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Representing Missions: Christianity and Colonialism in
Fiction by Joyce Cary, Elspeth Huxley,
Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o

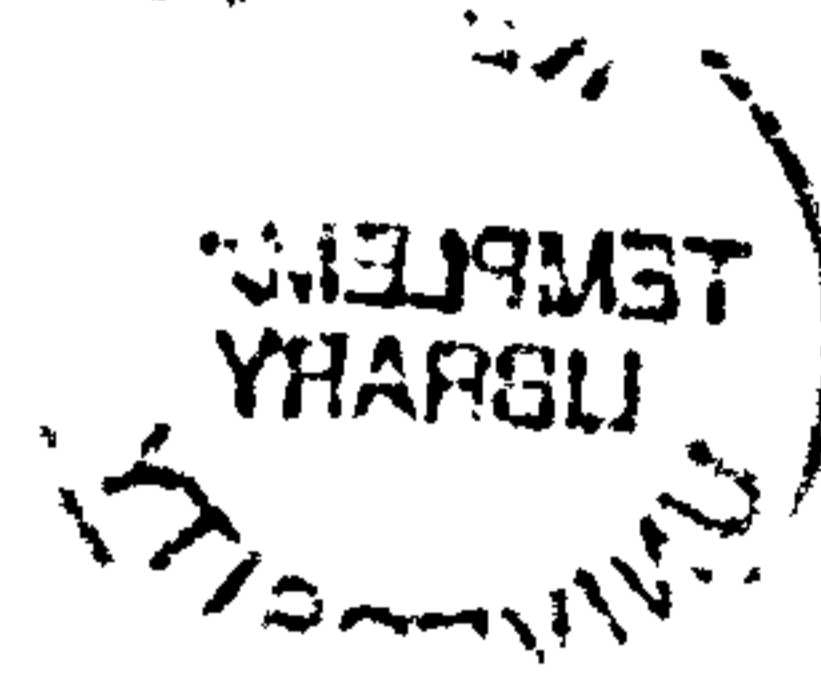
A thesis submitted to
the School of English, Faculty of Humanities
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in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

William F. Purcell

September, 2003



'Abstract'

Missionaries and Christian characters have frequently played significant roles in fiction related to the colonial encounter in Africa. This thesis focuses specifically on four writers--Joyce Cary, Elspeth Huxley, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o--representing both sides of the colonial divide in Nigeria and Kenya, whose fiction deals rather closely with Christian mission.

Chapter one discusses missionary activity from a historical and missiological point of view, with reference to missionary writing from the period of the early twentieth century. Chapters two and three discuss three African novels of Joyce Cary, a colonial officer-turned-novelist. Cary's novels depend on missions and missionaries for the source of their dramatic tensions while exploring Cary's ideas regarding the aims and objectives of the colonial project. Chapters four and five examine three novels by the London-born journalist and broadcaster Elspeth Huxley, who was raised on a settler farm in Kenya. In these Huxley uses Christianity and missions to highlight and contrast her estimate of the relative levels of 'civilization' achieved by Europeans and Africans and in the process seeks to justify the aims of the colonial project. Chapters six and seven focus on two novels by Chinua Achebe, son of an early convert and prominent Igbo catechist in Nigeria. Achebe's novels examine the religious and cultural consequences for Africans arising from the collision of Christianity with traditional beliefs and practices. Finally, chapters eight and nine examine four novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Gikuyu-Kenyan writer, critic, and cultural theorist. In Ngugi's early novels Christianity and missions are increasingly depicted as agents of a colonial ideology that undermines the confidence and stability of local cultures, and in his later novels as willing instruments of capitalist, colonial, and neo-colonial oppression.

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The interest underlying this thesis would probably never have developed had it not been for my parents, Florence and William Purcell. As good Catholics they conscientiously raised me in our own faith while also teaching me to respect the faith of others, which bred in me a curiosity about how others experience God.

My greatest debt of gratitude belongs to my wife, Rumi, without whose support, encouragement, and cooperation I would never have been able to complete this project. She listened patiently when I needed to rant, encouraged me when the going got tough, and made it possible for me to concentrate by taking on more than her share of responsibility for our family--including giving birth to our children Emily and Kenta during the time I was working on this thesis--while also pursuing her own career.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Mission in Theory and Practice	9
Chapter Two: Joyce Cary (1): Belief, Freedom, and the Colonial Project	39
Introduction	39
Cary's Religious Beliefs	42
Cary on Africa and Africans	48
Cary and the Colonial Project	56
Chapter Three: Joyce Cary (2): Failed Missions: Christianity and the Civilizing Mission in Joyce Cary's African Novels	61
Introduction	61
Cary's Africans	64
Primitive versus Christian Juju: <u>Aissa Saved</u>	68
Fatalism and Ignorance: <u>An American Visitor</u>	80
Mission Education and Colonial Policy: <u>The African Witch</u>	92
Chapter Four: Elspeth Huxley (1): Christianity and the Civilizing Mission to the Black Man in 'White Man's Country'	107
Introduction	107
Huxley's Background	108
Huxley on Africa and Africans, the Church, and the Colonial Project	110
Colonialism, Christianity, and the Civilizing Mission: <u>Red Strangers</u>	120
Chapter Five: Elspeth Huxley (2): Christian Missions and African Nationalism in <u>The Walled City</u> and <u>A Thing to Love</u>	136
Introduction	136
The Revolt of the Prodigal Son: <u>The Walled City</u>	141
Christianity and 'Mau Mau': <u>A Thing to Love</u>	153

Chapter Six: Chinua Achebe (1): Colonialism and the Cultural Impact of Missions	169
Introduction	169
Achebe's Background	170
Accommodation versus Contextualization	175
Beginnings: "Dead Man's Path"	178
Missionary Ethnocentrism and Accommodation: <u>Things Fall Apart</u>	181
Chapter Seven: Chinua Achebe (2): <u>Arrow of God</u> : Achebe's Failure of Nerve	201
Chapter Eight: Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1): Mission Christianity and Cultural Imperialism in <u>The River Between</u> and <u>Weep Not, Child</u>	224
Introduction	224
Ngugi's Background	226
Beginnings: "The Village Priest"	230
Community, Christianity, Colonialism: <u>The River Between</u>	233
Colonialism and Mission Education: <u>Weep Not, Child</u>	249
Chapter Nine: Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2): Revolution and Reaction: Christianity and Mission in <u>A Grain of Wheat</u> and <u>Petals of Blood</u>	263
Introduction	263
Christianity, Resistance, and Collaboration: <u>A Grain of Wheat</u>	266
Christianity and Neocolonialism: <u>Petals of Blood</u>	286
Conclusion	313
Works Cited	320

Introduction

In a 1976 article Robert Strayer described three general trends in African mission historiography. The first formal examinations of mission activity, he said, were "initiated by missionaries and their supporters and gave rise to what might be called the metropolitan-ecclesiastical school of mission history."¹ Typical of these were portions of Eugene Stock's four-volume History of the Church Missionary Society² and Kenneth Latourette's seven-volume History of the Expansion of Christianity,³ C. P. Groves's four-volume The Planting of Christianity in Africa,⁴ and parts of Stephen Neill's more recent Colonialism and Christian Missions.⁵ These focused on efforts to plant Christianity in Africa while providing accounts of the heroic efforts and adventures of individual missionaries. Such narratives tended to parallel and resemble contemporary European accounts of colonial history, "which saw Africa as a stage on which Europeans of all kinds played out their interests and their fantasies."⁶

In the 1950s and 1960s, during the period of accelerating decolonization, an emerging "nationalist perspective" in African historiography took exception to this trend. In tune with a newer emphasis on "African initiative", these historians "began to probe the ways in which African perceptions and reactions conditioned the pattern of mission expansion, the extent to which evangelization was an accomplishment of African catechists

¹Robert Strayer, "Mission History in Africa: New Perspectives on an Encounter," African Studies Review 19.1 (1976): 1.

²Eugene Stock, The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work, 4 vols. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899-1916).

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, 7 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937-45).

⁴C. P. Groves, The Planting of Christianity in Africa, 4 vols. (London: Lutterworth, 1948-1958).

⁵Stephen Neill, Colonialism and Christian Missions (London: Lutterworth, 1966).

⁶Strayer: 1.

rather than European missionaries, and the kinds of protests that were generated against mission policy and attitudes."⁷ Among these were J. F. A. Ajayi's Christian Missions in Nigeria,⁸ E. A. Ayandele's Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria,⁹ A. J. Temu's British Protestant Missions,¹⁰ and indirectly research by Western scholars such as Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham¹¹ and Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale.¹² These historians, Strayer says, took pains to counter the "pious pretensions" of earlier accounts; they "delighted in showing that missionaries were no less racist than other Europeans and that they were intimately linked to imperial pressures and colonial governments"; and, finally, they emphasized the extent to which missionary activity had adversely affected traditional life "by undermining the cultural self-confidence of their converts and by generating an educated and modernizing elite which eventually brought down the colonial system that had spawned them."¹³ Writing a few years later, Norman Etherington similarly noted this trend, adding that to some of these historians "the missionaries deserved more opprobrium even than the white settler or mining magnate. The latter merely wanted the African's lands and labour. Missionaries wanted their souls."¹⁴

The third trend Strayer notes is a more recent interest in African religious history, which in turn gave rise to "new modes of inquiry into mission history."¹⁵

⁷Strayer 1.

⁸J. F. A. Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

⁹E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1966).

¹⁰A. J. Temu, British Protestant Missions (London: Longman, 1972).

¹¹See, for example, Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966).

¹²Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa (London: James Currey, 1992).

¹³Strayer 1.

¹⁴Norman Etherington, "Missionaries and the Intellectual History of Africa: A Historical Survey," Itinerario 7.2 (1983): 117.

¹⁵Strayer 2.

Historians, he contends, had "only very recently . . . acted on the assumption that African religious systems may in fact have changed significantly over time", and this, in turn, stimulated interest in "the idea of examining mission-African interaction at the level of symbol, ritual, myth, and theology--in brief, at the level of religious encounter."¹⁶ These thinkers include such people as Lamin Sanneh,¹⁷ J. Kofi Agbeti,¹⁸ and O. A. Kalu.¹⁹ This trend, while not a return to the "pious pretensions" of the earlier historiographies, nevertheless represents a departure from--and a challenge to--many of the assumptions of the nationalist views. First, it recognizes an African interest in Christianity as religion, giving some credence to missionary assumptions of the power and value of Christian beliefs. Consequently, it also calls into question the prevailing nationalist assumption that "religious exchange was unlikely to occur without being stimulated by some ulterior motive"²⁰--namely the frequently-repeated claim by some nationalists that African interest in Christianity was directly, and some would say exclusively, tied to the political and material advantages it provided in pre-colonial trade contact and later in colonial society.

Our present concern is with fictional representations of Christianity and Christian mission, not historiography. Nevertheless, Strayer's and Etherington's observations do have significance for our purposes. History and fiction are both forms of narrative. The writer of fiction and the writer of historiography operate under different constraints, but both are affected by varying factors such

¹⁶Strayer 2.

¹⁷Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983); Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Process: The African Dimension (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

¹⁸J. Kofi Agbeti, West African Church History, 2 vols., (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

¹⁹O. A. Kalu, ed., The History of Christianity in West Africa (London: Longman) 1980.

²⁰Strayer 2.

as personal motivation, academic or artistic interest, ideology, political perspective, 'personal' experience-- including the 'historic' experience of those with whom one identifies--, gender, and religious belief and perspective or a lack thereof. For both the writer of fiction and the writer of history these factors mold and inform his or her choices of material; they accent, highlight and nuance the representations of the subject; they politicize the presentation and interpretation of the events being related, whether fictional or historical.

Strayer's observations are valid for the novelist as well as the historian. The earliest representations of mission were produced, if not by missionaries themselves, by Europeans dramatizing--and often romanticizing--the colonial adventure in Africa. Their representations frequently reflected the colonialist ideology of their world. Ellen Thorp,²¹ for example, draws on missionary memoirs to spin her romance about the founding of the CMS Yoruba mission. For Elspeth Huxley,²² as well, the European represents civilization and development, the African at times a Rousseauesque 'noble savage' and at others a figure of debased brutality. The European has a mission to elevate the African by imparting the fruits of Western civilization, the crowning point of which is Christianity. This same romanticized view is picked up in other writers like Esther S. Warner,²³ Louise Stinetorf,²⁴ and Charles Mercer,²⁵ among many others. Even less-than-complimentary

²¹Ellen Thorp, Swelling of Jordan (London: Lutterworth, 1950). Martin Tucker (Africa in Modern Fiction: A Survey of Contemporary Writing in English [New York: Frederick Unger Publishing, 1967] 59) notes that Thorp drew her material from Seventeen Years in Yoruba Country, the memoirs of Ann Hinderer, wife of the first CMS volunteer to the Ibadan mission.

²²Elspeth Huxley, Red Strangers (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939); The Walled City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948); A Thing to Love (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954).

²³Esther S. Warner, Seven Days to Lomaland (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1954); The Silk-Cotton Tree (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958).

²⁴Louise A. Stinetorf, White Witch Doctor (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950); Beyond the Hungry Country (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1954).

²⁵Charles Mercer, Rachael Cade (London: Collins, 1957).

representations of mission, such as those proffered by Joyce Cary,²⁶ depict the missionary as a well-meaning though misguided idealist sacrificing everything in order to bring the blessings of civilization to the debased African.

The period of growing nationalism and decolonization in Africa often produced representations of mission as an extension of colonial power. Mongo Beti's most unChristian Reverend Father Superior Drumont,²⁷ who uses threats of eternal damnation to exact tithes from his poor and often intimidated parishioners, is one such example. For writers like William Conton²⁸ and Onoura Nzekwu²⁹ the mission and mission education becomes an instrument for indoctrination into a colonial ideology that leads to alienation from the African's own culture. Even more representative of this sort of nationalist perspective is the fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Drawing on historic events and historic figures, in his earlier fiction³⁰ Ngugi uses missionaries and mission activity to dramatize the colonial clash in Africa. His European missionaries embody a complex mix of (overt or latent) racism, ethnocentricity, and often well-intentioned paternalism that so frequently characterized early missionary efforts. His African converts typically represent the spiritually and culturally colonized who have capitulated to the white man's demonization of traditional culture by rejecting their African past--including, often, their names--and all of its practices and traditions. In

²⁶Joyce Cary, Aissa Saved, 1932 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); An American Visitor, 1933 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961); The African Witch, 1936 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

²⁷Mongo Beti, The Poor Christ of Bomba, 1956, trans. Gerald Moore (Oxford: Heinemann, 1971).

²⁸William Conton, The African, 1960 (London: Heinemann, 1966).

²⁹Onoura Nzekwu, Blade Among the Boys, 1962 (London: Heinemann, 1972).

³⁰Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, 1965 (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994); Weep Not, Child, 1964 (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987); A Grain of Wheat, 1967 (London: Heinemann, 1968). The River Between, Weep Not, Child, and A Grain of Wheat were all originally published under the name James Ngugi. Further, A Grain of Wheat was later significantly revised and reissued in 1986.

his later fiction,³¹ as his commitment to Marxism deepened alongside his rapidly increasing disillusionment with the policies of the post-independence government, Christianity becomes an instrument of neocolonialist subversion and control oppressing the peasantry and proletariat.

Occasionally Strayer's third trend, namely the interest in the religious encounter between Christianity and traditional beliefs, also makes its appearance among fiction writers. Timothy Aluko, John Munonye, Kenjo Jumbam, and Chinua Achebe are all good examples of this. Aluko³² and Munonye³³ explore such thorny issues as polygamy and question why traditional structures of family and marriage are inconsistent with the Christian Gospel. Jumbam³⁴ as well, writing from the perspective of faith questions why Christianity and traditional practices cannot complement and nourish each other while imagining the forms a truly contextualized Christianity might take. Achebe's³⁵ fiction in turn is more complex, as are his representations of mission. His narratives are nationalistic in the sense that he often dramatizes the colonial struggle through the cultural clash of Christianity and African traditional religion. Yet at the same time his representations also dramatize the mission-African encounter as a religious encounter. On the one hand they explore the inadequacy of traditional religion that Christianity was able to address. On the other they raise the issue of Christianity's failure to contextualize itself into a truly African religion.

This study focuses specifically on four writers, representing both sides of the colonial divide in Nigeria and Kenya, whose fiction deals rather closely with the Christian mission in Africa. The African novels of Joyce

³¹Ngugi, Petals of Blood, 1977 (Oxford: Heinemann, 1986); Devil on the Cross, 1982, trans. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987); Matigari, 1987, trans. Wangui wa Goro (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990).

³²T. M. Aluko, One Man, One Wife, 1959 (London: Heinemann, 1967).

³³John Munonye, Obi (London: Heinemann, 1969).

³⁴Kenjo Jumbam, The White Man of God (London: Heinemann, 1980).

³⁵Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, 1958 (London: Heinemann, 1996); Arrow of God (London: Heinemann, 1964).

