking back and throwing words at Papa. "*Ifukwa gi*! You are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave!"' (70). In both cases, the English is used to convey a specific way of saying things, a way that seems more Nigerian-like and different from that with which the non-Nigerian reader may be acquainted.

It is clear, thus, that Adichie's use of English as part of her endeavor of telling African stories is quite successful. At the same time that we can see her writing in English as her tool of achieving a greater audience and of getting her culturally heavy stories read in places that have a much different reality than Nigeria, we can also understand it as a spontaneous thing to do, considering the linguistic situation of the country. English, as the author has commented herself, as much as Igbo, is a part of her reality and of the reality of those she writes about. In addition, in working with the two languages, and making one accessible through the other, she achieves a story that is as linguistically hybrid and multifaceted as the country she writes about.

3.3 The discussion on language and colonial discourse proposed by *Purple Hibiscus*

In the interview with Azodo, another question Chimamanda Adichie was asked was regarding what scholars, artists and people in general could do regarding the erosion of their linguistic patrimony in

Nigeria. When answering that, after commenting that they should work against this erosion at home, by teaching their children their languages, she also comments that

> I am amazed by the number of African academics who teach and write about this sort of thing but whose children do not speak their languages. I am very interested in what happened to us Africans. My father was a PhD student in the US in the early 1960s. When my mother had their first daughter, my parents decided to speak only Igbo at home, to make sure she knew her language because they knew she would learn English at school. Now, forty years later, that daughter of theirs has a son who does not speak Igbo and is not encouraged to. Some middle class Nigerians tell me that their children will be 'confused' if they speak both languages. I find this amusing. I certainly was not confused growing up bilingual. I think that, beneath these superficial reasons, there are deeper questions of self-esteem and fundamental pride in who we are (3).

Although, as we have seen before, the author understands the use of English over Igbo as a result of how the education in Nigeria has been happening in current times, she shows concern with the situation and the decrease of Igbo speaking in the more recent generations of people in the country. She mentions above that the reasons people have for not encouraging the learning of Igbo may go further than thinking their children must be confused, and are, rather, matters of self-esteem and of pride. With such comment, we can think of mimicry, and of the desire of the colonized to be accepted by and seen as the colonizer. Although it may not happen as overtly or with as much self-awareness as it once may have, English, having once become a norm or a desired language at some point, maintained its high status and being able to speak it properly might still be an issue that makes people proud and directly or indirectly affects their self-esteem.

This seems to relate to what Frantz Fanon says regarding the oppression black people (meaning the non-West in general) have suffered by the white man (referring to the European civilization and to those who represent it) and its relation to the use of the language which was once the language of the colonizer. He comments,

> Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 9).

Therefore, the ability to speak the colonizer's language – the white man's language – with mastery concedes the colonized some power and privilege, for they assimilate to the language of those who have power and privilege. As he emphasizes, "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (ibid). And these matters of self-esteem have their roots in the oppressive embarrassment that has been imposed on the black (or non-Western) person when in contact with the white man, for "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (82-83). This embarrassment is culturally rooted in the awareness of the colonial gaze placed upon them and that constructs them as the Other. As he comments, "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness" (83). There is the awareness of an image – of a black man – that has already been constructed for him by the other side – the white man – and he has to manage the construction of his own identity through that.

Having this in mind, another very important matter concerning language in *Purple Hibiscus* is that the use of English versus the use of Igbo is constantly mentioned and – to a certain extent – historically accounted for, pointing to roots in issues of self-esteem. The issue of English speaking and pride, as well as its origins in colonial times, can be observed in the story, especially through Eugene's language choice throughout the novel. Despite what the author has said regarding the use of English not being much of a choice, Eugene's insistence on the superiority of the language indicates that his is a very deliberate use. Eugene demonstrates – as will be approached further in this chapter – his belief in the inferiority of the Igbo culture as a whole and in the supremacy

of white ways, which indicates that his choice in using English is imbricated in how much of a subaltern he feels regarding his cultural heritage and that of the white people. As a somewhat public person, he seems to avoid associating with anything he deems inferior. His is an extreme case and should not be taken as a general example regarding the whole Nigerian population – for Eugene represents the elite, a powerful sector of the population, one which still controls the economy and education, a sector in which people take pride on their public status and appearance. Yet, through his image – as someone who has been led into thinking that his local cultural is deserving of less importance and significance – the novel tackles the colonial discourse and history behind these thoughts.

