

Daddy's Girls?: Father-Daughter Relations
and the Failures of the Postcolonial
Nation-State in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's
Purple Hibiscus and Véronique Tadjo's
Loin de mon père
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Abstract: Postcolonial theoretical discourses have adopted postnationalist overtones, declaring the obsolescence of the nation and treating dislocation as the paradigmatic condition. Sometimes, however, the claims of postnationalism may seem premature: the nation-state persists in the African literary agenda. When operating within the current paradigm, the notion of cosmopolitanism can serve as a useful tool for understanding contemporary African literatures and the ways in which they negotiate their relation to the local realities of the continent and the world beyond its boundaries. In this article, I read the narrative of the failed postcolonial nation-state through the lens of the father-daughter relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père* (2010). The father-daughter relations are intertwined with the narrative of the postcolonial nation, giving voice to daughterly disillusionment. The texts inscribe the national crisis on a larger map, making it a global rather than simply a local concern. The novels undertake a new attitude toward nationhood while being interested in national issues: their future visions are not in line with the logic of the nation-state but nor are they so with the transnational dimension. Instead, they are equally informed by the unease caused by the failures of the postcolonial nation-state and the unfulfilled hopes of finding both a more favorable socioeconomic situation and a sense of belonging in diaspora.

Keywords: African literature, cosmopolitanism, daughter figure, disillusionment, father figure, nation

As Nana Wilson-Tagoe rightly observes, in the study of African literatures, paradigm shifts have often been conceived in diachronic terms: periodizations have been linked to political movements such as decolonization, postcolonial disillusionment, neocolonialism, and, more recently, globalization (4). According to Wilson-Tagoe, such temporal mappings may be “historically enlightening” but remain somewhat inadequate ways of understanding paradigm changes (4). Instead of these more traditional periodizations, Wilson-Tagoe suggests that a model focusing on “the locations from which writers speak and experiment with literary models” might be more useful in understanding the changing vistas of the African literary enterprise (4-5). These “locations” include the collapse of national projects, gender issues, transnational movement, HIV/AIDS, and experimentations with oral and written forms (5). Elsewhere, Dominic Thomas identifies similar issues among the emerging themes of twenty-first-century African writing and maintains that the transnationalism of these authors bears on the works’ thematic by “challeng[ing] a restricted politics of location” and “incorporat[ing] an engagement with global issues” (227).

While these characterizations certainly hold true, the turn to transnationalism in the African literary field does not imply a lack of interest in issues that might more easily be classified as local and national. Indeed, despite the transnationalization of African literatures and the growing focus on themes of mobility and dislocation, writers with diasporic backgrounds—such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Véronique Tadjo, discussed in this article—continue to address specific local and national conditions in their work. Indeed, this is the case for many exiled African writers; as Alain Mabanckou contends, Africa often “lies at the heart of the[ir] narrative[s]” (80). With respect to academic writing on African and postcolonial literatures in general, the visibility of local specificities, as Elleke Boehmer argues, may result from the fact that “postcolonial readings, more openly admitting their own internal contradictions,

are more willing to allow the writers their differences, their poles of contention, as well as their similarities" (*Colonial* 252). Further, it can be argued that the binarisms between global/local and transnational/national are reductive in the first place, as Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih suggest: transnationalism, according to them, "can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities" (6). In a similar vein, Neil Lazarus, discussing the notion of cosmopolitanism, argues that an ethically defined cosmopolitanism should "underscore . . . the local specificity of selfhoods and social logics registered by the literatures of global modernity" (121). In this sense, Lazarus argues, cosmopolitanisms should always be understood as local, with no necessary opposition between what is traditionally deemed local/national and what is considered global (134). The argument that Lazarus makes in stressing the specificity of the local is an important one, given that we are currently operating within a paradigm in which displacement is "the essential condition of modern subjectivity" (Gikandi, "Between Roots" 24) and in which the local equates with parochialism (32), as Simon Gikandi maintains in his article, which discusses what he sees as the in-built elitism of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, in order to see the non-elitist face of cosmopolitanism, it is important to understand it as an ethical attitude that is informed by an openness to a wider world while taking into consideration the specificity of the local. In an effort to save the notion of cosmopolitanism from accusations of elitism, Robert Spencer states that *true* cosmopolitanism is not only marked by virtues such as critical self-awareness, responsibility, and "sensitivity beyond one's immediate milieu" but also an acknowledgment of the political and material conditions that define the asymmetrical nature of the global world order (4). The present article adopts this sort of view of cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitanism is, first of all, an ethical awareness of a world beyond one's own. Second, it involves an active attempt to engage in a dialogue with this other world, and third, it demands an understanding of one's own positioning within this global constellation. To make a rough categorization, if during the nation-building projects and their consequent failures, the nation was the center around which the meaning of African texts circulated, and if

diasporic writing is most of all concerned with questions of dislocation and movement, then cosmopolitanism combines the nation and the diaspora: it is simultaneously informed by the local/national as it is by the world that exceeds such boundaries. Understood this way, cosmopolitanism does not run the risk of overshadowing questions related to the local and the national but instead helps us to see each as an essential part of the global. It is in this sense that cosmopolitanism can serve as a useful concept for understanding contemporary African literatures and the ways in which they negotiate their relation to the local realities of the continent and the world beyond its boundaries.