Cary (1888-1957), a colonial officer-turned-novelist whose fiction initially received positive critical assessment as 'realistic', depend on missions and missionaries for the source of their dramatic tensions while exploring Cary's ideas regarding the aims and objectives of the colonial project. The London-born journalist and broadcaster Elspeth Huxley (1906-1997), who was raised on a settler farm in Kenya, uses Christianity and missions to highlight and contrast her estimate of the relative levels of 'civilization' achieved by Europeans and Africans and in the process seeks to justify the aims and even the necessity for the colonial project. Chinua Achebe (b. 1930), son of an early convert and prominent Igbo catechist in Nigeria, in several of his novels examines the religious and cultural consequences for the African people arising from the arrival of Christianity and its collision with traditional beliefs and practices. Finally for Ngugi wa Thiong'o (b. 1938), a Marxist-leaning Gikuyu-Kenyan writer, critic, and cultural theorist, Christianity and missions are increasingly depicted as agents of a colonialist ideology that undermines the confidence and stability of local cultures, and in his later novels as willing instruments of colonial and neo-colonial oppression.

Each of these writers will be considered in light of his or her individual circumstances as well as the prevailing historic circumstances surrounding their writing. This will include their individual backgrounds and experiences as well as the ideological, cultural, and religious beliefs that have shaped their perceptions of Christianity and missions. I will also discuss their writing against mission history and missiological theology. While individual characters may be creations of an author's imagination, missionaries and mission activity are an historic reality. Like many characters drawn from historic figures or types, fictional missionaries often resist authentic representation. This is because missionaries are

usually motivated by a cause or a call to action that is beyond the fiction writer's personal realm of experience. It is easy, for example, for Ngugi to represent in the revised version of A Grain of Wheat Revivalist Rev. Jackson Kigonde as a quisling who "was doing in the churches" the same thing that the King's African Rifles--the armed wing of colonialism--"had been doing on the battlefield."³⁶ That representation, however, is quite at odds with the reality of the Revivalist movement whose 'plague-upon-both-your-houses' attitude towards the 'Mau Mau' uprising and its suppression frequently left them suspected and targeted by both sides in the conflict.³⁷ It is likewise just as easy for Joyce Cary to highlight the mistrust and even haughtiness that often characterized missionary attitudes towards the colonial authority. That, however, did not prevent them from cooperating with colonial authority when it was to the advantage of their cause. It is therefore necessary to delve into the motivation of missionaries, into their attitudes towards indigenous cultures and religions, into their understanding of the Gospel and its relation to European culture in order to better understand the role of missionaries in the colonial project. This will then enable us to identify the gaps between 'real-life' missionaries--with all of their human failings--and their fictional counterparts.

³⁶Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1986) 220.

³⁷See F. B. Welbourn, East African Rebels (London: SCM Press, 1961) 10ff.

Chapter One

Missions in Theory and Practice

Writing in 1966 Stephen Neill lamented that it had become the accepted wisdom of the age to view missionaries as "tools of government" and missions as "instruments of western infiltration and control" in the colonial enterprise.¹ Neill has not been alone in his lament. More recently Brian Stanley also described assertions of conscious collaboration between missionary and colonial authority as "one of the unquestioned orthodoxies of general historical knowledge" which no amount of specialized monograph production by academic historians is likely to affect.² The obvious fact that there has been a close relationship between Christian missionary activity and the extension of colonial authority is not at issue with these scholars. Rather, they are questioning the assumption that the relationship between the two has been organic and that whatever collaboration occurred was the result of a conscious conspiracy.

The view of religion, and more specifically Christianity, as an instrument of control and oppression is not new. In the nineteenth century Marx had suggested that religion was the opiate of the masses, meaning that like a drug it provided a means of temporary relief for the proletariat from class oppression and exploitation. During the period of nationalist struggle against colonial exploitation Marx's observations were given a new meaning by the ideologists of anti-colonial liberation movements. Frantz Fanon in particular indicted the Christian church as a tool of colonial oppression that "does not call the native to

¹Stephen Neill, Colonialism and Christianity (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966) 12.

²Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Leicester: Apollos, 1990) 12.

God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor."³ In his analysis of the psychology and mechanics of colonialism Fanon correctly pointed to the cultural and racial assumptions of superiority and native inferiority underlying colonialist ideologies. He demonstrated how these assumptions permeated every aspect of colonial culture, how they were integrated and reinforced so that every aspect of the colonizer's culture became a potential, and sometimes unconscious, tool of colonialism. Religion in particular, as one of Althusser's ideological state apparatuses,⁴ was at times a particularly potent weapon. The lessons of forgiveness and of the saint who turns the other cheek, Fanon said, became a salve used by a "colonialist bourgeoisie" to aid "in its work of calming down the natives" and making them governable.⁵ But then he took a step beyond noting unconscious cooperation between church and colonial state, citing what he said were examples of "coordinated" efforts by police and missionaries in pre-Emergency Kenya and in Congo to isolate potential troublemakers who posed a threat to the colonial order into resettlement camps "under the charge of evangelical missionaries"⁶ where, presumably, the church could redouble its efforts to pacify them into submission. That the Church clearly saw the so-called 'Mau Mau' fighters as part of a "diabolical movement"⁷ led by savage recidivists, that it generally sided with and supported the colonial authority's 'anti-terrorism' policies,⁸ that it discouraged its

³Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1961, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967) 32.

⁴See Louis Althusser, "Selected Texts," Ideology, ed. Terry Eagleton (London: Longman, 1994) 89-92.

⁵Fanon 52.

⁶Fanon 103.

⁷Leonard J Beecher, Anglican Bishop of Mombassa. Quoted in "Kikuyu Christians' Steadfastness," Times, 25 Nov. 1953: 7.

⁸In 1952, for example, during a Parliamentary debate the Archbishop of York defended the need for tough measures against the insurgents, while urging that care be taken to protect the innocent. (See "Collective

membership from aiding or supporting the rebels,⁹ and that its cooperation with the colonial authority included active Church involvement in the 'rehabilitation' camps¹⁰ are all facts beyond dispute. However, any assertion that the aim of the Church and its missionaries was to pacify the Africans so as to facilitate the continuation of colonial exploitation is not.

Fanon's ideas have become a manifesto for the nationalist liberation movements. They have also spawned among postcolonial scholars and critics a similar condemnation of the Church as a willing co-conspirator in the colonial project. Following Fanon's lead, for example, A. J. Temu asserted in 1972 that the primary purpose of mission schools in East Africa was production of subjects "loyal to the colonial administration and to the ideology of the missions".¹¹ In the same work he also suggested a conspiracy between settler and missionary, asserting that the curriculum of the mission schools was deliberately designed to keep the African at a disadvantage, leaving them unqualified for "any other jobs except as manual workers and unskilled artisans", which would have "permanently placed them in an inferior position and . . . would have ensured that they remained

Punishment in Kenya Defended," Times, 27 Nov. 1952: 5.) Also, in 1955 the Christian Council of Kenya announced an appeal to raise funds for housing refugees, training youth leaders and rehabilitation officers for the camps and village elders in the new relocation villages. (See "50,000 to Help Kikuyu," Times 18 Feb. 1955: 4.)

Although the Church maintained its position that the freedom fighters were the worse of two evils, throughout the Emergency it continued to vigorously protest government abuses, as is demonstrated by the joint statement issued in the name of the Christian Council of Kenya, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, and the CMS. See "Missionary's Visit to Kikuyu," Times 10 Feb. 1953: 3; "Responsibility for Mau Mau," Times 4 Dec. 1953: 8.

⁹For example, Catholic Bishop Carle Cavelera, Apostolic Vicar at Nyeri, threatened to excommunicate anyone supporting Mau Mau ("Crime in Kenya," Times, 28 Aug. 1952: 3).

¹⁰Numerous articles from the period document and describe Church involvement in the camps. In a 1954 article, for instance, Frank Bouverie ("Mau Maus and Christians," Modern Churchman 44: 86-90) described in part church involvement at the Athi River Camp and other Rift Valley camps.

¹¹A. J. Temu, British Protestant Missions (London: Longman, 1972) 9.

second rate citizens as the settlers wanted them to."¹² Gideon Were in the meanwhile has called missionaries in Kenya "skillful robbers" who lived hypocritically, preaching love and equality to Africans but not practising these virtues themselves.¹³ Specifically he accuses them of collecting money from the poor and spending it on lavish living.¹⁴ Among literary scholars as well we find people like Harish Narang, who echoes Temu's claims of a mission education consciously designed to perpetuate a system of exploitation by reinforcing notions of European economic, political, cultural and ideological superiority.¹⁵ Ngugi, too, in his essays and lectures has repeatedly attacked the Church as the "religious ally" of colonialism,¹⁶ numbering missionaries among the "members of the religious, intellectual and spiritual armies of imperialism,"¹⁷ and accusing them of promoting "white racist lies"¹⁸ which were "meant to lead us . . . to paths of self-doubt and self-hatred and to indecisive postures before our enemies."¹⁹

The difficulty with these consciously nationalist historiographies, and the nationalist reading practices they encourage, is not that they are politicized. All writing is, after all, politicized. It is, rather, that too often ideology is allowed to dictate representations at the expense of truth--a claim that may be equally made of other modes of

¹²Temu 150.

¹³Gideon S. Were, "Politics, Religion and Nationalism in Western Kenya, 1942-1962: Dini Ya Msambwa Revisited," Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya, ed. Bethwell A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972) 87.

¹⁴Were 88.

¹⁵Harish Narang, Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995) 24-5.

¹⁶Ngugi, Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann, 1972) 31.

¹⁷Ngugi, Writers in Politics: Essays (London: Heinemann, 1981) 11-12.

¹⁸Ngugi, Writers 14.

¹⁹Ngugi, Writers 37.

representation as well.²⁰ In the present area of discussion, for example, the difficulty I find with such practices is not that they condemn missionaries for their ethnocentrism, or dramatize and highlight the negative impact their activities have had on indigenous cultures and societies, or even expose the role missions played in the extension of colonial authority. Rather, my difficulty lies with the willfully sinister and collusive motives assigned to missionaries, implying and at times asserting outright that missionary intentions and objectives were primarily--or even exclusively--in facilitating the extension and maintenance of colonial power and the exploitation of indigenous peoples. Such assignations, to borrow a phrase from Edward Said, are "less objectively true than we often like to think."²¹ They ignore men like Walter Owen, John White, Arthur Cripps, and later Donal Lamont. Archdeacon Owen, known to the Kenyan settlers as "the Archdemon", was outspoken in his opposition to settlement and to legislation aimed at reducing Africans to subservience,²² and was instrumental in organizing African self-help associations.²³ White, in turn, reminded his colleagues at the 1926 Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference that the Christian message is "revolutionary", and its rightful place was on the side of African aspirations.²⁴ Cripps, whose total solidarity with the Mashona people earned him the appellation "God's irregular" from his biographer,²⁵

²⁰Fanon's analysis of colonialist ideology clearly demonstrates the ideological necessity to at times falsify representations of the native in order to justify the colonial project. Others, most notably Edward Said, have built upon the foundation Fanon laid, exploring and exploding the myths of Europe and its 'Other' upon which the justifications for colonialism were constructed.

²¹Edward W. Said, Orientalism, 1978 (London: Penguin, 1995) 202.

²²John Lonsdale, "Mission Christianity & Settler Colonialism in East Africa," Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle, ed. Christian Missions & the State in the Third World (Oxford: James Currey, 2002) 201.

²³Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) 90-91.

²⁴Quoted in Lonsdale 204.

²⁵For details of Cripps' life, see Douglas V. Steere, God's Irregular: Arthur Shearly Cripps (London: SPCK, 1973).

was horrified by the racist South African state and campaigned for African "self-determination", "self-development", and "self-government", free of European interference.²⁶ Lamont, in turn, first earned the ire of the Rhodesian government for his 1959 pastoral instruction, which condemned its racial policies as a perversion of civilization.²⁷ Eventually he was detained, tried, and expelled by the regime for supporting 'terrorists.'²⁸ It would, of course, be naive to suggest that these men represent the majority of missionaries, for there were also missionaries who fit the nationalist image. But neither were they isolated anomalies. Consequently, by their existence they contradict the blanket assertions of Temu, Were, Ngugi and other nationalist writers of the left.

This does not suggest that African perceptions are necessarily invalid. Such knowledge has its own validity. Particularly for the oppressed, it matters little what the intentions of those perceived in league with the oppressor may be. However, as Said suggests, for the discriminating academic, intellectual, or artist, certain types of knowledge tend to become privileged over others, depending on how they conform to or support specific ideological or discursive assumptions and objectives.²⁹ With time they acquire an authority all their own because they 'seem' correct.³⁰ And as

²⁶Arthur S. Cripps, An Africa for Africans: A Plea on Behalf of Territorial Segregation Areas and of their Freedom in a South African Colony, 1927 (New York: Negro University Press, 1969) 63. Cripps was essentially championing a form of apartheid "based on a fair dividing up of Land Areas" (63-64), though once he understood this could be subverted oppressively in the settlers favor, he reversed himself (Steere 119-120).

²⁷See Donal Lamont, "Purchased People: Pastoral Instruction of the Right Reverend Donal Raymond Lamont, O.Carm., Bishop of Umtali, 29 June 1959," Irish Province of the Order of Carmelites, http://www.carmelites.ie/Zimbabwe/purchasedpeople_text.htm, 21 Dec. 2002.

²⁸For a detailed account see Lamont, Speech from the Dock (Leigh-on-Sea, Essex: Kevin Mayhew Ltd., 1977).

²⁹Said 202.

³⁰Aijaz Ahmad (In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures [London: Verso, 1992] 183-184) points out that the privileging of one's own culture and the reciprocal essentializing, stereotyping, and denigrating of the 'other' that Said attributes to 'Orientalism' is not unique to

we shall see, the gap between missionary intentions and the consequences of their actions often contributed to reinforcing these perceptions.

For this present study I feel it is necessary and helpful to begin with an overview of mission from a missiological point of view. If we are to better understand the role of missionaries in the colonial project, the images they projected, and the fictional representations their activities have inspired it is essential to know something of the beliefs and assumptions they held regarding religion, culture, and the aims of the missionary enterprise. It is, as well, necessary to put those beliefs and assumptions into some sort of theoretical framework.

The purpose of missionary activity ultimately is to bring about cultural change. Religion is an integral part of culture. While it can be thought of on one hand as a set of individual beliefs about God and a set of practices of worship, as Ajayi points out religion is also "an affair of the community so intimately bound up with its way of life that a change of religion necessarily involves a change of culture".³¹ Cultures are constantly in contact and adapting to the conditions in which they find themselves. New information, new input, new ideas are imported and invariably result in change. Looked at in terms of cultural interaction, the preaching of the Gospel amounts to the injection of new ideas into a culture. Its preaching therefore cannot be done in a way that will leave a culture unchanged. As Robert Schreiter said, "if the culture does not change, the Gospel

Europe. Rather, it has been repeated continuously through the ages and in various parts of the world. He also criticizes Said's strict Foucauldian-Nietzschean praxis, which precludes entirely the possibility of true statements and true representations (193). I agree with Ahmad regarding the possibility of transcending discursive limitations to arrive at true statements and representations. Nevertheless, his criticism does not negate Said's observations about the power of discourse to shape representations. Indeed, the privileged position of Marxism throughout his text (e.g. 166, 170) is a testimony to it.

³¹Ajayi, 1.

has not been preached!"³² Change is unavoidable. The challenge of the Gospel message itself is "a call to metanoia, to turning one's mind around."³³ The type of change we are talking about is at the most profound level, at the very core of culture.³⁴ It is not simply a change at the surface level of a particular practice or habit, though it may in fact be reflected at this level. It is, rather, a change in the very assumptions that the culture makes regarding the nature of the world and humankind, and the individual's place in it. The question for the missionary is not one of whether change is desirable. Rather, the question is what sort of change is desirable and to be encouraged, what is consistent with the Gospel. This, in turn, implies other issues. Chief among these are the questions of who is responsible for deciding what does and does not constitute valid expressions of the Gospel message; who has the authority to interpret it; whose responsibility is it to direct and facilitate change. The answers to these, in turn, are dictated by the particular mission models guiding the messengers.

Louis Luzbetak describes mission models as "postulates, inferences, and systems of motivations employed for guidance and imitation in carrying out the worldwide task of the

³²Robert J. Schreiter, The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 71.

³³Schreiter 71.

³⁴Louis J. Luzbetak (The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995] 74-8) defines three levels of culture: 1) the surface level of forms--the artifacts, symbols, gestures, and the like--divorced of their meaning; 2) the middle level of functions, which includes the meanings, the logic, and the purposefulness of the forms; and 3) the psychology of a society--"the basic assumptions, values, and drives, that is, the starting-points in reasoning, reacting, and motivating" (75), which systematically integrates the forms of culture and holds them together.

Lauriston Sharp's well-known 1952 study of the stone axe in Australia's Yir Yoront aboriginal society and the upheaval brought about by missionary introduction of the steel axe is a classic example of both the three levels of culture, the integrated nature of culture, and the potential consequences of careless and uninformed interference. See Lauriston Sharp, "Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians," Human Organization, 11:2 (1952): 17-22.

Church."³⁵ In the nearly two thousand year history of Christian mission activity there have been countless models, which he says might be placed into one of three major categories depending whether the dominant traits would reveal an ethnocentric, an accommodational, or a contextual orientation.