Eugene, who is a wealthy man with a past of education that was mainly rooted in the teachings of Catholic missionaries, is presented in the novel as someone who continuously reinforces his preference over English, the language that only gained official status in Nigeria in 1960 (Falola and Heaton 4). The very first time his linguistic inclination is mentioned in the novel, it already comes with a comment that leads the reader towards the historical implications of Eugene's behavior. It happens when the man is angry with his son, Jaja, who had first missed communion at church, then talked back to him and, finally, refrained from complimenting a product from Eugene's factories:

> "Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, *gbo*? Have you no words in your mouth?" he asked, entirely in Igbo. A bad sign. He hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, 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. Papa's sister, Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product. She had said this about Papa in a mild, forgiving way, as if it were not Papa's fault, as one would talk about a person who was shouting gibberish from a severe case of malaria (13).

This passage is important in order for the reader to begin to understand how Papa relates to the English language and to Igbo. As we continue to see in the novel, he uses the former mostly in occasions in which he is unnerved, and his choice is almost always English. In fact, the instances in which he uses Igbo are so rare that it is often taken notice

in the novel, as we see here, '"How many heads do you have, *gbo*?" Papa asked, speaking Igbo for the first time" (47). Through the comments of the narrator regarding his favoritism, we are led to understand that Papa sees Igbo as an inferior language to English, so much that it should be reserved for private environments. His position of disregarding Igbo and of placing it as the opposite of what would be civilized quite resembles that of the colonizers, who upon arriving in Africa deemed their culture, language and customs as the norm and set everything that related to "the other" as uncivilized. Many colonized people were taught to believe in that and not only sought to adequate themselves to the standard imposed, but also created an aversion to their own local cultural package. Eugene's attitude demonstrates that he fits this group and his sister Ifeoma seems to believe in that. She disapproves of his attitude, and sees him for the colonized subject he is; however, the way Kambili puts it, she seems to understand where it comes from and that it is only an unfortunate consequence of a colonial past.

We are once again led to think about that when the narrator comments on the effort her father makes into sounding British, also leading us to think of the concept of mimicry, discussed in the previous chapter, "Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious" (46). Eugene's attempt to sounds less Igbo, and, as emphasized by Kambili, of doing so especially in the presence of white people, demonstrates his eagerness to be part of a group he acknowledged and internalized as superior. His mimicry points to his need for being accepted by such group, which, as we have learned when his history with the missionaries is told, is one he respects highly. In addition, he recognizes and applauds the same effort in other characters:

> '"*Omelora*!" the man said in the forceful tone people used when they called others by their titles. "I am leaving now. I want to see if I can buy a few Christmas things for my children at Oye Abagana." He spoke English with an Igbo accent so strong it decorated even the shortest words with extra vowels. Papa liked it when the villagers made an effort to speak English around him. He said it showed they had good sense. (60)

In this passage, besides the reinforcement of Papa's personal preference for English, we are shown that he judges people better due to the effort they make to use English as well. He is pleased with the villagers' attempt, even if they do it with a strong Igbo accent, for that shows him their understanding of the supposed superiority of the language and some sort of wisdom, as if that was the expected right thing to do.

Mimicry is once again suggested when Kambili is talking about one of Ifeoma's colleagues from the University. The girl comments, "She spoke more Igbo than English, but all her English words came out with a consistent British accent, not like Papa's, which came on only when he was with white people and sometimes skipped a few words so that half a sentence sounded Nigerian and the other half British" (243). Here the reference is a professor at the university, who probably had a formal education abroad and who has stuck with a British accent in contrast with Papa who would purposefully emphasize his British accent in the presence of white people, in order to seem like them. However, as Bhabha claims, this imitation is never quite like the target (86 and 89), which is why Papa's sentence sometimes sounded half Nigerian anyway.

This issue of linguistic preference is further developed when Eugene's habits of confessions are brought up. As Kambili narrates:

> It was the feast of the Epiphany, a holy day of obligation, so Papa did not go to work. We went to morning Mass, and although we did not usually visit Father Benedict on holy days of obligation, we went to his house afterward. Papa wanted Father Benedict to hear our confession. We had not gone in Abba because Papa did not like to make his confession in Igbo, and besides, Papa said that the parish priest in Abba was not spiritual enough. That was the problem with our people, Papa told us, our priorities were wrong; we cared too much about huge church buildings and mighty statues. You would never see white people doing that (104).