The interplay between the local and the global described above forms the framework that informs the present reading of two contemporary African texts. As my emphasis on the notion of cosmopolitanism implies, the aim of this article is twofold. While focusing on what can be conceived of as the local/national, there is also an attempt to see these spheres as parts of a larger whole. This article focuses on the novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003/2004) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Loin de mon père* (2010) by Véronique Tadjo. My analysis acknowledges the current transnational paradigm and the theoretical efforts that have been made in order to bring the local back into discussions of globalization and transnational border crossings. In my reading of the novels, the focus is on the national and more precisely on the ways in which the texts employ father-daughter relations as a vehicle for dealing with the failures of the postcolonial nation-state. The father-daughter narratives are closely intertwined with the postcolonial nation, and my interest is in how these narratives give voice to daughterly disillusionment and the possibility of daughterly intervention in the nationalist family drama. In what sense, if any, can the daughters be defined as “daddy’s girls”—that is, how does the complex paternal legacy affect them and persist through them? How do these novels—informed as they are by “the betrayal of nationalist hope” (Ashcroft 32)—conceive the meaning of the postcolonial African nation in the contemporary global era? This question is essentially about the imagined futures and hopes that fictional texts articulate. The novels can be read together as a continuum that exposes the failures of the postcolonial nation-state and the consequent wave of

emigration especially among the upwardly mobile national subjects. By rendering visible the link between migrancy and the postcolony's lack of viable socioeconomic prospects, the novels contain a cosmopolitan vision that intertwines the local and the national with global concerns. In other words, while the novels are, above all, addressing the crisis of the postcolonial nation, they do so in a way that sees the nation connected to a larger world: problems such as war and corruption are global in nature. In a way, then, cosmopolitanism in the case of these two novels can be defined as a general narrative perspective that acknowledges the fact that there are other worlds beyond the nation.

When it comes to the authors under scrutiny, they easily fall into the category of cosmopolitans—understood in the conventional sense of the term as mobile world citizens with diverse affinities across the globe. Véronique Tadjo, daughter of an Ivorian father and a French mother, was born in Paris in 1955, grew up in Ivory Coast, and has since studied and lived in diverse countries on different continents. At the moment, she is living in South Africa and working as the head of the French department at the University of Witwatersrand. She has published novels, poetry, and books for young adults and children. As Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti observes, in her work Tadjo—whom Kabwe-Segatti considers to be part of a literary movement he names *dé-migritude* to signal a newly defined affiliation with the African continent among diasporic authors—is concerned with contemporary African problems such as violence and war (84-87). This article focuses on her latest novel, *Loin de mon père*. The novel approaches the local/global nexus from an interesting viewpoint: the protagonist Nina, an exiled, grown-up daughter, returns to her native Ivory Coast in order to organize her father's funeral. While the narrative remains highly suspicious about the possibility of returning for good, the novel's way of conceiving mobility as a return to the African homeland can be read as a reminder that transnational movements do also have other destinations than western metropolises; this is the novel's way of bringing the local and the national back into the focus. Depicting the conflict between the exiled, modern daughter and the memory of the deceased, traditional father, the novel discusses the possibility of a boundary-crossing dialogue.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie represents the third-generation of African and Nigerian writing with her acclaimed novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), as well as the short story collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009). Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977 but has lived and studied in the US and is currently “dividing her time” between the two countries, according to her official website. While her two novels are mainly situated in Nigeria, the short story collection actively intertwines African experiences on the continent with those in the American diaspora. The novel *Purple Hibiscus* is set in the context of the Nigerian political turmoil in the mid-1990s, but this national setting is informed by an awareness of the global that exceeds the boundaries of the nation. Like *Loin de mon père*, *Purple Hibiscus* examines the issue of different world views (traditional/modern) and the possibility of mutual understanding and dialogue.

In postcolonial literary scholarship, Anglophone and Francophone African literatures are generally treated as separate entities. I would argue that this language-based division is somewhat problematic and artificial and that more cross-boundary dialogue between these literary fields is needed. The thematic concerns outlined by Wilson-Tagoe cited at the opening of this article are issues that transcend linguistic boundaries and hence can be applied to contemporary African literatures on a more general scale. The linguistic separation is also partly connected to the fact that the fields of postcolonial and Francophone literary studies have in many ways been neglecting each other despite their common interests and trajectories, as well as the fact that their relation has been marked by mutual suspicion (for further discussion, see Donadey and Murdoch 1-8). By adopting a comparative approach, this article makes a gesture that contributes to the ongoing scholarly effort to “increase . . . cross-pollination” (Donadey and Murdoch 5) between linguistic literary camps in order to promote a fuller picture of the category “African literatures.”

As Anne McClintock maintains in her widely-cited article on gender and nationalism, “[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space” (63). The family trope is particularly useful in that it establishes a “natural” hierarchy and order both in

the social and temporal sense—women representing tradition and the national past and men the nation's future. These hierarchies are gendered, with the father as the head of the family and the mother and children subordinated to his authority (McClintock 63-64). African women writers have traditionally used the family trope as a national allegory by “set[ting] . . . the national dramas on the smaller stage of the family” (Andrade 96). In this familial constellation, where mothers stand for the reproducers of new citizens and the national son represents “the self-defining inheritor of the post-independence era and the protagonist of the nation-shaping narrative,” the daughter occupies the marginalized position of the national non-subject (Boehmer, *Stories* 106). As Boehmer maintains, several postcolonial women writers have set out to write the invisible figure of the daughter back into the national narrative (*Stories* 106). Yet, as Boehmer observes, even in these rewritings the father-daughter dynamic has been largely neglected (*Stories* 109). In general, feminist scholarship has been interested primarily in mother-daughter relations. The invisibility of masculinity also characterizes African literary criticism, which, as Gikandi contends, has until recently been “uncertain about the place of the masculine trope in its primary texts” (“Afterword” 296). As Kizito Z. Muchemwa and Robert Muponde argue, gender issues should not be restricted to the feminine: discussions on gender can be “complete and meaningful” only when masculinity is given the same critical attention as other genders (xv). If family is an important trope in the creation of national imagery, it is also the central site for generating gendered identities, and according to Muchemwa and Muponde, “[m]asculinities are largely connected to the fatherhood-paternity-manhood nexus” (xix). The child figure, on the other hand, features frequently in African literatures. According to Maxwell Okolie, the evocation of childhood in African literatures is essentially an “impulse of self-assertion and self-search” (30). In third-generation Nigerian writing, for instance, the child or the youngster has become a central vehicle for discussing the challenges that the global world order poses to new African generations (Hron 27-28). As the child figures in these narratives mature and grow, they also draw a picture of the “true nature of the . . . socio-cultural order” in which their