Ethnocentrism, simply put, is a tendency "to regard the ways and values of one's own society as the normal, right, proper, and certainly the best way of thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing things".³⁶ Ethnocentrism exists to some degree in all of us, varying mostly in its intensity. It can manifest itself as a minor excess in preference or apathy regarding such things as culinary taste or perhaps group pride and loyalty. In more extreme instances it might turn into xenophobia, cultural chauvinism or imperialism, or lead even to genocide. Ethnocentrism may also occur at different levels. It may occur at the supracultural level, underpinning the Orientalist-Occidentalists' conceptions of European and Islamic civilization, which is responsible for much of the misunderstanding, tension, and violence between the Euro-Christian and Islamic worlds. Or it may occur at the national level, producing the sort of extreme racist nationalism that resulted in such depravities as twentieth-century German or Japanese militarism. It might also occur at the subcultural level, turning into cultic rivalry within a national or ethnic group. One need only think of Roman Catholic and Protestant sectarianism in Ireland, or rivalries between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, or between Christian and traditionalist in some of the African communities.

Ethnocentrism may also express itself in different forms, the most common Luzbetak says being racism, triumphalism, and

³⁵Luzbetak 64. *The Church in the World*, p. 145. *Contextual Clarification* (see Luzbetak 64). It is probably a slight overstatement to say that the Church has been in the world since the beginning of time, but it is true that the Church has been in the world since the beginning of time.

³⁶Luzbetak 65. *The Church in the World*, p. 145. *Contextual Clarification* (see Luzbetak 65). It is probably a slight overstatement to say that the Church has been in the world since the beginning of time, but it is true that the Church has been in the world since the beginning of time.

paternalism.³⁷ At all levels and in all of its varieties ethnocentrism can have damaging--and damning--implications for missionary activity.

Racism is the most serious and ugly offspring of ethnocentrism. Racism was responsible for black slavery in the Americas, for some of the particularly more brutal consequences of colonialism, both in Africa and in other parts of the world, and for apartheid in South Africa. The Church as well cannot claim to be innocent of racism. It was, for example, Bartolomé de Las Casas, a sixteenth-century missionary in Central and South America remembered mostly as "a champion of the oppressed",³⁸ who promoted African slavery in the Americas as one means of protecting his indigenous converts from colonial exploitation.³⁹ A more recent example of Church racism is the attempt by elements of Afrikaner-nationalist churchmen, particularly in the Reformed Church, to theologically sanction apartheid.⁴⁰

Triumphalism is another manifestation of ethnocentrism. In brief, it is the conviction that one's own nation or culture is so successful and so blessed that it is its manifest destiny to impart the richness of that success to the world. The contemporary United States is one example, with its eagerness to foster its own style of democracy, free enterprise, and social ethics on a global basis. In terms of the Church a similar phenomenon can be seen. David Bosch has discussed various scriptural verses that have become the missionary text that has characterized a particular age.⁴¹ In

³⁷Luzbetak 65.

³⁸David J. Bosch, Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 310.

³⁹Neill 53. In fairness to Las Casas, though, it must also be pointed out that once he saw some of the realities of black slavery he very quickly changed his mind.

⁴⁰Adrian Hastings, The Church in Africa 1450-1950 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 569-70.

⁴¹For a brief summary see Bosch 339-41. It is popularly thought that the "Great Commission" of Matt 28:18-20 ("...Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of

the post-Enlightenment period, which saw the first great outbreak of evangelical enthusiasm, he notes Acts 16:9,⁴² John 10:10,⁴³ and Matt 24:14⁴⁴ as having particular significance for a Western Christianity that viewed other peoples as living in darkness and despair. These particular texts, in turn, were given revitalized meaning in the light of the expansion of European--and particularly British--military, industrial, and economic power in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The mission-sending Church--that is, the Western, European Church--began to see itself and its culture as so successful and blessed that it too had a manifest destiny to share with the receiving Church, not only its faith, but also the strictly cultural qualities of that faith. It thus saw its mission not only in the preaching of the Gospel but, even as a prerequisite to that, in civilizing the poor heathens.

Paternalism, the third manifestation of ethnocentrism, is in some ways the most difficult to come to terms with because it is also the most 'benign' in terms of the intentions of the sending Church. Paternalism is born out of a misguided compassion that sees the receiving Church as

the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .") has been the missionary text inspiring all generations of missions. Bosch suggests that in fact the Great Commission first began to gain prominence through William Carey's 1792 tract, An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.

For the Church in the patristic period Bosch suggests that the key missionary text was John 3:16--"Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life". In medieval Roman Catholicism it was Luke 14:23--"Then the master said to his servant, 'Go to the open roads and around the hedgerows and force people to come in to make sure my house is full"--, which would in some ways account for the frequent occurrence of forced conversions, particularly of Jews and Muslims, during this period. For the Protestant Reformation he says it was Romans 1:16ff--"For I am not ashamed of the Good News: It is the power of God saving all who have faith--Jews first, but Greeks as well--since this is what reveals the justice of God to us" (The Jerusalem Bible).

⁴²Acts 16:9--"One night Paul had a vision: a Macedonian appeared and appealed to him in these words, 'Come across to Macedonia, and help us'." (The Jerusalem Bible).

⁴³John 10:10--"I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full." (The Jerusalem Bible)

⁴⁴Matt. 24:14--"This Good News of the Kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world as a witness to all nations. And then the end will come." (The Jerusalem Bible).

immature and dependent on the 'parent' Church.⁴⁵ Indigenous peoples are instructed, initiated, and admitted into the Church. Its leadership and organization, however, remain in the hands of the missionaries from the 'parent' Church. Bosch notes that although lip-service had long been paid to the goal of fostering independent African Churches, by the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference this talk had largely been shelved and those Churches reduced to mere agents of the European missionary societies.⁴⁶ One consequence of this was the continued domination of the hierarchy of the African Churches by Europeans well past the middle of the twentieth century. Similarly, instead of fostering and nurturing locally supported institutions, such as schools and medical facilities, this paternalism fostered a reliance on the generosity of the sending Church to provide the financial support for such institutions.⁴⁷ Elsewhere European missionaries took it as their responsibility to act as guardians and spokesmen before the colonial authority for 'native' interests, as the natives were not yet sufficiently sophisticated to represent themselves.⁴⁸ The obvious consequences of this sort of paternalism have been both resentment on the part of the African Churches and a self-fulfilling prophecy that kept the receiving Churches in a state of dependency until recently.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Luzbetak 65-6.

⁴⁶Bosch 295.

⁴⁷Bosch 295-6.

⁴⁸The most glaring example of this sort of paternalism is probably John W. Arthur, head of the Church of Scotland Kikuyu Mission in Kenya during the early part of the twentieth century. Arthur accepted official appointment by the Kenyan colonial government as representative for native interests to the Legislative Council. However, he was roundly criticized by fellow missionaries, particularly Archdeacon Owen of the CMS, for presuming to be able to speak for Africans. For a fuller history and discussion see Anne King, "J. W. Arthur and African Interest," Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya, ed. B. E. Kipkorir (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980) 87-111.

⁴⁹It is for this reason, for example, that many predominantly Catholic countries like the Philippines and the various countries of South America have remained dependent on the mission-sending Churches of

While much missionary activity, particularly in Africa, has been ethnocentric, from late in the nineteenth century there developed among missionaries and theorists a greater appreciation of the nature of culture, particularly the integrated role of religion in culture. The assumption remained that the Gospel message was most perfectly embodied in European values and ways of life, but there was also a move towards making certain 'concessions' to local culture wherever they were deemed not to contradict the Gospel. Catholic mission circles called this policy "accommodation" while in Protestant circles it became known as "indigenization".⁵⁰ By either name, accommodation essentially implied recognition that certain elements of non-Christian culture were either "neutral" or "naturally good" and therefore possible useful bridges between Christianity and "'paganism' ".⁵¹

An accommodational orientation differs from an ethnocentric one mostly in the degree of ethnocentricity. That is, at its heart accommodation is ethnocentric, but it is also vaguely conscious of its ethnocentricity. Concessions to indigenous culture are of a superficial nature only.

Europe and North America for everything from financing to clergy well into the twentieth century.

⁵⁰Bosch 294. In his inaugural "Editor's Notes" for the first issue of International Review of Missions J. H. Oldham wrote that the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh declared as a priority for missions "making Christianity indigenous" and "building up a strong, independent, self-supporting, self-propagating Church." See J. H. Oldham, "The Editor's Notes," International Review of Missions 1 (1912): 3-4.

⁵¹Luzbetak 67. In his 1912 "Editor's Notes" Oldham described the main concern of the journal as the missionary message "in relation to each of the non-Christian religions" (3). The two questions in particular it would seek to answer were: 1) "What is found in actual experience to be really living in the non-Christian religions, as distinct from that which is mainly tradition and formal? What elements in them are genuinely prized as affording religious help and consolation, and exercise a real influence on character and conduct?"; and 2) "What are the vital forces of the Gospel as it comes in contact with the non-Christian peoples? What aspects of it possess the greatest power of appeal?" (3). One very influential exception to the general trend was Gustav Warnek, the late-nineteenth-century German Protestant missiologist, who viewed accommodation negatively as excess and abuse, dismissing it as "whitewashed paganism" (quoted in Luzbetak 68).

Furthermore it is the 'parent' church or its representative (i.e. the local missionary), not the local community, who makes the decisions regarding what will and will not be accommodated. Accommodation therefore usually takes place at the most superficial levels of culture, such as the use of vernacular and the adaptation of music, dance, and traditional arts and crafts to liturgical worship. It may also be seen in the Christian adaptation of local rites, such as initiation, or festivals and celebrations, such as those associated with planting and the harvest. Rarely does it entrust the local culture to make decisions for itself regarding matters that touch to the deepest levels of culture, such as issues of family structure. Polygamy is perhaps the best example, as it has long proved an insurmountable obstacle to evangelization. While there had occasionally been some relatively innovative approaches to the question,⁵² it was usually the European churches that dictated its prohibition out of hand. This is because accommodation, despite its beneficent intentions, assumes a European monopoly on truth vis-à-vis understanding, interpreting, and applying the Gospel. And it is in this area of authority over deciding what is and is not culturally consistent with the Gospel that accommodation differs from Luzbetak's third orientation, contextualization.

Contextualization, or what Luzbetak alternately refers to as an inculturational or incarnational orientation,⁵³ has

⁵²Kenneth Scott Latourette (A History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol. V [New York: Harper and Bros., 1943] 327-8) refers to Anglican Bishop John Colenso's attempts to deal with the institution in Natal, for which he was eventually excommunicated. F. Melville Jones ("Polygamy in West Africa," International Review of Missions 12 [1923]: 403-11) further notes that the Lambeth Conference of 1888, while forbidding the practice per se, adopted an attitude of flexibility in accepting polygamists as candidates for baptism, with baptism itself delayed until the candidate were free of the impediment. Even in these instances of attempted accommodation, though, it remained the European missionary or mother Church setting policy and making the decisions.

⁵³Aylward Shorter, (Toward a Theology of Inculturation [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988] 10ff) notes that the term "inculturation" as a

become a dominant form of thinking in the contemporary Church. Charles Nyamiti describes it as one of "two main types of African theology today",⁵⁴ the other being liberation theology. Contextualization begins by recognizing the fact that Jesus, the Word Incarnate, entered the world at a particular time and place in history--that is, a particular cultural context--and spoke to the world through the forms of that culture. It must therefore be remembered, as Schreiter notes, that the Gospel "never comes to a culture in pure form; it is already embedded in the less-than-pure culture" of the messenger,⁵⁵ whether that messenger be Jesus living as a Palestinian Jew two thousand years ago or the contemporary European missionary. It is therefore necessary to carefully determine what is the core of the Gospel and distinguish that from the particular forms of expression that the culture in which it was propagated has wrapped it. Contextualization, in other words, seeks to Christianize a culture by infusing the Gospel into that culture and allowing it to find its own expression in forms appropriate to that culture.⁵⁶

mission orientation was first used by Jesuit Joseph Masson shortly before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, when he cited an "urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated in a variety of forms" (quoted in Shorter 10). Subsequent Jesuit chapters took up the issue, with Superior General Pedro Arrupe issuing a letter to the whole Society on the subject in 1978. Shorter goes on to note that "contextualization" evolved as the term of choice by the World Council of Churches while the theologically imaginative "incarnation" gained the official favor of the Second Vatican Council (11).

⁵⁴Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today," Faces of Jesus in Africa, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 3.

⁵⁵Schreiter, New Catholicity 71.

⁵⁶Kwame Bediako (Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis] 1995) neatly turns the process on its head, suggesting that not only must a culture be Christianized through a process of inculturation, there is an additional need for the "Africanisation" of the Christian faith (4). The Christianizing of African tradition, he says, may be considered the resolving of a religious problem in that it has to do with "making room in the African experience of religious powers for Christ and the salvation he brings" while the Africanizing of Christianity should equally be considered as the resolving of an intellectual problem, namely "how African Christianity, employing Christian tools, may set about mending the torn fabric of African identity and hopefully point a way towards the emergence of a fuller and unfettered African humanity and personality" (5).

Although the terms themselves are a recent innovation, the implicit understanding of mission as addressing culture can be traced back to Paul, the so-called Hellenizer of Christianity. He took the Gospel, which had been revealed in a specifically Aramaic-Jewish context, and infused it into the Hellenistic culture of the Gentile community to which he preached, trusting the Spirit to nourish it and allow it to find its own appropriate forms of expression within that Hellenistic context.⁵⁷ Schreiter suggests that this interaction of Gospel and local culture is likewise responsible for the rise of the varieties of Eastern and Western Christianity--to which we must add the Coptic variety of Africa as well as the 'Syrian' form of India--that are culturally and liturgically distinct but united by a common scripture and profession of faith.⁵⁸ More recently, mission as a process of contextualization seems also to have been the understanding of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missionaries Matteo Ricci in China⁵⁹ and Roberto de Nobili in India,⁶⁰ who sought to liberate the Gospel from its European forms so that it might then find appropriate Chinese and Hindu expression--ironically at a time when Catholicism was codifying and 'universalizing' discipline in response to the Reformation.

As a concept contextualization precedes and in ways anticipates postcolonial notions of hybridity, with which it shares parallels. In the missionary context it stresses the

⁵⁷See Bosch (123-78) for an extended discussion of Paul's missionary strategy, priorities, and motivation. Focus has often been given to the passage from Romans 9:19-23, in which Paul says that to the Jews he came as a Jew and to the Gentiles as a Gentile, being all things to all people so as to win them for Christ. This, Bosch suggests, indicates that for Paul the Gospel "is intended for all, without distinction" and it is his obligation to preach it. Precisely for this reason he insists that "no unnecessary stumbling blocks be put in the way of prospective converts" (136).

⁵⁸Schreiter 66.

⁵⁹See Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 45-6.

⁶⁰See Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989) 98-101.

interdependence of missionary and proselyte; and recognizes the presence of God already in the culture.⁶¹ It takes place in what Homi Bhabha described as the "Third space of enunciation"⁶² between cultures, in what amounts to a translational negotiation between the two. This is what distinguishes contextualization from accommodation. Under an accommodational orientation authority for contextualizing the Gospel lies with the missionary, whereas under a contextual orientation it is the local community who are the agents. Like Paul, who preached the Gospel and moved on, the missionary is simply the messenger who conveys the Gospel, while it is the local church that "integrates the Gospel message (the 'text') with its local culture (the 'context')." ⁶³ Contextualization, in other words, trusts the Holy Spirit to guide the local community instead of the missionary seeking to direct it.

If contextualization was the orientation of the early Church, this was lost by the time of the post-Enlightenment rebirth of missionary enthusiasm. Christianity by this time had largely become what Lamin Sanneh has called a "cultural captive" of Europe.⁶⁴ Following its elevation to the imperial religion of Rome in the fourth century under Constantine the faith gradually became so intricately intertwined with European culture over the next one thousand five hundred years that the two had gradually become largely indistinguishable. The spiritual values and truths of Christianity, it became assumed, were not only enshrined in the cultural forms of the European host, but as E. A. Ayandele suggests, were viewed to be directly responsible for

⁶¹Luzbetak 73.

⁶²Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994) 37.

⁶³Luzbetak 69.

⁶⁴Sanneh, Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis) 1993, 71.

"the enlightenment, progress and technological achievements of [the West]".⁶⁵ So intricate was this identification that by the nineteenth century preaching the Gospel became almost synonymous with promoting European cultural values: "culture and religion, as sanitation and salvation, were for many missionaries one and the same thing."⁶⁶ Missionary activity by the nineteenth century had thus come to mean spreading the Western way of life in all of its details.⁶⁷

The origins of the British missionary presence in Africa are largely connected to the abolition movement that gained momentum among evangelical Christians in the late eighteenth century.⁶⁸ The resettlement colony at Sierra Leone for freed slaves and liberated captives was one of the early results of that movement, and for practical purposes the British

⁶⁵E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1966) 4.

⁶⁶Sanneh, Encountering 22. Ajayi similarly notes that missionaries became motivated by a desire to spread 'civilization', which to them meant "all that they considered best in their own way of life" (14).

⁶⁷Not that this was exclusively the case. In Translating the Message (101-5) Sanneh makes the point that William Carey (1761-1834), often considered the father of post-Enlightenment British missionary fervor, "was clear that the expansion of Christianity abroad should not be the perpetuation of denominationalism or the imposition of Western ecclesiastical forms." (101) The implication of Carey's insistence on vernacular translation was its allowance for "the indigenous expression of Christianity, trusting that the gospel, faithfully proclaimed, would stimulate the arrangements proper to it" (101).