Eugene's favoritism of English is also highly connected to his religious views and that explains why he prefers to do his confessions in English. As we have seen in the previous chapter, his view of Catholicism is a dominant white one and he makes a clear connection between acting – or being – white and being superior, in many aspects, especially in the

execution of religious practices. Once again, we see Eugene's demonstration of othering towards his own people in his preference of doing his confessions with the white people, because the latter seem more spiritual to him. That traces us back to the dualism imposed by colonizers that set the other as the impure or immoral, and themselves as the dignified ones.

We are led to think about that one more time when Eugene hires a white Reverend Sister as Kambili's tutor when the girl is in the hospital. The narrator emphasizes her surprise when she finds out that the sister – while being white – knew how to speak Igbo, so rare was the occasion:

> My private tutor came the following week. Mama said Papa had interviewed ten people before he picked her. She was a young Reverend Sister and had not yet made her final profession. The beads of the rosary, which were twisted around the waist of her sky-colored habit, rustled as she moved. Her wispy blond hair peeked from beneath her scarf. When she held my hand and said, "*Kee ka ime*?" I was stunned. I had never heard a white person speak Igbo, and so well. She spoke softly in English when we had lessons and in Igbo, although not often, when we didn't. (214-215).

Kambili's surprise with a white woman's knowledge of Igbo once again demonstrates her experience of both languages as a dichotomy, probably a result of the influences she has received from Eugene and the very strict environments she usually attends. Besides the stress on Eugene's careful choice of tutor – which ended up being a white religious woman –, in this passage we also notice how English is chosen by the sister for the teachings and Igbo only for the informal conversations, as if English were in a higher – more educated status – than Igbo, which would be left for the times when learning was not involved. That points to the sister's – and one could infer, her church's – views and expectations for the use of language, which is much like Eugene's; English seen as more suitable when one wants to sound more civilized.

Of course, here I talk about the specific cases of Eugene and his daughter's experiences through his influences. Neither English – nor its use – is demonized in the story, nor is it deemed as a mere colonizer's product only. Rather, there is the understanding of it as a part of this hybrid society and the questioning regarding language and colonialism in

Nigeria is related mostly through Eugene's insistence on the superiority of English and overt displeasure with the use of Igbo. We cannot forget that the vast use of English in contemporary Nigeria, as the author has mentioned herself, many times is much more due to the education in the country and the lack of opportunities to learn Igbo rather than about personal choice or because the general population truly believes in the inferiority of their local languages. Nonetheless, it is all in one way or another a heritage of colonialist discourse. In fact, if there is a lack of opportunity to learn Igbo at school, such as that which Adichie mentioned in her interview, it is due to the fact that there are still people in power who continue to look at the Igbo language or other cultural practices as not as important as English, much as Eugene did.

This issue regarding the languages and the educational system is one reinforced by people such as Eugene Achike, who represents a powerful and hegemonic elite which is politically and culturally influential, enough to perpetuate a colonial thinking even after the country's independence. That resulted in future generations (such as Kambili's, or even, Adichie's, for that matter) to have, as aforementioned, "no choice" when it comes to language. Certainly, as African writers such as Adichie – who write in English – defend, by using English they are not diminishing Igbo – or other cultural practices – as if they believed in the inferiority of them, but simply writing with the language they know and possess, or using English as a means to reach a wider public, to spread their story further. However, the educational (and political) system is one that still promotes the use of English over other languages because there are still people in power who promote that sense of superiority.

Thus, possibly, as a way to resist and denounce such colonial mindset, *Purple Hibiscus* problematizes the use of language in contemporary Nigeria, so that people might recognize the still prevailing colonial thinking that might inform their language use. Furthermore, we can observe that by presenting the reader with a family such as the Achikes, and especially through the character of Eugene himself, who struggles with the issue of language, self-esteem and pride, and who demonstrates in his language use signs of cultural erasure – which, as Adichie commented in her interview, she has observed in her country –, the author elaborates on the danger of it, of actually suffering this erasure. Yet, at the same time, the society represented in her novel is quite complex. It seems to navigate between the acceptance and the resistance of what was once the colonizer's culture. For instance, aunt Ifeoma's family accepts the culture but in a hybrid way, not letting go of their own Igbo experience and not demonstrating any sort of judgement of values