lives are embedded (Okuyade 142). While childhood obviously represents a very particular viewpoint for depicting not only child-parent relationships but also the national narrative, it should be noted that the child-parent bond extends from childhood to adulthood. This is the case of Tadjó's novel in particular—the grown-up daughter Nina revisits her childhood memories during her stay in her former home country. However, it is also, to a certain extent, the case of *Purple Hibiscus*, narrated retrospectively by Kambili, who has grown from a subordinated teenager into a young woman. The novels' way of constructing daughterhood as a continuum from childhood to adulthood enables a more extensive picture of the tensions and transitions in the father-daughter relationships.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* writes the familial into the national much in the way that Tsitsi Dangarembga's pioneering African feminist classic, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), does (for a comparison of the two novels, see Andrade 95-98). Like Dangarembga's novel, it is narrated from the viewpoint of a teenage girl who grows up in a patriarchal society in the midst of the post-independence turmoil. The events of *Purple Hibiscus* take place in the mid-1990s, and the familial drama is interwoven with the military coup, although from the protagonist's viewpoint this reality seems somewhat marginal compared to the centrality of family life. For instance, when demonstrations against the military rule break out, Kambili observes that "nothing changed at home" (28). Kambili's family lives under the constant threat of religiously motivated domestic violence, and the narrative draws a parallel between the violent father figure and authoritarian military rule. As Kambili's family begins to resist the patriarch, a similar parallel develops between the growing resistance to violent authority on a national scale. *Purple Hibiscus's* opening chapter sets the context for the story by describing the bourgeois furnishings of the home, such as the mother's porcelain ballet dancer figurines and the "gold-framed family photo" (3), and by contrasting these idyllic elements to the threat of paternal violence and the stressing atmosphere of silence that reigns at home. The novel's father figure, called Eugene, or simply Papa for his children, is a profoundly complex character: on the one hand, he is an aggressive home tyrant who causes mental and

physical injuries to his family; on the other hand, he is also officially a “good Christian,” a successful businessman, and the fearless owner of a magazine that criticizes the flaws of the military government. In short, he is a respected social figure in the eyes of his colleagues, relatives, and congregation. As the owner of the *Standard* magazine, the father represents someone who “dares to tell the truth” (136) and who “sp[eaks] out for freedom” (5). In his private life, however, truth and freedom are not afforded to others: abusing his patriarchal authority and silencing his children define his fatherhood. Kambili and her brother Jaja, as the father explains to his colleague, “are not like those loud children people are raising these days” (58). The colleague’s comment exposes the paradox that lies in the father’s public and private roles: “Imagine what the *Standard* would be if we were all quiet” (58), a joke that does not make either the father or the children laugh. The “renewed democracy” (25) that Papa’s journal promotes does not concern his family. In addition, the two “faces” of the father give the false impression that the familial and the social/national are two separate spheres: there is the political activist in the public and the repressive patriarch in the private. However, the impossibility of keeping the national and the familial separate is clearly articulated in the following paragraph, which contrasts an episode of politically motivated torture reported in the *Standard* to the ostensible safety of bourgeois domestic idyll: “And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead. During the family time, while Papa and I played chess, Papa winning, we heard on the radio that Nigeria had been suspended from the Commonwealth because of the murder” (201). The paragraph vividly illustrates how “in Kambili’s house, it is easier to give voice to national crimes than those committed within the family,” as Susan Z. Andrade puts it (95). It is only when Kambili and Jaja visit Auntie Ifeoma in the university town of Nsukka that they become more aware of what is happening not only around them but also in their own family. Ironically, the tyrannized children of the bourgeois family are “protected” from the tumult of the outside world to the extent that they lack the capacity either to deal with it or to function within it. Allegorically, the complexity of the father figure reflects the narrative’s

ambiguous attitude that the nation stands for a utopian hope for affinity and belonging but simultaneously that this is realized only violently and authoritatively in the form of the postcolonial nation-state.

The complexity of the relationship between Kambili and Papa is embodied in the “love sip”: the father’s habit of sharing his tea with his children. As Kambili the narrator stresses, the tea is always scalding, “burn[ing] Papa’s love into me” (8). This ambiguous mixture of suffering and affection marks Kambili’s feelings for her father from the beginning until the end of the novel, when the abusive father dies and Kambili starts to realize that domestic violence is not a normal condition of family life: “I want to see him in my dreams. . . . I want it so much I sometimes make my own dreams. . . . I see Papa, he reaches out to hug me, I reach out, too, but our bodies never touch before something jerks me up and I realize that I cannot control even the dreams that I have made” (306-7). The complexity and contradiction that mark the father figure can also be seen when he punishes his children for having committed “sins” or otherwise conducting themselves disrespectfully: once he has finished brutalizing his children, Papa breaks down, starts to cry and wants to hug his children, worrying how badly they are hurt. There is a scene in which the father pours boiling water on Kambili’s feet and later explains his actions by telling how he had to go through a similar “treatment” in his youth at the missionary school after having “committed a sin against [his] own body” (196). Ironically enough, the man who is aghast at the idea that military men are torturing the editor of the *Standard*—“They put out cigarettes on his back’, Papa said, shaking his head. ‘They put out so many cigarettes on his back’” (42)—does not refrain from justifying the domestic torture he inflicts on his family members. The father remains the most contradictory and, in a way, inscrutable figure of the whole novel. In the words of Kambili: “There were stories in his eyes that I would never know” (42). By constructing the father figure in such complex terms, the narrative refuses to portray him as purely evil. This understanding finds its articulation in Kambili’s cousin’s words: “People have problems, people make mistakes” (251). Representing Papa in this way draws attention not only to the authoritarian, hyper-masculine side of the

father figure but also to what Gikandi calls "the fragility of masculinity" ("Afterword" 296).