⁶⁸It is not our purpose here to conduct an in-depth examination of either the abolition movement or a history of the missionary presence in Africa. Although dated (and some would say tainted by imperialist bias), Volume 5 of Latourette's history of mission and C. P. Groves (The Planting of Christianity in Africa 4 vols. [London: Lutterworth, 1948-1958]) both provide a good historic account of mission activity throughout Africa, including focus on its connections with the abolition movement. Eugene Stock (The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work, 4 vols. [London: Church Missionary Society, 1899-1916]) is also an invaluable source for a detailed account of personnel and specific missions of the CMS. For a more recent overview of British missions in West Africa see Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis) 1983. For in-depth examinations of the missionary presence in Nigeria from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century see Ajayi and also Ayandele. For examinations of missionary activity in East Africa see F. B. Welbourn, East African Christian (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); also Welbourn, East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches (London: SCM Press, 1961). In addition, Rosberg and Nottingham also provide a sound overview of missionary activity in Kenya and its connection to the rise of African nationalism in that country.

missionary presence in Africa as well can be said to have started there.⁶⁹ Although not directly connected with the periods--late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries--or geographical regions--Northern Nigeria, Igboland, and Kenya--that are the subject of our present discussion, mission activity in this time and place has significant implications for the places and periods with which we are concerned so as to warrant brief mention. Colonization got underway in earnest in 1792 with the arrival of the 'Nova Scotia' settlers--freed slaves from North America--who were already Christianized and brought with them their own preachers.⁷⁰ The first CMS missionaries--Germans in the employ of the CMS--arrived in 1804, for the purpose of working among the indigenous population, but instead settled among the colonists.⁷¹ Others followed and engaged in limited work among the indigenous people, most of their focus being drawn to the settlers. For our interests their activities are significant for two reasons. First, some quickly became involved in education work among the settlers at government schools, in the process becoming what Sanneh called symbolic of "the connection between government and mission" as well as the "formal connection between mission and education."⁷² The

⁶⁹See Sanneh, West African 53-105. Groves (Vol. 1, 149-200) recounts various individual attempts at missionary activity along the coastal regions of West Africa, the British involvement beginning as early as the 1750s. These, however, had almost no significant success.

⁷⁰Hastings (179-80). Hastings notes that the first attempt at colonization actually took place in 1787, the colonists including the "'Black Poor'" of London and "seventy white prostitutes thrown in" (179-80). Some of the settlers were quickly re-enslaved; others became slavers themselves; many died of illness; and troubles with the neighboring indigenous peoples led to the settlement being burned. The expedition, Hastings concludes, "was not a success" (180).

⁷¹Sanneh (West African 60) identifies them as Melchior Renner and Peter Hartwig. Sanneh notes that their mission activities were handicapped by the fact that they did not get along personally. He also adds that Hartwig soon gave up missionary work for more profitable venture as a slave trader. He was, Sanneh says, "not the last missionary to find slave-catching more appealing than soul-seeking" (60).

⁷²Sanneh, West African 60. In 1806 Gustavas Nylander, another German in CMS employ, took up formal appointment to the government school at Freetown.

second point of relevance is that the settler communities among which they worked eventually proved a source for 'indigenous' missionaries who would later penetrate the interior of the Niger Delta after the ill-fated 1841 Niger Expedition.⁷³ That these people were 'Africans' in the sense of being of African stock is undisputable. However, as displaced peoples largely assimilated into heavily Europeanized slave and colonial cultures they were as foreign to the indigenous people among whom they were dispatched as were their European masters.

From early on, British missionary activity in Africa was conceived of as a 'civilizing' mission. Evangelical opposition to the slave trade, which was the driving force behind the Niger Expedition,⁷⁴ sought to cure the 'ills' of Africa through the introduction of commerce, cultivation, civilization, and Christianity.⁷⁵ This led to a two-pronged policy of 'uplifting' Africa through economic (i.e. cultivation and commerce) and cultural (i.e. civilization and Christianity) intervention. British Protestant missions in particular, inspired by men like T. F. Buxton and his supporters, sought to create what Ajayi termed "little cells of civilization from which the light would radiate to the

⁷³The first candidate, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was a liberated Yoruba resident of Sierra Leone and member of the Niger Expedition. He received Anglican orders in 1843 (Ajayi 33) and in 1864 was consecrated as Anglican bishop resident in Lagos, with jurisdiction over the Nigeria missions (Ajayi 194).

⁷⁴The economic interests of many of the investors in the expedition cannot be overlooked as a significant motivating factor. However the leaders of the project, headed by Thomas Fowell Buxton, were convinced evangelicals who, all available evidence indicates, were first and foremost motivated by their convictions.

⁷⁵Although frequently attributed to David Livingstone as the "three C's" (commerce, civilization, Christianity--cultivation having been dropped), it was actually Thomas Fowell Buxton who first popularly articulated the four "C's" as the remedy for the slave trade in his tract The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy (2nd ed. [London: John Murry, 1840. rpt. London: Frank Cass and Co., 1967]). But Sanneh notes that the idea did not originate with him either. Rather, Sanneh attributes it to Leopold Butscher, a CMS missionary among the Susu in Sierra Leone, as early as 1812 (Sanneh, West African 61).

regions around."⁷⁶ Since many of the evangelicals of this age considered civilization to mean all of those things in their own way of life they considered best, missionaries often brought with them their own social manners and customs, expecting conformity to them from their converts as an outward expression of their having been civilized. Sometimes this manifested itself in what would seem by our modern standards petty or even silly. Ajayi notes, for instance, that one missionary in 1844 celebrated his wedding anniversary with his African converts by holding a tea party, including cakes and biscuits, calling it a token of civilization.⁷⁷ Others, he notes, stubbornly insisted on maintaining their formal black clerical attire that was totally out of place in the tropical heat, worried more about the "'semi-nudity'" of the Africans around the mission.⁷⁸ Still others were preoccupied with the 'uncivilized' manner in which greetings were exchanged or respect shown to elders or superiors.⁷⁹ In other words, these missionaries brought with them their European lifestyle in its minutest details with the intention of reproducing it in this new environment. It included everything from their farming methods to their architectural and construction techniques, from their culinary and dietary habits to their manner of dress--all with total disregard for their appropriateness to the tropical West African environment. And they actively encouraged the indigenous Africans among whom they worked to abandon their traditional ways for these more 'civilized' European practices.

⁷⁶Ajayi 11.

⁷⁷Ajayi 14; citing the journal of Rev. S. Annear for 20 Oct. 1844.

⁷⁸Ajayi 14; citing the journal of Rev. Hope Waddell for 26 Mar. 1846.

⁷⁹Ajayi (14) notes that these Victorians thought it improper that boys should prostrate themselves before their elders, insisting instead that it was more civilized to bow. For the Victorians prostration implicitly implied worshipping another human being, which was a complete contradiction of their religious beliefs.

If ethnocentrism characterized missionary attitudes at the outset of early nineteenth century, from a practical point of view the situation had hardly changed at the end of the century and well into the twentieth century--and in some ways it had grown even worse. Luzbetak suggests that there has always been at least a vague awareness within the Church of the gap between Gospel and culture.⁸⁰ That is, missionaries at different periods and in different places have recognized the need to proclaim the Gospel to peoples "in a way that completely fitted their own mentality and respected the actual conditions of their own life."⁸¹ Ironically, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, when anthropology as a social science was emerging from its infancy and missionaries very much at the forefront of anthropological theorizing and research,⁸² when the integrated nature of culture and religion was becoming more and more understood, mission theorists and missionaries in the field were at the same time becoming increasingly ethnocentric and paternalistic vis-à-vis African cultures and the African church.

Any review of writings from this time by theorists and missionaries in the field, representing the entire range of the ideological spectrum, indicates all were tainted to some

⁸⁰Luzbetak 49-50. Specifically he refers to Paul, who opposed the Judaizing tendencies of the early Church; Gregory the Great, the sixth-century pope; Ricci and de Nobili, whom we have noted above; and a host of other cleric-scholars from the tenth through the eighteenth centuries who were involved in works that today would be considered pioneering in fields such as linguistics, ethnography, and folklore. Schreier (66-7) makes similar observations, pointing also to the "Germanization" of Christianity in the early medieval period. Bevans (46) further adds Cyril and Methodius, eleventh century missionaries to the Slavs, whose work led to the emergence of a uniquely Slavic Christianity.

⁸¹John Paul II, Salvorum Apostoli, (1985). Quoted in Bevans 46.

⁸²Luzbetak refers particularly to Wilhelm Schmidt (1862-1954), a Catholic priest whose work in linguistics and ethnology were in their day pioneering. Luzbetak suggests that Schmidt's deep regard for non-Christian cultures, particularly their myths, rites, and religious beliefs, was largely responsible for the development of the missiological concept of accommodation. See Luzbetak 61-3.

degree by ethnocentrism and paternalism.⁸³ For one, stereotypes of Africans as debased, superstitious, and lazy brutes that characterized Buxton's call for a civilizing mission were still alive and well as the twentieth century unfolded. For example, W. Millman, a missionary to Congo, in 1918 described the African as morally "little better than an animal, intellectually a babe, religiously credulous and dominated by fear of the dead, socially lacking in a sense of law and order and of mutual obligation, and not gifted with much practical foresight".⁸⁴ Another missionary to Uganda, W. H. Weatherhead, wrote in 1914 about the value of industrial training for "the African boy" as "a means of checking conceit," an affliction "to which Africans . . . are specially prone" and which eventually turns into "contempt of any handwork, especially of an arduous nature".⁸⁵ Others stressed the 'immaturity' and sensuality of Africans.⁸⁶ Another believed foreign leadership in the churches was essential because indigenous pastors are "inexperienced in exercising authority and . . . timid when faced by unpleasant difficulties."⁸⁷ Even for these people who lived and worked

⁸³An extensive and in-depth review of missionary writing is well beyond the scope of this study. What follows below is a brief survey of missionary writing, primarily from the 1910s and 1920s and related to the African missions. It is drawn mostly from the International Review of Missions, a Britain-based journal established under the auspices of the World Council of Churches as a byproduct of the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. What recommends it for our purposes is the fact that it is a journal by and for missionaries and mission theorists, bringing together points of view representative of the entire range of the ideological spectrum among missionaries.

⁸⁴W. Millman, "Realities of Missionary Life: V. On a Central African Riverine Mission Station," International Review of Missions 7 (1918): 186.

⁸⁵H. W. Weatherhead, "Industrial Training in Africa: II. The Educational Value of Industrial Work as Illustrated in King's School, Budo, Uganda," International Review of Missions 3 (1914): 343.

⁸⁶See Henri A. Junod, "Should Heathen Games Be Preserved in a Christian Community? A Bantu Speaks," International Review of Missions 9 (1920): 274; J. R. Graham, "The Moral Impact of the Gospel: A Record of Thirty Year's Work Amongst African Women," International Review of Missions 9 (1920): 96.

⁸⁷A. W. Wilkie, "An Attempt to Conserve the Work of the Basel Mission to the Gold Coast," International Review of Missions 9 (1920): 89-90.

among Africans, the land remained primordial and its people trapped in a primitive state of brutal existence; like children, they were immature, irresponsible, easily intimidated, lacking in self-discipline, and living only for the moment. Moreover, they were in need of the European to lead them out of this immaturity and into the world of adult responsibility.

This condescending view of Africans was not limited to individual isolated missionaries. Rather, it was the underlying assumption of mission theorists in general. The official documents of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 as well endorsed this view, defining evangelization as meaning "the introduction of education and letters, of agriculture and industries, of Christian marriage and of due recognition of the sanctity of human life and of property" among Africans.⁸⁸ That Europe was more scientifically and technologically advanced and therefore could potentially offer Africans opportunities for improvement to the material quality of their lives is not a major question.⁸⁹ However, the other implications of this statement smack of paternalism, ethnocentrism, and even racism. It points to an assumption, for instance, that traditional concepts of marriage--meaning polygamy--are naturally inferior to 'Christian' monogamy. It further bluntly accuses Africans outside the Christian fold of lacking respect for human life. Finally it suggests that European notions of individual property rights, which were alien to the communal ideas of life among many African peoples,⁹⁰ are synonymous with Christianity--an ironic twist

⁸⁸Cited in Millman 187. Quoting from the report of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 (vol. i, 206).

⁸⁹Though the appropriateness to the African environment of certain European innovations or methods in such areas as agriculture and architecture can be debated.

⁹⁰Amongst the Gikuyu of Kenya, for instance, Rosberg and Nottingham (146-7) point out the communal nature of the traditional githaka land-holding system whereby land was 'owned' by the mbari, or clan, and one's

that arguably conflicts with the communal ideal of early Christian life.

Ethnocentrism and paternalism were not limited to the more traditionalist-oriented missionaries and mission theorists. Even those more conscious of the gap between cultural forms and religious truth and those with more open-minded attitudes towards non-European cultures were affected. For instance, one missionary in 1925 published an article on female sexual practices and roles in Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) that is most remarkable for its understanding and respect for the importance of certain unspecified sexual practices in traditional society. She began by saying that it was not her place to judge or condemn traditional practices "because it is foreign to me and oft times inexplicable--that is not my task as a Christian missionary, it is a sin of presumption, and yet it is a temptation that comes not once but often."⁹¹ However, she then went on to attribute the continuation of these practices to the "strong physical instinct of the African girl",⁹² and concluded that with 'proper' Christian input these would eventually die out of their own accord.⁹³ Another similarly insisted that any "unnecessary interference with tribal customs is to be deprecated."⁹⁴ Yet in the same paragraph she then criticized traditional marriage practices (polygamy), architecture (the one-room hut), and child-rearing customs

individual rights to that land were dictated and restricted in part by the needs of the other members of the community.

⁹¹Mabel Shaw, "A School Village in Northern Rhodesia," International Review of Missions 14 (1925): 523. In what can only be regarded as remarks well ahead of her time Shaw went on to say there were an infinite variety of customs relating to the sexual education of girls about which missionaries have little understanding, and was "convinced that we do no good, rather harm, in striving to repress [them]. To begin with, we make a sense of guilt where there was none, and even if we do forbid these customs, I think the girls will still go on practising them in secret, with a sense of guilt" (530).

⁹²Shaw 530.

⁹³Shaw 532.

⁹⁴Agnes Fraser, "A Missionary's Wife Among African Women," International Review of Missions 3 (1914): 456.

(communal as opposed to the nuclear family) as all being undesirable aspects of traditional life that need to be changed.⁹⁵ A third wrote of the dangers for social stability of "interfering with primitive custom and tradition" and urged missionaries to be "aware of the significance of old tribal relaxations [and] honestly try to adapt them, with the least possible alteration, to the limits set by the Christian code".⁹⁶ However, this sort of accommodation was a temporary step to counterbalance the indigene's attachment to the allure of his past until such time as its appeal could be eradicated. Finally, one theorist insisted that all cultures --African included--have something unique "to contribute towards our apprehension and our comprehension".⁹⁷ Nevertheless in the same article he repeated Rousseauesque stereotypes of 'uncivilized' Africans as noble savages, closer to God in their natural state than the contemporary unconverted 'civilized' European yet also overwhelmed by "enormously developed" primitive sexual appetites.⁹⁸ There is, in other words, a considerable degree of 'respect' among these missionaries for non-Christian ways of life. At the same time, however, it is also obvious that each considered these ways of life indicative of 'primitive' cultures inferior to their own and saw as the final objective of their mission activities the gradual 'conversion' of the traditional African way of life to a more civilized African variation of the European way.

As European colonial authority in Africa expanded, particularly after the Berlin Conference of 1885, the often uneasy and informal partnership that had existed between missionary and secular colonial authority began to take on an

⁹⁵Fraser 456-7.

⁹⁶Handley D. Hooper, "The Expression of Christian Life in Primitive African Society," International Review of Missions 13 (1924): 68-9.

⁹⁷Robert Keable, "The Worth of an African," International Review of Missions 7 (1918): 322.

⁹⁸Keable 327.

official form. Some missionaries and theorists, in fact, spoke of mission and colonialism as partners in a noble task. Bosch, for instance, points out that missiologist Carl Mirbt wrote in 1910 that "'Mission and colonialism belong together, and we have reason to hope that something positive will develop for our colonies from this alliance'";⁹⁹ that "something positive" being African conversion to European Christian civilization. From the missionary standpoint the emphasis was almost always on improving the conditions of life for Africans in accordance with what the Europeans considered to be 'civilized' and within the context of a colonial society. Education therefore became a major area of activity among missionaries, one which in colonial Africa often received official government sanction if not financial support.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Carl Mirbt (1910); cited in Bosch 306. Writing three years later Joseph Schmidlin went a step further than Mirbt, and in a remark anticipating Fanon's critique of mission as a form of psychological colonization, suggested that it is the role of the missions to "assist in seeking the deeper aim of colonial policy, the inner colonization. . . . [I]t is the mission which secures the inward servility and devotion of the natives" (quoted in Bosch 306). From our early twenty-first century perspective Schmidlin's remark has a sinister ring. In the context of its own time, however, as Bosch (305-6) points out, these missionaries and theorists genuinely (though mistakenly) believed that European rule was ultimately for the material and spiritual benefit of the colonized.