towards it. The novel seems to point to this paradoxical condition of post-colonial societies, in which there is some resistance, but there is no idealization of the possibility of entirely returning to pre-colonial practices. That is the paradox that lies in the in-between zone of post-colonial societies, a place where they are, as Santiago mentioned, "between the submission to the code and the aggression, between the obedience and the rebellion" (26)[18]. Nevertheless, *Purple Hibiscus* makes sure that the reader understands that there is such a situation because there was a past that made that happen, a past filled with a discourse that may still be found in the words and attitudes of some people.

[18] My translation of "entre a prisão e a transgressão, entre a submissão ao código e a agressão, entre a obediência e a rebelião".

FINAL REMARKS

"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."
(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story")

The general objective of this thesis has been to analyze how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*, approaches the legacies of colonialism in Nigeria while at the same time giving the readers a story that could add to the many possibilities of stories of the place, opposing to the prevalent single narrative of African countries (and, more commonly told by the West, of Africa as a whole). Having this in mind, and in order to deepen on the findings of this thesis, let us first think of what Adichie argues six years after the publication of *Purple Hibiscus* in her TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story". In this talk, she comments: "So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become". In saying so, Adichie demonstrates her understanding of an issue previously addressed by Edward Said as Orientalism (and previously discussed in our theoretical chapter): the dominating discourse through which the West has been describing the Orient (which could be read here as what is not the West), authorizing stories and views of it, teaching about it and having authority over it. For Said, Orientalism is defined as "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage -and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively" (3). Similarly to Said, who was specifically talking about representations of the Orient in Western texts, Adichie indicates her preoccupation with the power of the repeated discourse of a place but, in her case, in the context of Africa, whose authorized view by the West has been only that of an exotic place full of troubles and difficulties. As Adichie argues in her Ted talk, the issue lies in repeating that view as the sole truth of the place, "Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes. There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo. And depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe. And it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them". Indeed, she demonstrates the importance of these other stories by bringing them to her writing.

As seen throughout the thesis, although Chimamanda Adichie writes about some of the problems her country faced (and may still face), she does not reduce Nigeria to them. Adichie goes much further than talking about problems, she also writes about her country's culture, its hybrid and very rich linguistic and religious system, its nature, and its people, who can be a manifold of things and who can have, while in the same context, different realities. Besides addressing issues connected to the complex political and economic system in post-independence Nigeria and denouncing the consequences of the colonial history of the country, the author also presents a story that talks about the season of harmattan, the diversified cuisine and food habits of the characters' community, cultural festivals and traditions – with music, masquerades, and costumes –, commonly known folk tales, different religious gatherings, family time, outgoing priests who enjoy themselves, flowers that blossom in the garden and people who pick them up, hardworking people, among others.

Adichie puts in practice, years before her TED conference, what she will discuss about later in her talk, going against the single narrative. She is aware of the problematic history Africa and, more specifically, her home country have been through, so much so that, as we have seen, these problems are present in her work *Purple Hibiscus*, but she is also aware that this history is not what defines Nigeria and its people, and much less, Africa as a continent. Of course, she tells the stories of a country that still shows signs of colonial discourse, suffered coups and whose population (or at least part of it) may be suffering with lack of resources and with authoritarian repression, but she also presents her readers with stories of people who have successful businesses (such as Eugene), families who have happy gatherings to celebrate annual holidays (as the Achikes, Ifeoma's family, or the people in the town of Abba), students whose preoccupation is to go well at school (such as Kambili's classmates), social projects that have good results (such as Father Amadi's project of playing football with poor boys), and children who spend their time playing (such as Ifeoma's neighbors), among many other different situations.

Chimamanda Adichie, in constructing her characters, brings us other sides to the stories and images of Africa and its people. Although the characters face the problems she denounces, they go on with their lives and are portrayed as smart, creative, funny and many times, simply ordinary people, leading the author to portray a more complex picture of Nigeria. There are more or less conservative people, teens who have problems any other teenagers could have, people who comply and people who resist and fight for their rights, among others. Moreover, the

characters in *Purple Hibiscus*, besides being very different one from the other, are very complex in their own self. More than not being able to be all shoved in a single box, they are also, individually, a multiplicity of things, sometimes even things that seem to be contradictory (such as Eugene, who is generous to his community but oppressive at home). The representation she gives us of her country is similarly constructed, as Nigeria is depicted as an incredibly complex place, which, as her characters, cannot be defined by a single narrative. It is the very place that holds people as multifaceted as her characters, a place where differences are observed and negotiated every day, and where what one believes as the standard is continuously reinvented within and by different communities.