One of the novel's governing tropes is silence. The family members lower their voices in order not to disturb the father, and due to this habit they end up speaking in whispers even in his absence. Kambili, Jaja, and their mother have also learned to communicate with their eyes and, as Kambili believes, with their minds, and there are many things that Kambili feels that she would like to say without ever having the courage to do so. Besides the silence, there is also a lot of irrelevant speech, as the family members keep "asking each other questions whose answers [they] already knew" in order to avoid "the other questions, the ones whose answers [they] did not want to know" (23), that is, questions dealing with the situation at home. Questioning is something that neither Kambili, her mother, nor her brother wants to do. There is a constant tension between the said and the unsaid, and this has a disturbing effect on Kambili: "I said nothing. There was so much I wanted to say and so much I did not want to say" (235). The traumas of domestic violence have such a long-lasting effect on the familial dynamic that silence maintains its grip on the surviving family members even after Papa's death. The silence that marks their family life can be read as an allegory of the political situation in which the military government strives to maintain its vision of truth by violent suppression of critical voices. In this context, it is symptomatic that Kambili fails to pronounce the words of the national anthem at a school event. The fact that she knows the words of the anthem but is unable to mouth them without stuttering signals her voiceless role in the nationalist family drama.

From the very beginning, the novel also ponders the possibility of revolt and change. While the seed of resistance against paternal tyranny has been quietly growing in all of the family members, it is Kambili's brother Jaja who embodies the idea of revolt in the first chapter. Eventually, their resistance to the paternal tyranny grows to the point of the mother killing Papa and Jaja taking the blame for the murder. There is a clearly articulated emphasis on the anticipation of freedom on a national and a domestic scale, and the novel is essentially concerned with whether freedom can be achieved and at what cost. Compared to

Jaja, who starts to question Papa's authority by refusing to do what his father tells him to, Kambili's resistance to Papa's tyranny is much less pronounced, and she is mainly represented as a fearful and submissive girl who lets her father decide what is best for her. Kambili has internalized her father's violent authority so that the mere thought of Papa's reactions causes physical symptoms in her: "I froze on my seat, felt the skin of my arms melding and becoming one with the cane arms of the chair" (187). While Jaja and Kambili's stay with their aunt's family in Nsukka marks a change in both children, the transformation seems more profound in Jaja. Kambili recognizes newness in his voice and in "how much lighter the brown of his pupils was" (126). She also observes her brother becoming more manlike, with "sparse hair [growing] on his chest" (183). The awakening masculinity of her brother makes Kambili see him as more of an authority figure, a potential rival to their father. In this sense, Kambili cedes the central role in the nationalist family drama to her brother instead of claiming it for herself. Kambili is fascinated by Jaja's transformation, and the fact that she "tried to place [her] feet on the exact spots where [Jaja] placed his" (191) suggests that she would like to be more like him. The difference between Kambili's and her brother's new attitude toward Papa's unquestioned authority is clearly exemplified in a passage where the father suddenly comes to take them home from Auntie Ifeoma's house: "'Good afternoon, Papa', I said, mechanically. . . . Jaja came out of the kitchen then and stood staring at Papa. 'Good afternoon, Papa,' he finally said" (188). Kambili starts to become more aware of Papa's peculiar rules while she is in the company of her aunt's family, although she is still unable to say things aloud: "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). At one moment, Kambili witnesses her cousin asking Auntie Ifeoma whether the two siblings are normal. This comment bothers Kambili to the extent that she actually manages to repeat the question to her brother, although in whispers. These moments of reflection that start to surface during her stay in Nsukka can be read as Kambili's transition from a submissive girl into a more independent subjectivity, although she never fantasizes about dislodging Papa.

In other words, Kambili's transformation from a girl who mechanically repeats the words "Yes, Papa" to someone who dares to laugh and question her father's truths starts once she has had the opportunity to see life from a wider perspective. This transformation, however, I would argue, is never complete: Kambili's resistance to Papa is always disturbed by her seemingly contradictory longing for a strong father figure.

An important element of Kambili's path from silence toward questioning is her sexual awakening inspired by Father Amadi, a handsome priest she meets in Nsukka. Before meeting Father Amadi, there is nothing sexual in Kambili's world of experience. The daughter's awakening sexuality can be read as a threat to the paternal authority, since it represents a force beyond the father's otherwise all-encompassing control. There are a couple of strongly sexually-loaded episodes that take place between Kambili and the object of her desire. Father Amadi is portrayed as an alluring, physical being, whose presence drives Kambili to think "sinful" thoughts:

[Father Amadi's shorts] climbed up to expose a muscular thigh sprinkled with dark hair. The space between us was too small, too tight. . . . [I]t was hard to feel penitent now, with Father Amadi's cologne deep in my lungs. I felt guilty instead because I could not focus on my sins, could not think of anything except how near he was. (175)

In another context, Kambili wishes to be the water that Father Amadi drinks, "going into him, to be with him, one with him. I had never envied water so much before" (226-27). In this case, the overtly sexual allusions describing Kambili's desire for Father Amadi are no longer followed by feelings of guilt that Papa's moralistic Christian worldview provoked in her earlier. Even though this teenage romance does not end happily from Kambili's viewpoint, her relationship with Father Amadi is a strongly empowering one: not only does it allow her to find her sexual identity, but it also allows her to find a more tolerant and liberal interpretation of religiousness and, above all, the courage of questioning. Later, Father Amadi, with his tender and supportive attitude, becomes a new masculine authority for Kambili, who believes that "his word is

true" (302). Kambili's admiration of Father Amadi signals yet again her desperate need for a father figure.