¹⁰⁰In Nigeria Ayandele (298-303) notes that the first government schools for Africans did not appear until after 1900, and even then the colonial government took no real interest in African education until the days of Lugard's second administration (1912-19). Prior to this education was left up to the missions, which received paltry contributions from the government on an irregular basis. Occasional laws were promulgated by the colonial government--such as the 1882 Ordinance--that set conditions for government support, but schools continued to remain in the hands of the missions.

In East Africa responsibility for African education was assigned to the missions from the outset and remained their exclusive domain even longer. The colonial authority provided for education among the settler population but few resources were given to educating Africans. Since there was negligible government oversight, what little formal education existed was often of poor quality, with the expected result that Africans were woefully unprepared to compete in colonial society--a fact they understood and bitterly resented. This situation continued even after release of the 1925 Phelps-Stoke Commission report, which was highly critical of education in East Africa. For a comprehensive discussion see John Anderson, The Struggle for the School: The Interaction of Missionary, Colonial Government and Nationalist Enterprise in the Development of Formal Education in Kenya (London: Heinemann, 1970).

Mission education from its beginnings was intended first and foremost to facilitate evangelization. Therefore literacy education for the purpose of individual scripture study was a primary concern for missionaries. Everywhere missionaries settled they established schools and offered literacy training to the local people.¹⁰¹ Particularly in the early period of mission activity, their educational materials were primarily translations of the Bible. Under the gradually evolving partnership between missionary and colonial authority literacy for scripture study gradually led to an emphasis on literacy and character education, so that by the time of the Phelps-Stoke Commission Report in 1925 character development had become an urgent concern.¹⁰² With deepening mission involvement in education some later missionary educators began to recognize the cultural inappropriateness of most 'Christian' literary materials of European origin and called for development of materials that reflected the African context.¹⁰³ Since literacy education also had a secondary benefit of training a corps of native clerks who could fill the needs of the colonial bureaucracy, it was not only sanctioned, but encouraged by the colonial authority.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Anderson (11) notes that by 1850 the CMS had established a pattern of using the school as a vehicle of evangelization. He also notes that when the CMS entered the mission fields of East Africa CMS director Henry Venn had cautioned his men not to follow the usual pattern but to get about the task of evangelizing.

¹⁰²J. H. Oldham, "Educational Policy of the British Government in Africa," International Review of Missions 14 (1925): 421-7.

¹⁰³These appeals, however, usually called for Europeans to develop such materials! See, for example, W. T. Balmer, "Text-books: A Study with an African Background," International Review of Missions 14 (1925): 37-44; C. E. Wilson, "The Provision of a Christian Literature for Africa," International Review of Missions 15 (1926): 506-14; E. W. Thompson, "The Bible in the Religious Education of Africa," International Review of Missions 16 (1927): 394-404.

¹⁰⁴For instance, Ayandele (299-301) points out that beginning in 1882 successive ordinances of the colonial government in Nigeria offered financial backing for education that produced the results it desired. "The administration", he said, "did not care whether its clerks were 'pagan' or Muslim or polygamists, so long as they could write and speak good English, write ornately and make simple calculations" (301).

Industrial education was another area of activity for missionaries. This education was initially intended to facilitate self-sustaining Christian villages, with African artisans trained in European methods of carpentry, woodwork, ironwork, and agriculture. As colonial domination of native life deepened industrial education also became viewed as a necessity for preparing Africans to participate in colonial society and contributing also to European capitalist interests.¹⁰⁵ Missionaries did not see their schools as being for the purpose of serving the needs of the settler community. Rather, they took the settler presence as a given, and hoped that satisfying the settlers' need for labor would eventually mute their opposition to native plantations, believing that the "empire stands for the uplift of the native races and therefore cannot rightly allow" settler objections to stand in the way.¹⁰⁶ The only sure way to obviate their objections, it was felt, was to train Africans in the soundest of European methods. Whatever the intention, the result was usually of greater benefit to the settlers.

There existed, in short, a considerable gap between missionary intentions and the consequences of their activity in Africa. Although they may have come with good intentions, all too frequently they were blinded by their own cultural prejudices. Missionaries on the one hand spoke frequently of the need to respect native culture and native institutions, and of the need to indigenize Christianity, yet at the same time they saw many native institutions and practices as inconsistent with Christianity and sought to supplant them with their own European practices. They mistrusted colonial authority and frequently sought to distance themselves from

¹⁰⁵See A. W. Wilkie and J. K. Macgregor, "Industrial Training in Africa: III. In the Calabar Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland," International Review of Missions 3 (1914): 743; also F. Rowling, "Industrial Training in Africa," International Review of Missions 7 (1918): 495.

¹⁰⁶Rowling 495.

it, yet they entered into partnership with that same authority. They also envisioned themselves as self-appointed champions and protectors of Africans from exploitation by the colonial authority, foreign capitalist interest, and the settler community, yet their education activities more frequently served the labor needs of these foreign groups than they did to protect the African. As we turn to the fictional representations of missionaries these same inconsistencies and contradictions also continually surface.

Chapter Two

Joyce Cary (1)

Belief, Freedom, and the Colonial Project

Introduction:

In the preface to the 1952 Carfax edition of Aissa Saved Joyce Cary expressed his surprise that so many readers took the book as an attack on missionary activity in Africa. While acknowledging religion was for him a "deeper interest",¹ he nevertheless dismissed the notion that his book was intended as an examination of the negative impact of Christianity on indigenous culture. Rather he praised missionaries, whom he said "have done good work in bringing to Africa a far better faith than any native construction".² However, in a note of criticism he added that "some Christian missions do not realize the effect" 'sophisticated' religious ideas such as Christianity can have on "African primitives" who are ill-equipped to cope with them.³ European Christianity, he felt, during its nearly two-thousand year history had evolved from a set of "articles of faith which were once taken in a literal sense" into a set of beliefs which were now "accepted as metaphors or symbols" for a metaphysical reality which can be approached through reason.⁴ Africans, however, were still "several hundred years behind the old

¹Joyce Cary, "Prefatory Essay", 1951, Aissa Saved, 1932 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 216. Similarly, in the "Prefatory Essay" (1951) to the Carfax edition of The African Witch, Cary rhetorically asked what could be "more fascinating than the work of the religious imagination, for good or evil", and also described William James' Varieties of Religious Experience as "one of the most absorbing books in the world". See Cary, The African Witch, 1936 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 309.

²Cary, Aissa Saved 216. Several years earlier, in The Case for African Freedom, he even praised missionary activity as being one of the few aspects of European intervention in Africa of which Europeans could be proud. Similarly, in the "Introduction" to Denys Craig's Man in Ebony he credited missionaries with having done "immense good in Africa" in terms of "education, intertribal peace, [and] . . . weaken[ing] the power of evil superstitions, of fear". See The Case for African Freedom, New ed. (London: Martin, Secker & Warburg, 1944) 18; also "Introduction," Denys Craig, Man in Ebony (London: Victor Gollancz, 1950) 11.

³Cary, Aissa Saved 216.

⁴Cary, Aissa Saved 217.

believers, in an age of absolutism and intolerance".⁵ That is, their minds were closed to new discoveries and to exploring new ideas. They lived in an environment of intellectual stagnation, in which the received wisdom regarding the world was unquestioned and new propositions viciously persecuted.

These are telling remarks, for they point to a number of assumptions that inform and direct Cary's narrative in this and all of his African novels. The first is the assumption that the Church in fact has a significant role to play in--and a contribution to make to--the civilizing mission of imperialism. These remarks reassert the suggestion Cary made some ten years earlier in The Case for African Freedom when he said that any program of development in Africa that addressed only the economic life of the people was doomed to failure. Rather, he said, what was needed was a colonial policy of "total development", based on a "new education" that would have a serious impact on the "habits and customs, taste and even religious tradition" of the African peoples.⁶

A second assumption, made explicit here, is that Africans have yet to achieve a level of intellectual and cultural sophistication equivalent to contemporary Europeans that would allow them to appreciate the 'truths' of the Gospel message. Rather, they remain stifled by ignorance and irrational superstition, not unlike the sort of beliefs that characterized medieval European societies, which prevents them from comprehending these religious truths on anything but the most literal, simplistic, and superficial level. This, in turn, further suggests a need for rapid and radical intellectual and cultural change--a literal change of 'mind'--if Africans are to arrive at the same level of religious and intellectual sophistication, and then to achieve a similar level of social and economic development as Europeans.

⁵Cary, Aissa Saved 217.

⁶Cary, African Freedom 9.

Although his remarks are specifically about the gap he perceived between 'sophisticated' European Christianity and 'primitive' African religiosity, they are indicative of a more general gap Cary also perceived between European and African cultures. This gap he similarly believed prevented Africans from completely comprehending and benefiting from other 'fruits' of European civilization, particularly democracy. Just as the failure of the missionaries in these novels to sufficiently 'civilize' their converts resulted in sophisticated European Christianity being transformed into a 'Christo-paganism', the failure of colonial administrators and officials to similarly prepare their charges for the fruits of European civilization resulted in chaos and disaster. The missionary failure in these novels thus reflects Cary's assessment of a more general failure of imperialism--particularly the policy of indirect rule--to elevate, enlighten, and civilize Africans.

Few serious readers today would consider Cary's African novels realistic fiction. Most would probably follow Abdul JanMohamed's advice and approach them as romances. Such a treatment, he said, would have the advantage of rendering the mimetic issues "relatively unimportant".⁷ For JanMohamed this facilitates a more fruitful examination of the novels "within their generative ambiance--the political, social, and psychological imperatives and contradictions of the colonial society".⁸ This strikes me as a most sensible approach. Particularly in the case of a writer like Cary whose "deeper interest" was religious--that is, in the nature, power, and durability of the ideas and beliefs that people "live by"⁹--discussions of the inauthenticity of this or that characterization would be tedious and far less interesting than an examination of the cultural, political,

⁷Abdul R. JanMohamed, Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) 15.

⁸JanMohamed 16.

⁹Joyce Cary, "Prefatory Essay", Aissa Saved 216.

psychological and religious assumptions underlying and generating them. This is not to suggest that there is no relationship between character and ideology, for particularly in a work of fiction the two do interact with each other. Nor does it dismiss altogether the validity of the mimetic problems raised by Cary's characterizations. Indeed, Cary himself did at times seem to feel that he was in fact creating authentic representations of Africa and Africans.¹⁰ Rather, I agree with JanMohamed that these novels are more fruitfully read if the representations are accepted as formulaic devices. By accepting that his Africans are less characters than caricatures crafted from stereotypical notions of primitive Africans attention can then be focused on those political, philosophical, and religious issues that long preoccupied Cary and gradually shaped his views on the purpose and objectives of colonial policy, on the 'civilizing mission' of the colonial project, and particularly on the role (and failure) of the Church in that project.

Cary's Religious Beliefs

Cary's primary interest was in religious questions, and his beliefs form the basis for all of his views and opinions, whether philosophical, cultural, or political. They are the starting point for the ideas outlined in his major nonfiction works: Power in Men, The Process of Real Freedom, and The Case for African Freedom. In particular his religious views have serious implications for the positions he eventually took on Africa and traditional African societies, on the Christian missions in Africa, and on the colonial project. An understanding of his beliefs is therefore essential to understanding his Africa novels.

¹⁰For example, in a 1942 interview Cary described Aissa Saved as "a view of Christ filtered through the African mind", obviously begging in a large way the issue of his ability to authentically represent "the African mind" and the "African" experience of Jesus. See Stanley Parker, "Joyce Cary or What is Freedom", Oxford Mail 15 Dec. 1942: 3.

Cary's religious history has been discussed at length elsewhere.¹¹ Dennis Hall, in addition, has already pointed out the weaknesses and logical inconsistencies in the line of reasoning through which Cary arrived at his particular form of faith.¹² It is not necessary to review these particular issues at length here. What is important for our present discussion is what Cary professed concerning the nature of God and the relationship between God and the world, and the implications these beliefs had for Cary's philosophic, cultural, and political views.

Cary considered himself a Christian, yet at the same time he admitted that his beliefs were unconventional to the point that he doubted that any church would accept him.¹³ Having lost his faith in traditional Christianity while a student at Clifton,¹⁴ Cary spent most of his early manhood largely "indifferent to religion".¹⁵ Instead he embraced what he described as a "scientific" view of the world.¹⁶ This indifference stayed with him through his university years, his African service, and beyond. It was in the process of writing Aissa Saved, he said, that he experienced a religious awakening and rediscovered faith. Writing the book, he said, "raised a lot of questions in an acute form . . . which I could not answer".¹⁷ Eventually he came to the conclusion that science and religion were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both, instead, have

¹¹Cary described his religious history in great detail in the unpublished essay "My own religious history", Joyce Cary Papers MSCARY Box 331, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Relying on this and other sources, in their separate biographies Malcolm Foster and Alan Bishop subsequently also recount Cary's journey from early childhood faith, through youthful agnosticism, and finally to a faith of his own. See Alan Bishop, Gentleman Rider: A Biography of Joyce Cary (London: Michael Joseph, 1988) 57-58 and elsewhere; and Malcolm Foster, Joyce Cary: A Biography (London: Michael Joseph, 1968) 27-37 and elsewhere.

¹²See Dennis Hall, Joyce Cary: A Reappraisal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) 1-13.

¹³John Burrow and Alex Hamilton, "An Interview with Joyce Cary," 1955, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays, ed. A. G. Bishop (London: Michael Joseph, 1976) 7.

¹⁴Cary, "My own religious history" 4. Also Cary, "A Slight Case of Demolition", in Joyce Cary: Selected Essays 69.

¹⁵Cary, "My own religious history" 4.

¹⁶Cary, "My own religious history" 14.

¹⁷Cary, "Prefatory Essay", Aissa Saved 217.

legitimate claims and have made legitimate contributions to humanity.¹⁸ God in this new compromise was, for Cary, a given, and the existence of beauty and of altruism was for him the ultimate proof of God's existence.¹⁹ He concluded that the physical world was indeed governed by scientific principles of causation, and not the intervention of an omnipotent God.²⁰ At the same time, not all evil was the result of an evil will; rather, the innocent do at times suffer utmost misery; bad luck does exist. That is, the world is fundamentally unjust.²¹

The unconventional faith at which Cary arrived was characterized by a belief in a personal God; that is, a God who is "a character, a real and consistent being".²² For him God was "the ground of love, beauty and goodness",²³ the author of the universe who continues in the present to encourage love and good behavior. Yet Cary rejected the notion that such a God could perform miracles.²⁴ God, he believed, must be powerless to interfere in the chain of causation as revealed by science. Otherwise God himself would be "directly responsible of all that happens, all suffering and all evil".²⁵ In his mind such a deity would not be a God but "a devil",²⁶ and Cary found himself incapable of believing in such a God. And if God could not work miracles, intercessional prayer was pointless. Nor did he believe in the resurrection or an afterlife.²⁷

Since God was incapable of intervening in the world via miracles, Cary concluded that the universe had to be governed by physical laws revealed through science. Evil

¹⁸Cary, "The Split Mind of the West", Joyce Cary Papers MSCARY, Box 247, leaf 220.

¹⁹Cary, "The Split Mind of the West" 226.

²⁰Cary, "My own religious history" 16.

²¹Cary, "Prefatory Essay, Aissa Saved 217.

²²Burrow and Hamilton 7.

²³Graham Fisher, "A Great Author Faces up to his Death," 1957, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays 253.

²⁴Joyce Cary, "My own religious history" 13-19ff.

²⁵Cary, "My own religious history" 16.

²⁶Cary, "My own religious history" 16.

²⁷Fisher 253. While not categorically denying the possibility of an afterlife, Cary found the concept impossible to imagine and "d[id]n't count on it".

and misfortune, therefore, were neither punishment visited upon humans for their transgressions nor any other wilful acts of God. Rather, evil and misfortune had five primary causes: they either arose "from disease, from accident, from bad luck, from the mechanical action of causes like infections, collision, fire, frost and hunger", or they were the result of "evil done wilfully by men".²⁸ There was little or nothing individuals could do about misfortune deriving from bad luck or accidents. Combating evil and misfortune due to natural calamity lay more within the realm of possibility, requiring the exercise of the powers of human creativity. Evil that resulted from individual acts of will, in turn, was entirely within the realm of human control. And this led to a second, central tenet of Cary's faith: a belief in absolute human freedom.

Although Cary continued to reject the traditional Christianity of his youth as "naive"²⁹ and dominated by "superstition",³⁰ he gradually came to the conclusion that the 'scientific' view he subsequently embraced was also "scientific dogma"³¹ little different from "extreme orthodox" religious views.³² In particular he rejected "extreme" behaviorist models, which he saw as reducing human beings to machines merely responding to stimuli.³³ Just as allowing for the possibility of miracles implied that God was ultimately the author of evil--a position he could not accept--Cary similarly came to the conclusion that embracing a 'scientific' model of the universe that included behaviorist explanations of human nature negated the notion of human freedom and individual responsibility,

²⁸Cary, "My own religious history" 16. Hall (2-3) reduced these five to three: sheer bad luck, natural disaster, and the conflict of will among men.

²⁹Cary, "My own religious history" 3.