In her TED talk, Adichie also comments, "The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar". We can see, in *Purple Hibiscus*, her work against this aspect of the single story, which, through the emphasis on the difference, robs people of their dignity and sets them apart. Although in some parts of her story the author may delineate differences, by illustrating the specificities of cultures and of customs, at the same time Adichie also allows readers from other parts of the world to understand that despite the obvious differences, we may, in many aspects, not be so different after all. She approximates the readers to these different people and culture through the non-limitation of characters due to these specificities. There is a connection at the level of human beings.

We see, in her novel: people who had a very happy and enlightening childhood, such as Ifeoma's children, but who grew up without wealth; people who were financially privileged but had a hard time growing up because of oppression at home, such as the Achike's children; people who lived very urban lives, such as the Achikes; those involved in the university drama and daily life, such as Ifeoma; and those who still had their foot in the village and its traditions, such as Papa-Nnukwu. Simultaneously, when following their lives, we also learn about their different experiences as Nigerian people. There is not just one story, one definite view of what life in Africa – or in Nigeria – must be like. Therefore, we can say that – at least in the context of *Purple Hibiscus* – Adichie does fulfill her project of fighting the single story. Such project, as I have pointed out in the theoretical chapter, is characteristic of literature written by authors from postcolonial communities, talking back to the narrative historically propagated and to the discourses presented in

them, for literature is “an important means of appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies” (Loomba 63).

Furthermore, in the theoretical chapter I also emphasized how one of the projects of postcolonial literature is to address the consequences of the colonial discourse in the places that were once under the dominance of the colonizers. One of the main objectives of this thesis, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, has been to analyze how Adichie addresses these issues in *Purple Hibiscus*, to study the ways through which she demonstrates her postcolonial agenda with her novel, what she denounces and how she denounces. As found along our analysis, there is, indeed, in Adichie's novel, many different instances in which a discussion was raised about matters that trace back to colonial times or which are due to the still prevalent colonial discourse, which indicate an attempt to denounce the maligns of the colonial history of the country and to promote the questioning of current attitudes and mindsets. In fact, there is not only a discussion being raised in terms of the colonial attitudes of othering and mimicry, and in how that may still be observed – and resisted – in postcolonial societies when it comes to the still perpetuated idea of the superiority of the West, but also a discussion regarding the idea of the postcolonial world as a hybrid one, a place of mixtures, of contaminations, which has left the possibility of purity (whether from the side of pre-colonial cultures or European cultures) behind.

Adichie, as I have analyzed, approaches the matter of both mimicry and colonial othering through the portrayal of characters such as Eugene, who, having internalized the colonial discourse and by perpetuating it through the devaluation of cultural aspects that do not entirely comply with the colonial heritages, creates an antagonism with those who differ from him. His mimicry can be observed, for instance, in his expressed preference over European-sounding English and his antagonism is demonstrated in the poor relationship with his father and in his extremism when punishing his family. At times, such extremism, at the surface, may seem only a simple consequence of his intense religious devotion, but the readers are later led to understand that it is a consequence of his colonial mentality. Religion was an important tool for the development and spreading of colonial discourse, and Adichie demonstrates, through the character of Eugene, that in contemporary times it may work as a tool for the maintenance of such discourse. Similarly, language imposition was a means of cultural subjugation during colonial times, and through the same character – Eugene Achike – the author demonstrates that such subjugation, although Nigeria is presently a country of linguistic

complexity, may still be reinforced. This reinforcement happens whether through the erasure of the local language from the institutions of education – an erasure that Adichie addressed in the interview – or through the insistence some people – like Eugene – may still have on the superiority of the European language, and on their displeasure with the use of local languages.