While the focus in *Purple Hibiscus* is admittedly the national, the transnational dimension represents an important narrative bypath. As Christopher E. W. Ouma (49) and Madelaine Hron (30) have maintained, third-generation Nigerian writing is marked by dislocation and engagement with global concerns. This is the case with *Purple Hibiscus* as well: in Ouma's words, the novel is "informed by the experiences of movement and contact with other worlds" (49). Kambili's father's sister, Auntie Ifeoma, works as a lecturer at Nsukka University, where the country's flaws are flagrantly visible: unpaid salaries, authoritarian management, and career stagnation are driving staff members into exile. The idea of leaving raises diverse feelings in Kambili's cousins. The oldest cousin, Amaka, feels that leaving means running away, and she asks her brother whether the problems of the crisis-ridden country cannot be fixed. "Fix what?" (232), reads the brother's ironical, disillusioned answer. Auntie Ifeoma's colleague brings up the question of the brain drain, claiming that "[t]he educated ones leave, the ones with the potential to right the wrongs. They leave the weak behind. The tyrants continue to reign because the weak cannot resist. Do you not see that it is a cycle? Who will break that cycle?" (244-45). Eventually, bearing witness to the hardening atmosphere and continuous problems, Auntie Ifeoma makes the decision to leave the country. This is a shock for Kambili, for whom the aunt's family represents a whole new perspective, a more joyful and fuller horizon of life. Also Father Amadi's sudden decision to emigrate is a serious setback for Kambili: Auntie Ifeoma and Father Amadi represent the strong ones with the moral responsibility to "break the cycle" to which Ifeoma's colleague refers. The decision of these two empowering figures leaves open the question of the country's future, as well as that of Kambili's. It is noteworthy that Kambili herself never considers the possibility of leaving. This signals the fact that she is stuck with the postcolonial nation-state as much as she is unable to detach herself from her father's authoritarian legacy. Besides the theme of migration, the narrative conveys a cosmopolitan approach through the way in which it discusses the dilemma between the traditional and

the modern. This dilemma is treated most explicitly in the contrast between the figures of Papa and Auntie Ifeoma. While Papa is represented as an admirer but also essentially a victim of modern European world views and values (in the sense of not being capable of combining his traditional background with his colonial education), Ifeoma embodies the virtues of cosmopolitanism such as a combination of openness to a world beyond one's own and firm attachment to local traditions.

While Kambili has gained more self-assurance toward the end of the novel, it seems rather unlikely that she, as the national daughter in the allegorical sense, has the strength and determination needed to overcome the national crisis and to envisage a better future. The ending of the novel suggests that the surviving family has a lot of issues to negotiate. The future of the family—and, on a larger scale, that of the nation—depends largely on how the violent past is going to be worked through. However, the ending does not really promise a hopeful horizon, and it seems that Kambili remains passive and submissive in the face of familial and national tragedies and is far from becoming a genuine protagonist in the national narrative. In this sense, Andrade's suggestion that *Purple Hibiscus* could be seen as criticizing "women's failure to become political actors" (99) seems well grounded. From the viewpoint of change it is also noteworthy that during Jaja's imprisonment for the murder of Papa, Kambili starts to bribe guardians, judges, and policemen. Interestingly, her corrupt behavior stands in opposition to that of her deceased father who, despite all his faults, was incorruptible. This detail calls into question the possibility of resistance. Indeed, it seems that the promise of freedom and resistance symbolized by the purple hibiscus in the novel's title is never really claimed. In this sense, my reading is less optimistic than other interpretations stressing Kambili's rebellion and resistance to her father's authority, such as Christopher E. W. Ouma's suggestion that "Kambili's childhood . . . is defined by the search for an autonomy that can serve as an alternative to the patriarchal stranglehold of Papa Eugene" (54), or Ogaga Okuyade's reading in which Kambili's "rebellion against the phallogocentric and autocratic forces of society" (155) is highlighted. The final chapter, significantly entitled "A different silence," depicts the surviving family members constantly struggling with silence.

At first glance, it may seem that Kambili has gained a new authority and become a sort of head of the family after Papa's death, Jaja's imprisonment, and her mother's nervous breakdown. However, there is an incident that undermines this interpretation. When visiting the imprisoned Jaja with her mother, Kambili tells her mother to tighten her headscarf. The mother answers, "It is tight enough" (296). Later, Jaja asks the mother to do the same thing, and now "Mama hastily unties and reties her scarf—and this time, she knots it twice and tight at the back of her head" (306). Significantly, then, Kambili does not even have the authority to tell her mentally ill mother what to do, whereas Jaja does. While the ending of the novel articulates a certain amount of pessimism as to the possibility of change, it is also obvious that diaspora is not the answer to the problems either: it does not fulfill the hopes invested in it. The letters from Ifeoma and her exiled family explain that the educated aunt has been obliged to take two jobs in order to provide for her family and that she writes often "about things that she misses and things she longs for" (301). In a way then, the narrative remains torn between the attractive promises of the national project and the hopes invested in diaspora. In her letters, Ifeoma also writes about people who think that "we [Nigerians] cannot rule ourselves because the few times we tried, we failed" (301). Kambili's confused reaction to these words, "I still do not know why she wrote it to me" (301), signals her continuing marginality in relation to the national narrative.

Tadjo's novel *Loin de mon père* opens with Nina's night flight from Paris to her native Abidjan. The idea of "returning home" causes anxiety in Nina, who has been away for some years during which her former home country has undergone violent change and descended into crisis. The distance between Nina and Ivory Coast has grown to the extent that Nina starts to think that her memories of home are no longer relevant and that she has "perdu [s]on pays" (15), "lost her country" (personal translation here and throughout). In her bad dreams, she has an unwelcoming reception, with voices in her head asking her "Pour qui te prends-tu? Tu n'es rien. Ta maison a été rasée. Tes parents n'existent plus. Personne ne veut de toi, ici! Va-t'en!" (14), "Who do you think you are? You're nothing. Your house has been demolished. Your parents are not

there anymore. Nobody wants you here. Go away!" Nina's journey back home is also marked by a guilty conscience for not having been there for her father during his sickness. Her father had convinced her to stay in France because of the deterioration in the national situation. The opening of the novel depicts Nina as an outsider in the national crisis and her father as an old, tired, and disillusioned man with neither belief in more optimistic future prospects nor true agency to do something about the course of events. The first pages of the novel set the affective context for the narrative, which is marked by a sense of hopelessness, frustration, and alienation in the face of the national turmoil. While the father has obviously experienced more glorious days and enjoyed his life as a respected national figure, in the current situation he has lost his status and represents the ancient regime that is no longer in touch with reality. The father, a respected doctor, has been ousted from the competition for the position of minister of health for no obvious reason, and due to this sudden setback he has resorted to sorcery and owes great amounts of money to a witch doctor. In his late life, the father has confined himself within the domestic sphere, which indicates his retreat from the stage of the nationalist drama. Nina seems to have received this pessimism and sense of outsidership as a paternal legacy. Her unease is further intensified by her exilic distance. If, as a young man, Nina's father represented the post-independence period, with unrealistically optimistic expectations and future-oriented enthusiasm, and while his later sickness and desperate actions reflect the current state of the nation, Nina's situation is illustrative of the postcolony's lack of direction and its unanswered questions.