³⁰Cary, "My own religious history" 2.

³¹Cary, "My own religious history" 13.

³²Cary, "My own religious history" 15.

³³Cary, "My own religious history" 14ff.

thus negating with it "the possibility of goodness"--an idea he found equally anathema.³⁴

Freedom for Cary had a very particular meaning. He rejected the traditional liberal definition of freedom as "absence of restraint",³⁵ which he saw as false. Humans do not live in isolation. Rather they live in societies, occupying and interacting in common spaces. Close physical proximity automatically implies restraint on each other, so "one man's liberty is another man's restraint".³⁶ Rather, Cary saw freedom as a sort of power: "a man's power to do what he likes; that is to say, to form his own ideas, his own purpose".³⁷ This power could take many forms and affect many aspects of the individual's life. It could be physical power; or it might be economic, political, or intellectual power. Anything that enhanced an individual's ability to do what he likes was good and desirable, while anything that so limited an individual was anathema. For example, education, to the extent that it empowered an individual to pursue his desires, was something useful and good. Thus government, which Cary claims under traditional liberal notions of freedom was problematic because it imposed restrictions on freedom,³⁸ could in Cary's scheme instead enhance individual freedom through the various functions it performed, such as the laws it passed and enforced

³⁴Cary, "My own religious history" 16.

³⁵Cary, Power in Men, 1939 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963) 3.

³⁶Cary, Power in Men 3.

³⁷Cary, The Process of Real Freedom (London: Michael Joseph, 1943) 7. In this essay Cary makes a distinction between "freedom" and "liberty", terms he used interchangeably four years earlier in Power in Men. In that earlier work he applied a similar definition to liberty: "Liberty is not an absence but a power. It is the power in man to do what he likes so far as his power can reach" (7). Hall (3) suggests that Cary had come to apply the word "liberty" specifically to what he had earlier described in Power in Men as the traditional liberal notion of freedom as lack of restraint. If this is indeed true, the distinction was short-lived. For one year later in the revised edition of The Case for African Freedom he was again using liberty and freedom interchangeably (see, for example, 24).

³⁸In Power in Men (4) Cary quotes J. R. Seeley's 1896 essay collection, Introduction to Political Science--"Perfect liberty is the total absence of government"--, citing this as symptomatic of an internal contradiction in nineteenth-century Liberal thought regarding theories of state.

regulating labor, the infrastructure it constructed for facilitating travel and transportation, or the education it provided for its citizens.

If freedom is a kind of power, then the most important form of freedom for Cary was freedom of the mind. In Cary's scheme freedom was a creative force responsible for every aspect of human progress: it "has created all the machines, all the states, the wealth, arts, and civilization in the world".³⁹ If on the one hand human beings are in fact free and not merely automatons programmed to respond to particular stimuli, and on the other hand God is truly incapable of intervening in the course of events, then it lies within the potential of each individual to create or at least influence his or her own destiny. Bad luck and natural disaster aside, the only limit on any individual attaining his or her desire is the self-limitation of one's own creativity. And for Cary it was the creative aspects of the human mind that were the source of real freedom. For, as he said in Power in Men, "[t]he mind . . . is the heart of liberty, its last stronghold."⁴⁰

Cary described a free mind as one "open to new truth".⁴¹ That is, a free mind is unencumbered by what Cary called "dogmatic" thinking. It appeals first and foremost to "reason and facts".⁴² While it accepts particular assertions as truth, it is always prepared to modify its beliefs and opinions in the light of new knowledge or facts that demonstrate those earlier assertions to be false. A dogmatic mind, on the other hand, is "closed to new truth".⁴³ Being closed, it rejects freedom for itself and "tr[ies] to deny it to others" and becomes "the enem[y] of all truth so far as it stands upon facts".⁴⁴ This is because a dogmatic mind, as Cary saw it, was

³⁹Cary, Power in Men 1.

⁴⁰Cary, Power in Men 18.

⁴¹Cary, Power in Men 14.

⁴²Cary, Power in Men 14-15.

⁴³Cary, Power in Men 194.

⁴⁴Cary, Power in Men 194.

authoritarian.⁴⁵ It viewed its own truth as "complete and final" and was hostile to any other knowledge that challenged its beliefs, seeking to silence opposition.⁴⁶ The dogmatic mind was an obstacle to progress of any sort.

Cary saw traditional Christianity, particularly the Christianity of his youth, as bounded by just this sort of dogmatism. Although his teachers at Clifton were, he said, men of science who urged him to ask questions and "were irritated if I learnt simply by rote",⁴⁷ when it came to matters of religion these same teachers simply gave him "a set of dogmatic statements without any explanation".⁴⁸ In other words, in matters of religion "questions were not in order".⁴⁹ Thus for Cary traditional religion, including Christianity, insofar as it clung to particular dogmas that were at odds with truth as revealed by science, or opposed the discovery or proliferation of new knowledge that contradicted its own truths, was an obstacle to progress. And this conviction, in turn, had serious implications for Cary's views of African societies and cultures, and for his understanding of the aims of the colonial project.

Cary on Africa and Africans

"British imperialism", said Robin Winks, "was based upon a sense of superiority, upon a conviction of a superior economic system, a superior political code, on access to a superior view of some Higher Being, on a superior way of life."⁵⁰ Realists and idealists alike were convinced of this superiority, and for this reason sought to spread their institutions. Cary was in many ways such an imperialist-idealist. It was this idealism, along with a romantic desire for adventure, which led him as a young man

⁴⁵Cary, Power in Men 195.

⁴⁶Cary, Power in Men 195.

⁴⁷Cary, "A Slight Case of Demolition", 69.

⁴⁸Cary, "My own religious history" 3.

⁴⁹Cary, "A Slight Case of Demolition" 69.

⁵⁰Robin Winks, "Introduction", British Imperialism: Gold, God, Glory, ed. Robin Winks, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963, 2-3.

to volunteer for service in Montenegro in 1912 during the First Balkan War⁵¹ and later to apply for a position in Sir Horace Pluckett's Irish Agricultural Organization Society in 1913.⁵² It was also this same idealism that led Cary next to the Nigerian colonial service.⁵³ As a young officer in the service he saw the British presence in Africa in altruistic terms: Britain's role was to foster freedom and development in order to prepare Nigerians to govern themselves in the future as participants in the modern world.⁵⁴ Initially he was an enthusiastic supporter of the policy of indirect rule.⁵⁵ Years later, however, long after his retirement from the service, he gradually became critical of the policy, chiefly for its failure "to enlarge native freedom, or to raise the standard of living."⁵⁶ He did not question or oppose the British colonial presence in Africa. Rather, he believed that Britain had a duty to take a more direct and active role in fostering and promoting development and change in Africa.

Cary was part of the Nigerian service from 1913 to 1920. However, the first of his African novels, Aissa Saved, did not appear until 1932, some 12 years after his retirement and departure from Africa.⁵⁷ During the 1930s

⁵¹"Cheerful Protestant", Time (Asia Edition) 20 Oct. 1952: 50. The article quotes Cary as saying that when fighting broke out he felt he had to get into it because "I didn't think there were going to be any more wars and I didn't want to miss it. And of course I did have some idea about this sort of freedom stuff."

⁵²Alan Bishop, Gentleman Rider 99. Citing an autobiographical draft, Bishop quotes Cary as saying that he saw in Pluckett's association an opportunity "to do something useful and practical for the Irish peasantry, and perhaps find time and material for writing."

⁵³Bishop 103. Citing a draft preface for the American edition of The African Witch, Bishop quotes Cary as saying that he was attracted to the Nigerian service because he felt it was performing "important and valuable, constructive political work." In a somewhat cynical tone Malcolm Foster also suggests that Cary was further motivated by the more practical need, at the age of 24, "to find a steady job". See Foster, Joyce Cary 85.

⁵⁴In a 1919 letter to his wife, for example, he described his duty as a colonial officer as being "to encourage and assist the peoples to develop [sic] on their own natural lives". See Joyce Cary Papers MSCARY Box 309, leaf 174-175; letter to his wife, 24 April 1919.

⁵⁵Cary, African Freedom 61.

⁵⁶Cary, African Freedom 63.

⁵⁷In his "Prefatory Essay" Cary said Aissa Saved took three years to finish (217, 219), which would place its beginnings around 1928.

four of the five novels he published were set in Nigeria and deeply concerned the colonial project.⁵⁸ Though he abandoned the African setting completely following the publication of Mister Johnson in 1939, through the 1940s and into the 1950s Africa--and particularly colonial policy in Africa--continued to be a significant preoccupation in his non-fiction.⁵⁹ Some of these essays, especially the later short pieces, are primarily the nostalgic reminiscences of a sick and elderly man on the adventures of his youth. Nevertheless, particularly the earlier longer tracts provide substantial insights into Cary's evolving political, cultural, and religious views, which in turn help to clarify the thematic concerns of his African novels.

The Case for African Freedom is particularly germane to our present discussion. Published originally as a pamphlet in 1941, it represents more than twenty years of reflections on Cary's personal experiences in the Nigerian service, on his perceptions of Africa and African societies, on the merits and shortcomings as he saw it of

Alan Bishop suggests that Cary had already begun approaching the novel in the mid 1920s, sketching out pieces of dialogue and descriptions, though he remained for a long time preoccupied with the never completed Cock Jarvis. It wasn't until after March of 1928 that he settled seriously into work on Aissa Saved. See Bishop, Gentleman Rider 216-219.

⁵⁸Aissa Saved was followed in 1933 by An American Visitor and by The African Witch in 1936. Castle Corner, which is concerned primarily with Ireland, preceded Mister Johnson by one year, appearing in 1938. During this time Cary also concerned himself with other writing projects, most notably the political tract Power in Men, which was published in 1939. Though its central concern is neither Africa nor colonial policy per se, this tract does reflect the impact on his political, religious, and philosophical views of his experience in the 1910s of living among African 'primitives', as well as reflecting his continued interest in Africa.

⁵⁹The Case for African Freedom was first published in 1941, and then expanded and reissued in 1944. Britain and West Africa appeared in 1946, and was subsequently republished the following year with an added appendix. In addition three shorter essays dealing exclusively with Africa--"Africa Yesterday: One Ruler's Burden"; "Christmas in Africa", and "Policy for Aid"--were published in magazines in 1951, 1953, and 1955 respectively, while "Catching Up with History", Cary's review of Richard Wright's book on Nkruma and Ghana, Black Power, came out in 1954. Meanwhile, in essays like "A Child's Religion" (1955), "The Most Exciting Sport in the World" (1957), and "The Meaning of England" (1958; posthumously published) Cary continued to draw and to nostalgically reflect in part on his experiences of some 40 years earlier.

colonial policy, and on his hopes and desires for the future course of that policy. More importantly, it incorporates the political, philosophical, and religious positions Cary had been forming since at least the 1920s and had recently articulated in Power in Men, applying them specifically to his views on African societies and on the past and future course of colonial policy in Africa. Since the ideas presented here reflect many of the themes and issues that made up his intellectual preoccupations at the time he was writing his African novels, it likewise forms a significant background against which to consider his African fiction.

Compared to his reading public, Cary had the benefit of extensive first-hand experience living among Africans and therefore, one might presume, extensive knowledge of the cultures of the peoples whom he was writing about. JanMohamed has suggested, however, that Cary was in fact largely isolated from the local African communities by a linguistic barrier that severely limited any meaningful interaction.⁶⁰ Owing to his very limited fluency in Hausa, he was forced to rely for the most part on a coastal English pidgin. This, Foster noted, put the African at a disadvantage in his interaction with Europeans because his limited English ability often made him appear childish or foolish, and the listener, Cary included, without thinking would often consider him just that.⁶¹ Cary's isolation, in turn, was reinforced by--and also helped to reinforce--"colonial assumptions of European superiority" as well as the "vague, often defensive generalizations about the otherness" of Africans that his own culture generated.⁶²

⁶⁰JanMohamed 20-21. Foster (148) notes that although Cary had passed the written portion of his Hausa qualifying exam in February of 1917, he was largely unable to speak or understand oral Hausa. As late as 1919, in a letter to his wife dated 11 March, Cary noted that he was still preparing for and feeling anxious about the oral qualifying exam, since he said had no one with whom to practise speaking Hausa--presumably, no other European, that is! (cited in Foster 192).

⁶¹Foster 148.

⁶²JanMohamed 20.

Chief among these generalizations was the notion that Africans were "primitive". This word, in fact, comes up time and again in Cary's references to African peoples and their cultures. As a young colonial administrator he regarded the various peoples he encountered as "primitive people in their isolated villages" and assumed that "their ideas of the world were primitive".⁶³ Similarly, at different times and in different forums he described their economy,⁶⁴ their governmental institutions⁶⁵ and power structures,⁶⁶ their levels of educational⁶⁷ and intellectual development,⁶⁸ their achievements in health care⁶⁹ and sanitation/hygiene,⁷⁰ their art,⁷¹ their systems of family and social organization,⁷² their traditional religious ideas⁷³ as well as modern religious movements,⁷⁴ and indeed their general world-view⁷⁵ all as "primitive" and "Stone Age".⁷⁶ There was not one aspect of African life that did not seem to Cary primitive and inferior in comparison to the social, political, intellectual, and religious achievements of the various European societies.

Of course not every instance of Cary's use of the word 'primitive' was necessarily pejorative or condescending. Arguments about the culturally-determined nature of

⁶³Cary, African Freedom 21.

⁶⁴Cary, African Freedom 28.

⁶⁵Cary, "Policy for Aid," 1955, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays 100.

⁶⁶Cary, Power in Men 238.

⁶⁷Cary, "Policy for Aid" 101.

⁶⁸Cary, "Catching Up With History," 1954, The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings on Africa (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962) 223.

⁶⁹Cary, African Freedom 82ff.

⁷⁰Cary, African Freedom 86.

⁷¹Cary, Power in Men, 3.

⁷²Cary, "Britain and West Africa," 1946, The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings on Africa 195. Also, "Christmas in Africa," 1953, The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings on Africa 213. Also Power in Men 2.

⁷³Cary, "Prefatory Essay" for Aissa Saved 216, and The African Witch 309

⁷⁴Cary, African Freedom 67.

⁷⁵Cary, African Freedom 83.

⁷⁶This latter term is used, in addition to "primitive", in "Catching Up With History" to describe both "the culture of Negro Africa" (221) and the African "mind" (222).

'scientific knowledge' aside,⁷⁷ the levels of scientific, technological, and medical achievement Europeans encountered in Africa by comparison with modern European standards were in fact quite primitive. In many cases they were, at best, on a par with medieval European levels of achievement. The unsanitary conditions they frequently encountered, as well, similarly indicated a more primitive level of understanding regarding the relationship between disease and hygiene. Nevertheless, as we shall see, some of Cary's views regarding the 'primitive' nature of African life--for example, his dismissal of communal life as primitive 'tribalism'--do reflect a degree of European arrogance.

By 1941 Cary had arrived at the conclusion that Africa was in need of a program of "total development".⁷⁸ By this he meant not merely economic development in the form of tapping raw materials, developing local industries, and training and employing local labor. Rather, he sought a colonial policy that emphasized "a new education, new social services", one that would have a transforming effect on the very psyche of Africans themselves; that is, a policy that would affect those intangible aspects "often more psychological than economic; on habits and customs, taste and even religious tradition".⁷⁹ For Africa in Cary's view, far from being a rich continent simply "needing

⁷⁷See, for example, Sandra Harding, "Is Modern Science an Ethnoscience? Rethinking Epistemological Assumptions", Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 45-70. As interesting as such arguments may be on a theoretic level, in terms of the present discussion they are irrelevant. It is therefore not my intention to test them here. Suffice it to say that, in its application and in terms of practical benefits, African achievements in technology and science were no match for European achievements. Cary's own anecdotes indicate that Africans often had highly advanced levels of knowledge in such areas as physics and engineering, developed entirely independent of European education. See, for example, African Freedom 36, where Cary recounts the story of a native bridge builder who had no knowledge of European science or engineering methods but well understood the theories behind pulleys and levers and designed his own system for raising building materials. In the context of the larger picture, however, such knowledge paled by comparison.

⁷⁸Cary, African Freedom 9.

⁷⁹Cary, African Freedom 9.

development", was instead "very poor" and "going down hill rapidly".⁸⁰ Its problems--expanding deserts, receding lakes, rapid deforestation, poor soil fertility, famine, disease, all compounded by a rapidly increasing population --he asserted were less the result of Western political, military, and economic intervention in the continent than of the traditional economies and lifestyles of the peoples, which he called "ruinous",⁸¹ and of a general state of mind which he described as "primitive".⁸² Policies aimed simply at raising the "standards of living"--such as introducing the benefits of modern science and technology, or integrating the African continent into the modern world economy--he felt were useless "without an alteration in the standards of life".⁸³ Policies which did not "assume, as premiss [sic], all those other developments, social and personal, . . . can only be superficial and local",⁸⁴ and are ultimately doomed to failure. In other words, by 1941 he was arguing against what had been the guiding principles British colonial policy in Nigeria from the beginning of the twentieth century--a policy he himself had unquestioningly and enthusiastically embraced as a young officer in the colonial service⁸⁵--namely, that policy of indirect rule and minimal interference in local culture that became known as Lugard's 'dual mandate'. He was instead urging a policy that would completely alter traditional social structures and cultural values. And high on the list of cultural items he deemed requiring "great interference" from the European colonial mentors were "religious ideas".⁸⁶

⁸⁰Cary, African Freedom 28.