Eugene Achike represents, through both his mimicry and othering, the intolerance some people may still have towards cultural aspects that differ from the European ways and that leads them to pursue and promote a sense of purity through the denial of characteristics that point to non-European heritage. The discussions raised through his character – or through the instances in which other characters behaved according to him – revolved around the idea that some people may still carry the belief in the superiority of the West over non-Western cultures, or the belief that non-Western ways are uncivilized, for that was the discourse imposed on colonized nations for many years. With that, the author alerts to the danger in allowing the imposition of a certain culture over a different one, deprecating what is different – a hostile attitude that (as historically shown around the world due to colonization) may lead to conflicts, oppression and the erasure of a people and its culture. Yet, as we have also seen, the approaches to this topic go further and can also be noted in the characters that question and resist the colonial discourses behind attitudes of people in contemporary times. Through these characters, such as the always very inquisitive Amaka, Adichie promotes the questioning of the discourses the lead people in their everyday lives, and indicates the possibility of resistance to prejudicial discourses and attitudes. Like Amaka, one does not have to conform if one believes the discourse behind such conformity is harmful and biased.

Moreover, the author also presents the reader with a depiction of a country that is, at the time of the story – many years after it gained its independence –, a hybrid space, in terms of religion, language and cultural traditions. With this depiction, Adichie raises a discussion regarding the current hybridity of Nigeria in terms of its cultural aspects as a result of the imposition of the culture of the colonizer during colonization, and also because of the resistance to such imposition – for rather than a pure culture, what remains is a contaminated one. We could observe that along the novel through the characters that negotiate different religions, languages and customs in their everyday life, many times dealing with a cultural mixture. Nigeria, in *Purple Hibiscus*, is a place where the cultures of those who were once colonizers and of the colonized are both, after

processes of resignification and with contamination from both sides, part of the same context, despite the resistance people may have against it. In being hybrid, it demonstrates – as does Adichie in bringing these aspects to her novel – not only the consequences of the colonial strategy "premised on cultural purity, and aimed at establishing the status quo" (Loomba 146), but also the strong defiance to this strategy for, as Bhabha argues, hybridity "is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination" (112). There may be subversion in it, once, according to Bhabha, through the ambivalence of hybridity, "[i]t unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (ibid). Yet, such ambivalence may also point to an unattainableness of a single or fixed politics, whether dominant or subversive, for hybridity is "such a powerful and double force" (111). The local, to a certain extent, has survived and has appropriated the colonial, contaminating it and being contaminated by it, and there is no possibility of reaching a sense of purity anymore, from either of the sides.

Still thinking about this hybrid aspect of Nigeria and how it was brought to *Purple Hibiscus*, one interesting parallel could be made with the image of the country – and its people and culture – and that of the purple hibiscus, a flower that serves as the title for Adichie's novel. In the story, the purple hibiscus is a hybrid version of the flower – usually seen in the red and yellow color, but also in others – grown by Ifeoma, a botanical experiment that is successful and that is appreciated not only by Ifeoma herself but also by others, causing their surprise, as we see in the following passage:

> "That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Aunty?" Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fencing. "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. My good friend Phillipa is a lecturer in botany. She did a lot of experimental work while she was here. Look, here's white ixora, but it doesn't bloom as fully as the red."
>
> Jaja joined Aunty Ifeoma, while we stood watching them.
>
> "*O maka*, so beautiful," Jaja said. He was running a finger over a flower petal. Aunty

> Ifeoma's laughter lengthened to a few more syllables. (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 128)

The hibiscus, in the purple color, as much as the country's culture, is a result of a mixture, a contamination of different features. Ifeoma's experimental hibiscuses are described by Kambili as "rare, 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. A freedom to be, to do" (Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, 16). That demonstrates the somewhat optimistic perception of the success of such hybrid experiment, an optimism that could perhaps be perceived in the country as well, once we remember that Ifeoma is also represented in the novel as a character who welcomes and supports the hybrid aspects of her country and culture and who does not hold on to ideas of purity or of a single possibility of perceiving things. On the other hand, perhaps if we stretch our thinking to the name of Papa's character, Eugene, someone who is portrayed as a conservative man whose idea of what is right and good revolves around a sense of purity (whether in religion, in language or in cultural traditions) and the existence of a superior way of being and acting, we can think of the word eugenics, which refers to the study or science aimed at the improvement of the human race through the control of hereditary characteristics[19]. Eugene, somewhat like the term his name resembles, represents the colonial thought that insisted on purity and superiority while Ifeoma, like the purple hibiscus she plants and cares for, represents hybridity and the hope for accepting days. In the end, Eugene – as much as the possibility of purity in postcolonial communities – ends up killed, while Ifeoma – as the hybridity she represents –, although she struggles and does not have life easy – as she faces plenty of difficulties in different areas of her life, such as her professional one –, to a certain extent still thrives.