The father and the daughter both belong to the national elite, whose members, as Gikandi ("Between Roots" 29) points out, are "the major beneficiaries of the project of decolonization" and who later end up in western metropolises because of their scorn for the very nationalist project from which they have profited. While Nina and her family's relative privilege must be acknowledged, it is also obvious that, due to the instability caused by the national crisis, the security that the elite status entails is endangered. The threat of violence is present everywhere, and the fact that Nina is the daughter of a recently deceased national figure

only barely spares her from being interrogated about her reasons for being in the country. She also feels like an outsider because her primary link to the country has been her parents, who are now both dead. She feels unprepared to face the loss of her father and the national crisis, and when she is driven from the airport to her father's house, she wishes that her cousin "Hervé fasse demi-tour et qu'il l'emmène ailleurs, bien au-delà de cette terrible vérité qu'elle devait affronter" (22), "Hervé would do an about-turn and take her elsewhere, well beyond this awful truth that she had to face." She feels at home neither in her home country nor in the diaspora. In her father's house, Nina becomes completely aware of his absence and is overwhelmed by her memories. Significantly, the last conversation between father and daughter took place when Nina was waiting for her flight at an airport, in a public space "sans âme, où les gens se dispersaient aux quatre coins du monde" (24), "without soul where people disperse all around the world," expanding the scope of the novel from the merely national to the global. Her father, in contrast, speaks in a frail voice from a country in the grip of a violent crisis, with no hope in sight. The dislocated, upwardly mobile daughter and the disappointed, tired father represent two different poles of the postcolonial crisis: while the daughter has found more viable prospects for her future in diaspora, the father has become an embittered citizen who has witnessed the transformation of the political climate from high hopes into instability and violence, and he has taken the changes so personally that it seems that "c'est la guerre qui l'a brisé" (35), "it was the war that destroyed him."

As a result of her return, Nina's life becomes more tightly woven into the fabric of the local problems, and she becomes personally involved in the situation rather than being simply a distant observer whose main link to the local reality is the TV news. Nina feels powerless in the face of the chaotic situation, which seems to extend from the public realm to the privacy of familial and domestic life. Nina's relatives consider both their collective and personal setbacks as twists of fate that have to be tolerated. While for Nina this sort of attitude represents "un fatalisme dangereux" (32), "a dangerous fatalism," she nevertheless acknowledges the limits of the situation and asks herself whether she has

“une meilleure solution à proposer” (32), “a better solution to propose” and observes that, despite the crisis, most people simply wish to live their lives as normally as possible and that it is necessary to “trouver la force de continuer” (33), “find the strength to move on.” Later, Nina’s efforts to understand these viewpoints signal her willingness to engage in a dialogue with the realities beyond her own world of experience. In a sense, Nina’s relatives’ attitude to the national turmoil is of necessity more down-to-earth than Nina’s. Indeed, it soon becomes obvious that Nina’s failure to identify with the realities of the so-called common people is not solely the result of her geographical and cultural distance but also of her social class. On her visit to a poor Abidjanian suburb, Nina recognizes how privileged her elite childhood has been: “Nina réalisa combien elle méconnaissait son pays. Elle avait vécu dans un univers protégé, d’où elle avait fini par s’échapper, certes, mais seulement par l’éloignement” (40), “Nina realized how little she knew her country. She had lived in a protected universe, from which she had certainly managed to escape, but only through distance.” Nina’s diasporic privilege can also be seen in a discussion that she has with her former lover, Kangha. Kangha asks her whether she could stay for good, a question to which Nina’s quick response reads, “Mais pourquoi prendrais-je une telle décision ? . . . Cela n’a pas de sens, c’est le chaos ici” (101), “Why would I make such a decision? . . . There’d be no sense, it’s chaos here.” When Kangha goes on to state that there are people who stay and keep the country afloat despite the crisis, Nina’s words give expression to the possibility of choosing, an option not open to all of her fellow-citizens: “Il existe beaucoup d’autres pays plus accueillants. Pourquoi gâcher ma vie ici ?” (101), “There are many other more welcoming countries. Why waste my life here?” Kangha’s last words, “C’est une question à laquelle tu es la seule à pouvoir répondre” (101), “That is a question that you alone can answer,” leave Nina in a state of bewilderment. Later, when Kangha, contrary to his earlier statements, claims that living in Ivory Coast has become impossible for him and announces that he is emigrating to the United States, Nina is surprised and disappointed. Kangha’s decision obliges Nina to rethink her own position and affinities.

Toward the end of the novel, it seems that Nina has actually given Kangha's question some thought, since she does not reject the idea of returning as flatly as she has earlier. Nina's privilege of being able to choose whether to stay or leave is in contrast to her relatives' offspring, who also aspire to migrate in order to pursue more favorable opportunities in diaspora. Nina does not really express empathy or understanding for the aspiring émigrés and is reluctant to offer her help to facilitate their migratory endeavors: "Nina s'imaginait déjà à Paris, sa cousine sur les bras. Sa tante se faisait des illusions si elle comptait sur elle" (118), "Nina imagined herself back in Paris, the cousin under her wing. Her aunt was kidding herself if she counted on her." When her relatives start to put questions about emigration to Nina's brother, Amon, who resides in Canada, Nina feels uneasy and tries quickly to change the subject. These instances highlight the fact that leaving is a luxury that not everyone can afford, and that Nina, with her speculations about her potential return, embodies this privilege: "Si elle choississait de revenir, beaucoup de choses allaient devoir changer" (167), "If she chose to come back, many things would have to change." The novel displays an opposition between those who have to continue their lives despite the crisis and those who have the opportunity to leave or stay away from the country, including Nina, Nina's sister, their mother's French relatives, and Nina's Parisian boyfriend.