⁸¹Cary, African Freedom 28.

⁸²Cary, African Freedom 28.

⁸³Cary, African Freedom 10.

⁸⁴Cary, African Freedom 10.

⁸⁵Cary, African Freedom 61.

⁸⁶Cary, African Freedom 57.

Cary described traditional African religions as "juju".⁸⁷ By this he meant they were irrational systems of belief built upon superstitions handed down from generation to generation that are usually at odds with rational truth as revealed by science. Like the religion of a child, juju is mysterious, emotional, and irrational, but to the holder of such beliefs all too terrifyingly real. Children and juju believers both, he said, "grapple with mysteries and demons, ghosts and monsters".⁸⁸ The consequences of this are that Africans, in Cary's assessment, are irrational in the way they face the daily tasks of living and coping with the world, driven by emotion. Confronted with challenges, man-made or natural, Africans too often become "lost, bewildered, hopeless, and finally despairing";⁸⁹ they "rage against the mysterious fate" which they feel powerless to control,⁹⁰ and consequently have tremendous need from time to time to release their pent-up emotions "or they explode".⁹¹ They are less likely to respond to situations and challenges with reason but according to "what they feel".⁹² Women, in particular, he said, were emotional: they "think with their feelings".⁹³ The African outlook on life, as well, he described to be "limited, sceptical, superstitious, and timid of adventure".⁹⁴

Because Cary perceived women in general, and African women in particular, as especially susceptible to emotion, he saw juju as particularly powerful among them.⁹⁵ This was especially problematic because in most societies traditionally women were responsible for the care and education of children.⁹⁶ Consequently, as long as women

⁸⁷See, for example, Cary, "Prefatory Essay" Aissa Saved 216; "A Child's Religion," 1953, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays 21; African Freedom 119.

⁸⁸Cary, "A Child's Religion" 21.

⁸⁹Cary, African Freedom 47.

⁹⁰Cary, African Freedom 47.

⁹¹Cary, African Freedom 48.

⁹²Cary, African Freedom 56.

⁹³Cary, African Freedom 121.

⁹⁴Cary, African Freedom 108.

⁹⁵Cary, African Freedom 119.

⁹⁶Cary, African Freedom 119.

clung to traditional beliefs and remained under the influence of the juju priest the influence these held over society were perpetuated into the next generations. As powerful as these beliefs are, though, Cary believed that ultimately juju is unsound: challenged by rational truth it quickly crumbles and loses sway.⁹⁷ In other words, the power of juju over societies could be undermined and eventually eliminated through a program of "total development", which centered round a "new education".⁹⁸

Cary and the Colonial Project

Cary's call for total development and a new education in Africa implied an assumption that the Church too had a definite role to play in the colonial project. The fact that responsibility for colonial education, as well as for much of the medical and health services in the colonies, were largely in the hands of the missions presupposes that missionaries would have to be deeply involved in any new education. Therefore, particularly if this new education was to touch such profoundly "psychological" areas as "habits and customs, taste and even religious tradition", the cooperation of the missionaries was not just a presumption; it was a prerequisite. The success or failure of the colonial project, therefore, in Cary's scheme would be greatly affected by the success or failure of the missions.

The ultimate goal of the colonial project as Cary saw it was to prepare Africans for freedom. For Cary, however, this did not mean political freedom in the sense of decolonization and self-government--at least, not as the immediate priority. In the present situation "political devolution", he felt, was of no advantage to the masses⁹⁹

⁹⁷Cary, "Prefatory Essay", Aissa Saved 216.

⁹⁸Cary, African Freedom 9.

⁹⁹Cary, African Freedom 12.

and should only come later, after the masses had been prepared for "real freedom".¹⁰⁰

Cary envisioned organs of social organization as having an important role to play in facilitating the advance of "real freedom". They did this, he suggested, with the roads and bridges they build which would enhance the ability of individuals to travel if they so desire, or to carry on trade; the education they provided put it in the power of individuals to learn and thus increase their ability for economic and social advancement; the legislation they passed could protect workers' rights or extend their powers to bargain.¹⁰¹ It is, he said, no paradox that the modern Englishman or American living in a highly complex and ordered society "has much more freedom to indulge his tastes and realize his talents than had his ancestor of a few hundred years ago, in a simple society with few laws but no organized education, no protection from the exploiter, and miserable pay".¹⁰² In other words, the more sophisticated the level of development achieved by a society, the greater the potential for the individual to satisfy his or her desires, and consequently the greater the potential for obtaining "real freedom".

This does not mean that Cary thought governments and other social organs were always good or that they automatically enhanced freedom. Rather he believed that they have such potential. Although he would undoubtedly reject Louis Althusser's Marxist political orientation, Cary similarly recognized that social organs--be they administrative bodies, schools, or Churches--were potentially what Althusser described as ideological state apparatuses¹⁰³ that could be manipulated to either enhance or limit individual freedom. The degree to which such social organs fostered dogmatic intolerance of competing

¹⁰⁰Cary, African Freedom 24.

¹⁰¹Cary, African Freedom 24-5.

¹⁰²Cary, African Freedom 25.

¹⁰³See Louis Althusser, "Selected Texts" in Ideology, ed. Terry Eagleton (London: Longman, 1994) 89-92.

understandings of 'truth' was an indication of the degree to which these organs hindered the development of freedom. And herein was the primary criticism behind Cary's portrayal of traditional African society in his novels and his non-fiction as well as his major critique of the Church, particularly the evangelical missions. For Cary believed that "freedom of the mind"¹⁰⁴ is the ultimate form of liberty, and that education is "the key of liberty".¹⁰⁵ In his view the Church missions in particular were failing to cultivate genuinely free minds through the type of education they were offering. Instead they were replacing one primitive form of dogmatic juju with a slightly more sophisticated form.

If Cary recognized that education was the key to liberty, he also realized that education was not limited to formal 'schooling'. Rather he equated it with the entire process of socialization. The individual, he said, is formed "by a total experience" which begins very early, from the time a child "can use its will or form an idea. It learns at first from its parents, toys, friends, any accidents or illnesses that may befall it. It learns from its total environment".¹⁰⁶ Formal education, he said, is that aspect of the process that is "arranged for specific purposes. It is controlled experience".¹⁰⁷ It consists of formal instruction, games meant to enhance physical, mental, and social development, participation group or communal activities and rituals, manual work, and exposure to forms of artistic expression of the community. Such a 'total environment' is "partly real, partly spiritual or ideal".¹⁰⁸ Such intangible things as religious beliefs, communal traditions, customs, and values, public opinion

¹⁰⁴Cary, Power in Men 13ff.

¹⁰⁵Cary, Power in Men 18.

¹⁰⁶Cary, Power in Men 192.

¹⁰⁷Cary, Power in Men 192.

¹⁰⁸Cary, Power in Men 193.

and taste "form a spiritual environment more compelling in effect than physical surroundings"¹⁰⁹.

Because this emotional, intellectual, and spiritual environment plays such a central role in forming the individual, Cary believed that the measure of a society's freedom and the measure of its ability to foster 'freedom of the mind' are marked by the degree to which it practices "toleration".¹¹⁰ Toleration, he said, is "the natural air of freedom. Without it there is full liberty only for one man, one opinion, one party, or one creed".¹¹¹ Societies that encourage the production and exchange of ideas promote freedom while those that discourage, repress, or limit such activity are "destructive of liberty".¹¹² Cary was particularly concerned about toleration for the pursuit of new ideas. Minds closed to new ideas he described as "dogmatic".¹¹³ Dogma, on the one hand, Cary said means "a declared belief.[] In this sense all men and all churches are dogmatic".¹¹⁴ But a second meaning of dogma is "belief enforced by authority".¹¹⁵ Citing Cardinal Newman as an example, he said that this sort of dogmatism insists "that there is only one truth in the world about religion, which he [i.e. Newman] knows, and that anyone who attacks that truth or denies it ought to be silenced".¹¹⁶ This same attitude is true of anyone who believes his truth is final and complete. However, "[s]ince truth is not complete, men must have power to seek and publish what they think to be the truth. Progress is impossible without toleration".¹¹⁷

Cary considered traditional Christianity dogmatic in this sense. He also saw African religions--juju--as equally dogmatic and a hindrance to development in the societies over which they held sway. "Primitive races", he said,

¹⁰⁹Cary, Power in Men 193.

¹¹⁰Cary, Power in Men 193.

¹¹¹Cary, Power in Men 193.

¹¹²Cary, Power in Men 193.

¹¹³Cary, Power in Men 194.

¹¹⁴Cary, Power in Men 194.

¹¹⁵Cary, Power in Men 195.

¹¹⁶Cary, Power in Men 195.

¹¹⁷Cary, Power in Men 195.

". . . are crushed and bound by false ideas derived from past authority, and are stultified by the traditional creed that such ideas are superior to the truth".¹¹⁸ These creeds rule by "terror" fostered in turn by ignorance of the world.¹¹⁹ The primitive African, Cary wrote, lives in fear and superstition; "[h]e suspects and dreads the outside world".¹²⁰ He is afflicted with a "village mind" that is on the one hand "limited" and "superstitious",¹²¹ and at the same time arrogant and conceited.¹²² That is, he remains convinced of the superiority of his own ideas about the world even when confronted with clear demonstrations of their error. Rather than question his own beliefs he ridicules and dismisses the rival ideas. His mind is closed to new ideas, and consequently to progress. What is urgently needed, therefore, is to eradicate the sort of prejudice, fear, superstition, and ignorance that juju has cultivated. This he felt should be the urgent priority of the colonial project. This, in turn, should be the principal mission of the Churches. And his novels become an exploration of the success or failure of the colonial partners in fulfilling this mission.

¹¹⁸Cary, Power in Men 16.

¹¹⁹Cary, Power in Men 238.

¹²⁰Cary, African Freedom 107.

¹²¹Cary, African Freedom 108.

¹²²Cary, African Freedom 112-3.

Chapter Three

Joyce Cary (2)

Failed Missions: Christianity and the Civilizing Mission in Joyce Cary's African Novels

Introduction

About half way through Joyce Cary's Aissa Saved District Officer Bradgate finds himself brooding over a stinging letter of rebuke received from the missionary Carr. Bradgate is offended by Carr's implications that he is only concerned with "purely commercial and selfish" matters,¹ and not with the overall improvement of the quality of life for Africans in the district. While Bradgate has long been convinced of the urgent need for projects that facilitate development of the economic infrastructure, he is also beginning to feel that Carr's criticism might not be completely irrelevant, that "the religious questions might after all be of some little importance, that they might have some connection with education, for instance, which he knew to be important".² Thematically this is a significant moment for this novel and Cary's subsequent African fiction. It shows Bradgate beginning to question the wisdom of a colonial policy based on the principles of the dual mandate. Specifically, it questions whether roads and bridges, improved health care and sanitation, or the introduction of scientific methods of farming are by themselves sufficient to improve the quality of life for Africans. Specifically raising the interrelated issues of religious belief and 'education' in its broadest sense, it questions whether some other form of intervention--intervention that would touch the core of the social, the psychological, and the spiritual lives of the Africans--would in fact be necessary to effect the sort of development he and

¹Joyce Cary, Aissa Saved, 1932. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 112.

²Cary, Aissa Saved 113.

the colonial powers thought desirable. By raising these questions the scene anticipates Cary's call nine years later for a colonial policy of "total development" for Africa, based on a "new education" that would seriously impact upon "habits and customs, taste and even religious tradition",³ while at the same time anticipating what would become a major thematic concern in the African novels that would follow. This and the ensuing novels therefore can be read, in part at least, as a double-edged critique of colonial policy of both the civil authorities and their religious counterparts for their failure to prepare their African charges for 'real freedom'. That is, these novels represent Cary's assessment and critique of a secular colonial policy that concerns itself almost exclusively with the material side of development and of a religious colonial mission that fails to propagate among the African masses a truly liberating form of Christianity, one which would break what he saw as the chains of tribalism, blind dogmatism, and superstition.

Cary had said on a number of occasions that his primary interest in all of his novels was with matters of religion.⁴ In the prefatory essay to the Carfax edition of Aissa Saved, for instance, he said "the fundamental question for everybody is what they live by; what is their faith".⁵ Everyone, he said, had "some kind of faith; if only a political theory, 'science', a mascot, or a column of mud roughly shaped like an erect penis"; the question that most interested him was "how sound is the faith; . . . how deep does it send its roots into reality".⁶ In his estimation faith in juju--Cary's generic term for traditional African religions--"stands

³Cary, The Case for African Freedom, New ed. (London: Martin, Secker & Warburg, 1944) 9.

⁴Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved, 216. He made similar comments in the prefatory essays for the Carfax editions of An American Visitor and The African Witch.

⁵Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 216.

⁶Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 216.

badly".⁷ Rooted in ideas inconsistent with logic and scientific fact, it is quickly shaken.

Cary's interest in religion establishes a connection with Chinua Achebe, who shares a similar interest,⁸ and to a lesser degree with Ngugi wa Thiong'o--especially in his early fiction⁹--and also to an extent with Elspeth Huxley,¹⁰ who partly shared Cary's assumptions regarding the potential civilizing effects of Christianity for Africans. The conclusions at which each arrives, though, are quite different. All four are keenly aware of the power of religious belief and practices, and the central position these hold in building, shaping, and controlling society. Yet there is an obvious gap in the way they perceive religion, both traditional practices and European Christianity. In their views of traditional religion, what Cary, and to a lesser extent Huxley, ultimately dismiss as primitive superstition that inhibits progress both Achebe and Ngugi celebrate as the cement that bonds their traditional societies; what in Cary is typically reduced to irrational, orgiastic frenzy is lovingly--though not romantically--reproduced in both Achebe and Ngugi as profound and spiritually nourishing ritual. When it comes to mission

⁷Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 216.

⁸Achebe discussed with Robert Wren his interest in religion, particularly comparative religions, as a student at Ibadan. See Robert M. Wren, "Those Magical Years," 1983, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997) 104.

⁹A short story like "The Village Priest" (the original version, that is) openly endorses Christianity. The River Between, which will be discussed later, in turn offers a sympathetic treatment of traditional religious practices and longs for a compromise with Christianity. Outside his fiction, as late as his student days at Makerere Ngugi was endorsing Christianity as "the best challenge to Communism or any form of totalitarianism." See Ngugi, "African Culture: The Mistake That Kenyatta Made," Sunday Post 6 Aug. 1961: 10.

¹⁰Although Huxley grew up in a family where organized religion (i.e. 'church-going') was not important, her mother included as part of her home schooling bible study itself and commentary on the scriptures (Elspeth Huxley, The Mottled Lizard [London: Chatto and Windus, 1962] 111-112). Religion plays an important role in her Africa novels, as we will see later. Her non-fiction articles, especially during the period of the Kenyan Emergency, also often reflect her interest in religion.

Christianity, what for both Cary and Huxley is potentially a primary conduit of Europe's civilizing mission in Africa is for Achebe and Ngugi another weapon in the colonial arsenal.

Owing to Cary's deep interest in religion many critical readers have been quick to look past his representations of Africa, African peoples, and their cultures. Most have echoed Molly Mahood's assertion, particularly regarding Aissa Saved, that Cary did not "write a novel 'about' Nigeria"; rather, she said, he was using Borgu and Kontagora "as a satisfyingly distanced setting for a book about the fundamental injustice of the world and the varying faiths by which individuals come to their own terms with this injustice".¹¹ While authorial intentions certainly need be acknowledged, Cary's personal experiences in Africa as part of the colonial administration nevertheless gave him a different perspective from, say a Conrad, or from his readership, so that we must also agree with G. D. Killam when he points out that this and Cary's other novels are "so specifically about Africa . . . that it is difficult not to look upon them as a nearly complete evocation by Cary of the colonising process, the civilising mission in Africa".¹² I would suggest that there is in fact a close relationship between Cary's religious interests and his views on the aims, course, and objectives of colonial policy. Further, in these novels while Cary is pursuing his religious interests he is simultaneously offering his critique of colonial policy.

Cary's Africans

The African world Cary represents in these novels strongly reflects contemporary stereotypical images of 'primitive' peoples. His African characters are emotional and

¹¹M. M. Mahood, Joyce Cary's Africa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) 106.

¹²G. D. Killam, Africa in English Fiction: 1874-1939 (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968) 124.

irrational; they are clannish, arrogant and conceited; and they are superstitious and dogmatic in their beliefs. They are, in other words, possessed of what he described elsewhere as a "village mind".¹³ In his non-fiction Cary repeatedly expressed the belief that 'primitive' Africans are driven by "feelings".¹⁴ They are excitable,¹⁵ impulsive,¹⁶ "a people highly emotional and open to suggestion".¹⁷ African women in particular, he said, "think with their feelings",¹⁸ while native African religious movements were "emotional, anarchist, destructive".¹⁹ This in turn is the manner in which the indigenous characters, and particularly the eponymous heroine of Aissa Saved, are portrayed in his novels. His Africans do not speak or shout so much as they "scream",²⁰ "shriek",²¹ "howl",²² "screech",²³ and "bellow".²⁴ Discussions are never calm and rational but rather turn into violent, animal-like brawls.²⁵ The frequency of these emotional outbursts gives the impression of a people constantly on the edge of frenzy, barely able to maintain rational control. Nor

¹³In The Case for African Freedom Cary described the "village mind" as "limited, sceptical, superstitious, and timid of adventure" (108). He went on to clarify, saying that the outlook on life of primitive peoples was characterized by "[p]rejudice, superstition, fear, ignorance" (110), and "conceit" (112).