Indeed, *Purple Hibiscus* gives us readers a lot to think about. It warns about the problems of discourses and thoughts based on the superiority of a people and of belittling those whom one sees as the other; it points to the historical consequences of colonialism, which forever

[19] The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines Eugenics as "a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed" (Available at https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eugenics Accessed on December 5, 2017), while the definition given by Oxford Dictionaries online is "The science of improving a population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics" (Available at https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/eugenics Accessed on December 5, 2017).

changes the lives of the people where it occurs; it celebrates the Nigerian country, with its diverse people and their cultural richness and complexity; and it does all of that while helping deconstruct and destroy the notion of a single narrative of Nigeria and Africa, giving us more stories and more circumstances to think about. Yet, it also works to show that *Purple Hibiscus* is just another story (or rather, a set of other stories) of Africa, as much as *Things Fall Apart* is. Although the author shares parts of what she knows with the reader, by telling her own stories of Africa she also points to the fact that hers alone is not a representative of the general reality. There are many other stories to be told, and these do not define all that Africa – or Nigeria – is.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Robert Young comments on the paradox that is the postcolonial, which denounces and opposes the remains of colonialism while at the same time it celebrates the historical triumphs over it (*An Historical* 60). Along this research, I found that Adichie's work in *Purple Hibiscus* seems to fit this description well. It is postcolonial from different perspectives at the same time, definitely much more than merely because it is a work written by an author from an ex-colony in a contemporary time of post-independence. Through the novel, Adichie celebrates the triumphs over colonialism – in the observance of Nigerian culture, in the acknowledgement of the hybrid, of the part that did not bow to colonial 'purity', and of the possibility of resisting to colonial discourses, and in the world-wide promotion of different African narratives, told by Africans. Yet, at the same time, it denounces the maligns of colonialism and the struggles caused by it, alerting to the fact that it is much alive – through the identification of problems such as cultural intolerance that leads to extremisms and the social problems that come with corruption, as well as by revisiting historical moments that brought the discourses to the Nigerian context. It is a work that touches both present and past, as does postcolonial theory.

Evidently, the possibilities of analyzing the postcolonial aspects of *Purple Hibiscus* do not exhaust here. It is a work that presents a lot to be examined. Thus, for further research I suggest, for instance, a deeper study regarding the social and economic issues presented in the novel (and briefly approached in the introduction of this thesis), such as the coups, the lack of basic resources and the state of fear imposed by the military, as a consequence of the colonial history of the country, with a more elaborated historical framework in order to analyze how Adichie correlates these issues with her country's past and what she achieves with that. Another suggestion would be to develop a study of the character of Eugene Achike alone, exploring his complexity as a generous man of the

community versus an oppressive colonized product and the causes of such intricacy. Alternatively, perhaps, one could develop a much deeper comparison between him and *Things Fall Apart*'s Okonkwo (which was only shortly initiated in this research), in the terms of their times of prosperity and demise, and how that connects to the colonial period and discourse in Nigeria. Moreover, thinking about the aspects of religion and colonialism discussed in this research work, it would be interesting to analyze *Purple Hibiscus* in comparison to Adichie's short story "The Headstrong Historian" from *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), regarding how both stories approach the way colonial teachings led some people to religious othering and to the rejection of cultural roots – enough to antagonize parent and child –, but also how the younger generations in both novels seem to resist the intolerance the comes from colonial discourse and try to adjust to the present without denying their past.

In conclusion, we ought to remember that colonialism is something that has affected many people's lives, directly or indirectly, not only in Nigeria, or, less specifically, in Africa, which is the main context of this work, but in every place its discourse has reached. Independence has long come officially for many places, but still we can observe the force of colonial thoughts in politics, in literature, in the media, in education, or in people's everyday attitudes. Hence, literature such as *Purple Hibiscus* can definitely work as a mind opener in the terms that it awakens readers to the possibilities of facing, appropriating and resignifying the discourses that rule contemporary society. Therefore, promoting the critical reading of works such as this is an act of freedom.

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