The loss of her parents and the situation of her former home country cause Nina to feel overwhelmed by sadness and evoke in her a sense of responsibility that she cannot possibly fulfill: "Sur quoi reposait à présent le futur de sa famille ? Sur ses épaules ?" (30), "On what did the future of her family hinge at the moment? Upon her shoulders?" This sense of powerlessness is an all-embracing feeling that defines Nina's relation to the national crisis and familial problems. The characters continuously articulate complex questions that comment on the political situation or concern the future. These questions remain merely rhetorical in nature and hence often unanswered. Unanswered questions recur throughout the novel. People find it hard to believe that they are actually living in a crisis, asking "Qui aurait pu croire que nous en serions encore là aujourd'hui ?" (40), "Who would have thought that we would still

be here today?" Just as Nina realizes that "[i]l y avait tant de questions sans réponse" (49), "there were so many questions without answer," her father previously found himself in a similar situation, overwhelmed by "des questions sur son avenir auxquelles il ne savait pas quoi répondre" (76), "questions concerning his future he did not know how to answer." While toward the end of the novel Nina gradually becomes reconciled with her childhood memories, a certain feeling of insecurity remains: "Quand les ceremonies seraient terminées, à quoi ressemblerait l'avenir?" (109), "Once the ceremonies are over, what shall the future look like?" Nina feels that her father has betrayed her by not showing her "la bonne direction" (113), "the good direction," although it seems that her father lost this direction earlier in life than she does. Despite several difficult, unanswered questions to which the narrative gives voice, it is also suggested that one cannot but move forward: "Il fallait aller de l'avant" (51). This message embodies the text's philosophy of survival and hope, which becomes evident especially in the latter part of the novel as Nina finally makes peace with her father's memory.

The feeling of powerlessness and the sense of deception closely connected with it are further intensified as the secrets of her father's private life start to unfold. Nina finds out that her father has a nine-year-old son, news that she finds particularly disturbing because her mother was still alive at the time of his birth. This creates a breach in the image of a stable family life and expands the distance between father and daughter. Nina feels that she has been duped by her father and that he has taken advantage of his position as the head of the family: "Cloîtré dans son rôle de patriarce, avouer l'existence de cet enfant l'aurait exposé au jugement de ses filles" (38), "Cloistered in his patriarchal role, confessing the existence of the child would have exposed him to his daughters' judgment." Soon it turns out that the nine-year-old son is not the father's only extramarital offspring but that there are also two other sons and a daughter. As new revelations emerge, Nina is obliged to revisit her childhood years, trying to recollect meaningful cues and her parents' potentially revealing silences. As a result of the revelations, family life seems to be as unstable as the country's situation, where "[p]ersonne n'est certain de quoi que ce soit" (35), "no one can be sure of anything" and where

chaos has become the central denominator. Nina feels that her paternal heritage consists of the need to solve several demanding familial and financial problems and that she is not the right person to find solutions to the trouble her father has left behind. As for the financial problems, it is interesting how pronouncedly the novel highlights the costs of different factors and services such as her father's employees' salaries, the prices of the funeral organizations, as well as her father's debts and the requests for money that he had received. The lists of the sums of money can be read as the text's way of directing the reader's attention to the crudely material side of existence. Moreover, the repeated calculations of CFA francs that Nina has to deal with seem to tie her more closely to her father's reality, and once she discovers her father's mounting debts, his authority starts to crumble in her eyes. Consequently, Nina is forced to see him as not only an uncritically loved and powerful father but also a human being with several weaknesses and faults. Significantly, the numbers that Nina counts refuse to expose their full meaning: "Les chiffres se moquaient d'elle, ne signifiaient rien. Il lui manquait trop d'éléments pour y voir clair" (111) "The numbers made fun of her; they meant nothing. Too many elements were missing in order to make sense." The ambiguity of the supposedly logical numbers is commensurate with the unpredictability of the familial and the national situation.

Besides her father's extramarital children, Nina also has a sister named Gabrielle, who left the family home in her teenage years under ambiguous circumstances, Nina becoming the "only child" of her parents. Gabrielle is Nina's parents' first, unwanted child, whom their mother tried to abort unsuccessfully. The figure of Gabrielle remains distant throughout the story, Nina's only contact to her being the sporadic and evasive e-mail replies Nina receives to the messages through which she tries to find out whether Gabrielle will be attending the funeral. In the end, Gabrielle does not participate in the funeral ceremonies, and it is not clear whether she has ever become aware of her other siblings. While a certain tension between the two sisters remains throughout the novel, Nina comes to terms with her sister's decision not to attend the funeral and acknowledges that Gabrielle has the freedom to celebrate their father's memory in her own personal way. Despite the earlier shock

caused by the revelations of her father's double life, Nina eventually gets to know the other four siblings and starts to see the value of having these "additional" brothers and sisters:

Ses frères et sœur lui donnaient des racines, la plantaient fermement dans la terre. Elle avait beau fouiller son esprit, elle ne trouvait pas assez d'outrage pour refuser cette nouvelle parenté. Elle qui croyait avoir tout perdu possédait à présent plus d'attaches qu'avant. *Etait-ce cela, l'héritage de son père ?* (170),

Her brothers and sister gave her roots, planted her firmly on the ground. Despite rummaging through her mind, she could not find enough of a sense of outrage to reject this new kinship. She who had thought everything was lost suddenly had more ties than before. Was this her father's legacy?

Another family member that remains somewhat distant in the novel is Nina's deceased mother, a Frenchwoman who moved to her husband's home country and became a composer. Nina feels that her mother has left many things unsaid, but she also looks up to her and her artistic heritage. Her mother, like Nina's father as a young man, embodies the early hopes of independence for a better future. She is a woman for whom independence meant that "[l]'avenir offrait l'espoir sur un plateau d'argent" (137) "[t]he future offered hope on a silver platter," but who, in due course, became disillusioned and isolated. While Nina misses her mother, she feels relieved that her mother did not have to see the current state of the country. She speculates on how her mother would have reacted in the face of the turmoil and believes that she "aurait lutté contre la destruction" (139) "would have fought against destruction" instead of leaving. In a sense, then, while Nina cannot possibly know what her mother's attitude to the crisis would have been, for Nina, she represents a sort of moral ideal.

The interweaving of the national and the familial becomes strikingly obvious in the funeral organizations. Because Nina's father was a prominent national figure, the funeral is not simply a private event. Nina is not enthusiastic about the attendance of the government representatives

at the funeral, but she is soon made to realize that the death of her father is not only a familial concern: “Kouadio, paix à son âme, nous appartient biologiquement, mais pas socialement. C’est une figure publique qui a beaucoup fait pour son pays” (27) “Kouadio, may he rest in peace, belongs to us biologically, but not socially. He’s a public figure who has done so much for his country.” Interestingly enough, the bureaucratic practices that normally belong to the realm of the official have also taken over the seemingly private funeral organizations, where committees with different functions and areas of responsibility are established by the family members themselves. From Nina’s perspective, the funeral arrangements proceed at a very slow pace, with several bureaucratic obstacles placed in their way. While the beginning and middle part of the novel are marked by Nina’s anxiety and frustration, in the latter part the overall tone becomes more understanding, not to say serene. Thus the novel conveys Nina’s coming to terms with her father and her orientation toward the future, despite all of the unanswered questions. Her father’s funeral represents the burial of the hopes which, from the perspective of the contemporary crisis, seem illusory and provides space for a more realistic way of conceiving the future in conjunction with the past, **acknowledging that colonial legacy with its violent power structures cannot be undone simply by gaining independence.** Further, the fact that toward the end of the novel Nina has also started to better understand the reality lived by her father and relatives signals her effort to engage in a dialogue with a world that is less familiar to her. Essentially, then, *Loin de mon père* articulates the idea that the nation is its people: in the words of Bill Ashcroft, there is a “distinction between a nation, which represent[s] people, and the nation-state, which represent[s] the political and administrative structures” (33). In both novels’ articulations of future vistas, it is this communal and affective dimension of nationhood as people that is being addressed.

My reading of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Loin de mon père* intertwines the national and the familial but also the global. Both novels adopt a cosmopolitan approach, by which I mean an awareness of what lies beyond the national. In a way, then, these texts inscribe the national crisis on a larger map, making it a global rather than simply a local

concern. The novels display somewhat problematic father-daughter relationships: whereas in *Purple Hibiscus* the central theme evolves in the context of violence and silence, *Loin de mon père* is preoccupied with betrayal and unanswered questions. The theme of silence and unanswered questions reflects the novels' general attitudes toward the future: while the continuing silence in *Purple Hibiscus* is somewhat discouraging, the questions in *Loin de mon père* signal at least a frail hope of change. In both novels, the postcolonial nation is in a state of crisis, and the daughters are left with a paternal legacy that does not really allow them to navigate toward a better future beyond paternal repression and betrayal. The privileged and protected lives of Kambili and Nina become exposed to the national crisis; Nina, especially, has to face the local realities during her return to her home country. Kambili, on the other hand, is a more passive character, utterly paralyzed by the traumatic father-daughter relation, observing the events around her from a certain distance.

The fathers in both novels are prominent national figures whose deaths could potentially provide their daughters with the possibility of claiming authority. In *Purple Hibiscus*, however, this does not occur: Kambili remains a marginal and powerless figure, a sort of passive bystander observing how her mother kills Papa and Jaja takes the blame for the murder. The violence that her father inflicts on Kambili does not really evoke in her any strong revolt or hatred; instead, Kambili remains awkwardly loyal to her father. Nina, on the other hand, is shocked by the revelations concerning her father's secret life, and it takes her some time to recover from her father's betrayal and to come to terms with his memory. Her father's death signifies for Nina a process of growth and reconciliation with her "fatherland," and she also becomes more aware of the challenges that people face in the national crisis. In both novels, the father figures experience a loss of authority: Nina's father through his betrayal, financial problems, and recourse to sorcery, and Kambili's father through his children's growing awareness that their familial life is not normal. While the ending of *Loin de mon père* points toward reconciliation and, in a very subtle manner, articulates a more hopeful vision of the future than *Purple Hibiscus*, it is nevertheless obvious that

in the crisis-ridden situation, the novel gives voice to disillusionment and articulates a sense of disbelief in the possibility of an unproblematic daughterly intervention. In other words, the father's death does not automatically mean that the daughter would claim the protagonist's role in the national narrative, although *Loin de mon père* does articulate such an aspiration.

In an article discussing the concept of nation and utopianism in postcolonial writing, Ashcroft argues that their relation is profoundly problematic (30). Ashcroft defines utopia as "a vision of possibility that affects the transformation of social life," and according to him, in contemporary postcolonial writing the utopian function is "always a form of hope that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state, because the concept [of the nation-state] represents disappointment and entrapment rather than liberation" (30). This hope that transcends the boundaries of nationhood, Ashcroft maintains, is also the case for postcolonial literary works that express "national concerns" (31). In effect, in Ashcroft's words, both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Loin de mon père* seem to be "work[ing] beneath, above or outside the concept of the nation-state" (31). In other words, these novels undertake a new attitude toward nationhood while remaining essentially interested in national issues: the future visions that they articulate are not in line with the logic of the nation-state but nor are they so with the transnational dimension. They are, in a way, equally shaped by the unease caused by the failures of the postcolonial nation-state and the unfulfilled hopes invested in diaspora.

Like self-sufficient nationalisms, in their own ways, both father figures shut out the outside world: Kambili's father wants to keep the world away from his home and rejects world views that differ from his own, while Nina's father escapes into traditions that, from Nina's viewpoint, seem regressive. Indeed, the father figures are far from true cosmopolitans: Kambili's Papa stands for a violent patriarchal nationalism that is unwilling to see beyond its own truths, while Nina's isolated and powerless father seems to be paralyzed by his country's and his own failures. In the end, Kambili and Nina are both daddy's girls but not in the same sense: while Kambili is condemned to stay in the shadow of her violent Papa, Nina reconnects with her father in a way that could actually be

considered empowering. Neither of the novels, however, envisages an easy leap into a better future: the daughters are left with disturbing paternal legacies and so are the nations.

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