¹⁴Cary, African Freedom 48.

¹⁵Cary, African Freedom 67.

¹⁶Cary, "Africa Yesterday: One Ruler's Burden," The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings on Africa, 207.

¹⁷Cary, African Freedom 144. And thus, in his mind, easy targets for manipulative nationalistic movements.

¹⁸Cary, African Freedom 121. To emphasize its primordial nature, he added this is "probably the original method" of thinking (121).

¹⁹Cary, African Freedom 67.

²⁰See, for example, Cary, Aissa Saved 17, 36, 38, 59, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 124, 136, 156, 168, 169, 172, 180, 186, 191, 192, 193, 200, 201, 207, 209; also An American Visitor, 1933 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 16, 17, 35, 64, 71; also The African Witch, 1936 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962) 30, 31, 47, 49, 56, 57, 58

²¹See, for example, Cary, Aissa Saved 21, 27, 51, 61, 87, 91, 99, 135, 136, 157, 174, 184, 190, 197, 199, 202, 208; also American Visitor 16, 18; also African Witch 33, 45, 47, 55, 57,

²²See, for example, Cary, Aissa Saved 33, 36, 46, 198, 204.

²³See, for example, Cary, Aissa Saved 55, 92; also African Witch.33

²⁴See, for example, Cary, Aissa Saved 38, 52, 120, 198, 199; also American Visitor 36.

²⁵For example Cary, Aissa Saved 17; American Visitor 80-1.

are these emotional outbursts limited to the 'pagan' community. Rather, the Christian converts, and particularly the women, shriek, howl, and fight as frequently as do the non-Christians.

Cary's Africans are also clannish, arrogant, and conceited. The pagans of Aissa Saved, for instance, look down upon both the Christians and the Muslims, comparing them to "a dog waiting to be whipped".²⁶ His Africans hold the whites,²⁷ their science,²⁸ authority,²⁹ and ideas³⁰ in contempt; they blame outsiders for their difficulties;³¹ and they despise and abuse Christians living among them.³² The Christian converts, for their part, are smug, even towards white men not of their mission community;³³ they disdain the pagans as "rubbish"³⁴, as cannibals,³⁵ and as "bastards" whom they intend to drive out of the land;³⁶ and they are supremely confident in the superiority of their god.³⁷ The ruling-class Muslims, in turn, look down upon non-Muslim tribal groups with disdain;³⁸ they generally exploit their position of power to benefit themselves and their co-religionists.³⁹

Similarly, the Africans' religious beliefs and practices are a compilation of what Cary called 'false ideas' based on superstitions, which appeal to emotions rather than reason. Each of the different communities believes in personal gods who intervene in the course of human events, violating the

²⁶Cary, Aissa Saved 30.

²⁷For example Cary, American Visitor 14, 34, 81 and elsewhere; African Witch 77 and elsewhere.

²⁸For example Cary, Aissa Saved 30.

²⁹For example Cary, Aissa Saved 38, 58 and elsewhere.

³⁰For example Cary, American Visitor 51, 56 and elsewhere

³¹For example Cary, Aissa Saved 30; American Visitor 64, 103.

³²For example Cary, Aissa Saved 32-3.

³³For example Cary, Aissa Saved 14; also An American Visitor (196).

³⁴Cary, American Visitor 80.

³⁵Cary, Aissa Saved 27.

³⁶Cary, Aissa Saved 55 and elsewhere.

³⁷For example Cary, Aissa Saved 57 and elsewhere; African Witch 37 and elsewhere.

³⁸For example Cary, Aissa Saved 76, 88.

³⁹Cary, Aissa Saved 72.

laws of physics and nature. The 'pagans' live in fear of the gods and the power of juju,⁴⁰ and practise human sacrifice.⁴¹ They are also haunted by demons and other capricious, vindictive, and malevolent spirits that are out to harm them.⁴² They believe in magic and witchcraft: books are regarded as "magic and sacred objects" and the ability to read them a source of magical power;⁴³ sickness and other disaster is caused by either witchcraft⁴⁴ or demonic possession,⁴⁵ while charms will empower and protect them.⁴⁶ Witches, in turn, are capable of transforming themselves in an instant into any form they desire;⁴⁷ abnormal births, such as breeches, twins, or children born with teeth, are all indications of witchery and demand the immediate destruction of the child;⁴⁸ ritual healings make use as well of incantations and magical objects.⁴⁹ Finally, it is primarily an emotional religion. That is, it is a religion of ecstatic experience that is often violent and even self-destructive in nature. Its rituals and ceremonies often involve the use of alcohol and other hallucinatory drugs as well as rhythmic music and dance that produces hypnotic, trance-like states and often incite violence and self-mutilation.

Finally, susceptibility to this primitive and irrational emotionalism is not restricted only to Cary's 'tribal' characters. Rather, it affects all of his Africans to some degree, from the rival pagan and Christian communities of Kolu and Shibi to the urbane, Oxford-educated Louis Aladai.

⁴⁰For example Cary, Aissa Saved 31; African Witch 28ff and elsewhere.

⁴¹Cary, Aissa Saved 123ff, 209ff.

⁴²For example Cary, Aissa Saved 66-7, 104; American Visitor 59, 81.

⁴³Cary, Aissa Saved 41.

⁴⁴For example Cary, Aissa Saved 84; American Visitor 60.

⁴⁵Cary, Aissa Saved 104.

⁴⁶Cary, African Witch 80.

⁴⁷Cary, Aissa Saved 61ff, 85.

⁴⁸For example Cary, Aissa Saved 85, 108.

⁴⁹Cary, Aissa Saved 104.

Primitive versus Civilized Juju: Aissa Saved

In the penultimate chapter of Aissa Saved Cary relates in minute detail an intense personal encounter between the eponymous heroine and the spirit of Jesus. Aissa and her fellow converts have just destroyed the juju house of the goddess Oke, massacring the juju priest Owule and his followers in the process, all in the name of Jesus. Yet Jesus is apparently unsatisfied with this act of propitiation. His spirit possesses Aissa, chastising her with accusations of loving her man Gajere and her child Abba more than Jesus and demanding further signs of her love. The scene then proceeds to relate her frenzied declarations of devotion, punctuated with acts of gory self-mutilation intended to demonstrate her sincerity, and culminating in the sacrifice of her child before a hastily crafted cross. In its brutality, its gruesomeness, its frenzy, and the associated acts of self-mutilation and human sacrifice the scene recalls the earlier sacrifice of Ishe's son Numi to the goddess Oke. However, juxtaposed between the scenes of the two sacrifices is reported a third 'sacrifice' which takes place outside the narrative: that of the missionary-wife, Hilda Carr. It is merely noted that Hilda's first child had died soon after birth and was buried "somewhere down river", and that she had "thrown away her looks and health" and was now risking the life of another child in her womb in order to bring the Gospel to these people, all "for the love of Jesus."⁵⁰ Although Hilda's sacrifice lacks the ritual, the frenzy, and the violence associated with those of the African characters, it is nevertheless a propitiatory offering--what Molly Mahood described as an act of "self-abdication"⁵¹--to a personal god,

⁵⁰Cary, Aissa Saved 140. Further citations are given in the text, abbreviated as AS.

⁵¹Mahood 108. Mahood alternatively uses the word "self-abandonment" (109) as well.

motivated not by the light of reason but by 'enthusiasm'.⁵² It also incorporates similar if less dramatic or ritualized acts of 'self-mutilation' and human sacrifice, and eventually culminates in the death of the devotee herself. By juxtaposing the reports of these incidents involving the missionary-wife between the minutely detailed accounts of the sacrifices of Ishe and Aissa Cary is suggesting that the three women have more in common than would appear on the surface. Specifically he is establishing a close relationship between the nature of the religious beliefs of the Africans and the missionaries. More specifically, he can be seen as gendering 'traditional' religion--both indigenous African beliefs and practices and Western evangelical Christianity--in the feminine,⁵³ a trope he would reemploy in An American

⁵²James Dunn (Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 5, ed. Mircea Eliade [New York: Macmillan, 1987]) defines the classical meaning of 'enthusiasm' as a "fundamental belief in the immediacy and directness of [the individual's] experience of God." For the enthusiast "this experience is self-evident and self-authenticating . . . The enthusiast knows God's will and acts as his agent, accountable only and directly to him" (120-1). Dunn adds that for those "hostile to religion as such--or to any save a strictly rational religion--enthusiasm was no different from superstition", and further that enthusiasm has often been associated with "sectarianism" (119). Cary's portrayal of the Carrs and their religion in the present novel, as well as the Dobsons in An American Visitor and to a certain degree Schlemm in The African Witch, all suggest that their religion is to some degree 'enthusiastic'. The only use Cary makes of the term that I have thus far uncovered comes in An American Visitor (88), in which it is used very much in this classical and derogatory sense, indicating that this is the meaning with which Cary would have most likely understood the term. To the extent that I use it in this paper, this is therefore the meaning I intend.

⁵³Peter Childs and R. J. Patrick Williams (An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory [London: Prentice-Hall, 1997] 199) note the tendency of colonial discourses to feminize native men. Sandra Harding similarly points to a "curious coincidence" in colonial discourse of similarity between what has been identified as an 'African' world view and a feminine world view. (Quoted in Ania Loomba Colonialism/Postcolonialism [London: Routledge, 1998] 163.) Cheri Register's list of specific characteristics of 'femininity' commonly ascribed to women, drawn from Mary Ellman's Thinking About Women, includes instability/hysteria and irrationality--along with formlessness, passivity, confinement (narrowness, practicality), piety, materiality, spirituality, compliancy, and incorrigibility. See Cheri Register, "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction," Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory, 2nd ed., ed. Josephine Donovan (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989) 3.

Visitor and The African Witch.⁵⁴ Both, he is suggesting, are irrational religions that appeal to emotional experience and valorize self-abandonment, and are built upon superstition and other false ideas about the nature of God. In other words, the Christianity the missionaries are teaching in Cary's view is, religiously and socially, little more than sophisticated forms of 'juju' and 'tribalism', both of which he maintained only serve to inhibit rather than foster 'real freedom' for the African masses.

Malcolm Foster has suggested that any balanced reading of the novel "is severely hindered by the violence it depicts".⁵⁵ Indeed, from start to finish it reads like a catalogue of African depravity, savagery, and cruelty. Briefly, the story focuses on three African communities--the pagans of Kolu and Yanrin, the Christian converts at Shibi, and their Muslim overlords, with the European missionaries and the colonial officer in minor but thematically essential supporting roles--and recounts a bloody clash between the pagans and converts during a time of drought that threatens to lead to famine. The pagans, searching for an explanation for the drought, conclude that their goddess has been offended by the presence of a foreign religion in her lands. The converts, in the meanwhile, set off to hold a witness rally in the pagan stronghold at Kolu. A riot ensues. In the course of the riot Aissa is captured by the pagans and suffers severely at their hands, losing her foot to gangrene as a result. She later escapes and is nursed back to health by Mrs. Carr. Following a highly emotional conversion experience at her first communion, Aissa and a band of converts led by Ojo again rush off to Kolu, this time to kill

⁵⁴Marie Hasluck, the eponymous American Visitor, experiences a highly emotional religious conversion while Elizabeth Aladai in The African Witch is Cary's epitome of an African juju that is female-centered.

⁵⁵Malcolm Foster, Joyce Cary: A Bibliography (London: Michael Joseph, 1969) 317.

the pagan priests and drive Oke from the land. Following an even bloodier clash with the pagans, during which the pagan priest is killed and the juju house destroyed, the novel moves towards its conclusion, first with the Christo-pagans performing the rainmaking sacrifice noted earlier, and then with Aissa's own execution by the pagans, a horrible death upon an anthill, limbs broken and screaming out her love for Jesus.

Cary's underlying assumption in the novel is that organized Christianity, particularly the fundamentalist evangelical⁵⁶ variety represented by the Carrs, is as much a 'primitive' religion as the beliefs of the Africans. That is, it shares with African 'juju' many assumptions and practices that Cary considered 'false' or 'superstitious' ideas. Included among these are 1) polytheistic and pantheistic beliefs that emphasize personal deities present and active in the world in contradiction of Cary's remote form of monotheism;⁵⁷ 2) the need for, and even desirability of, propitiatory blood-sacrifice; and 3) intuition and ecstatic experience--often leading to self-abandonment and self-sacrifice--as a primary source of revelation. What distinguishes this sophisticated 'juju' of the Europeans from the more primitive juju of the Africans is not the absence of any of these 'false' ideas, but simply the manner in which they are expressed. Contemporary Africans, he believed, were

⁵⁶George Marsden (Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 5) describes evangelicalism as a "largely Protestant movement that emphasizes (1) the Bible as authoritative and reliable; (2) eternal salvation as possible only by regeneration (being 'born again'), involving personal trust in Christ and his atoning work; and (3) a spiritually transformed life" (190). Fundamentalism, in turn, is a "subspecies of evangelicalism", referring to "evangelicals who consider it a chief Christian duty to combat uncompromisingly 'modernist' theology and certain secularizing cultural trends" (190). Both are dogmatic--particularly in their emphasis on scriptural authority, and valorizing personal, intuitive, ecstatic experience--which qualifies them for inclusion under the heading of 'enthusiastic' religion.

⁵⁷Hall (5) suggests that logically Cary's position is existentialistic and atheistic.

living in an intellectual environment of "absolutism and intolerance" akin to the European medieval period.⁵⁸ They had yet to experience anything with the equivalent tempering intellectual effect of the European Enlightenment, which has had a moderating influence on the manner in which these beliefs are expressed or otherwise acted upon, in many cases reinterpreting dogmatic articles of faith from the literal to the symbolic.

When the novel appeared in 1932 some critics seemed distracted by the graphic detail with which the violence is related. One representative reviewer expressed disappointment with Cary's apparent lack of commitment to the side of the colonizers despite the manner in which the Africans' "crudity is so vividly dwelt on", and felt that Cary should have embraced the efforts of the missionaries and colonial officials by representing them more favorably rather than being "too objective".⁵⁹ Later readers were more adept in perceiving Cary's intent,⁶⁰ and many have already extensively discussed Cary's often stereotypical representation of Africans and their 'primitive' beliefs. Even these readers, however, seem to miss Cary's intended critique of evangelical mission Christianity as a hindrance to the development of real freedom and consequently progress.⁶¹ Dennis Hall, I

⁵⁸Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 217.

⁵⁹Rev. of Aissa Saved, Times Literary Supplement, 21 Jan. 1932: 42.

⁶⁰Foster (317), for instance, suggested that many readers fail to see Hilda Carr's sacrifice of two babies and her own life for her faith is fundamentally no different from the sacrifices of Ishe and Aissa.

⁶¹Michael J. C. Echeruo (30-2), for instance, devotes several pages to a comparison and discussion of the Christian and pagan notions of sacrifice, especially blood-sacrifice. Also, Echeruo (34), G. D. Killam (134), S. H. Kanu (4), and D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke (202) all discussed the religion of the African converts as a parody or perversion of Christianity. In addition, Douglas Stewart (138) sees the humor and the tragedy of this novel in the mutual "utter failure of the European to understand the imaginative life of the African, and the equal failure of the African to grasp the inwardness of European culture and religion". Still, in the end he places the greater burden on the Africans, whom he says have "mistranslated" the gospel taught them by Carr (141). Finally, Barbara Fisher (154) suggests that there is little difference between the religiosity of the Carrs and their converts, describing Aissa and Ojo as

believe, comes closest to Cary's intent when he notes that the ideas and assumptions regarding the nature of the world which underlie Carr's religion--i.e. 'God' and 'Devil' both as personal forces active in the world--have "much in common" with those of the Africans, and it is this commonality that produces "similar results" in such forms as ecstatic possession and blood-sacrifice.⁶² Although the Carrs' religion may appear on the surface more advanced, more intellectually mature, more sophisticated than that of the Africans, in many of its essential aspects it is "nothing other than a sophisticated version" of 'juju'.⁶³ It is therefore more likely to hinder rather than encourage the development of 'free minds' and stifle rather than enhance progress among the African masses.

As a young district officer in Nigeria Cary did not like missionaries, especially evangelicals.⁶⁴ He described them as "Machiavellian" in their ways, "completely ignorant" of the objectives of the colonial mission, and often a hindrance to it.⁶⁵ He also accused missionaries of turning Africans into "hybrids" who have all of the "vices" and none of the "virtues" of Europeans, and also hinted that they were often responsible for causing "bloodshed".⁶⁶ Included among these

"the irrational, subconscious selves of Harry and Hilda". She says that the major difference between the Africans and the Europeans lies in the refusal of the latter to recognize or acknowledge the reality of "their still primitive beliefs" (156).

See Killam; Michael J. C. Echeruo, Joyce Cary and the Novel of Africa (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1973); S. H. Kanu, A World of Everlasting Conflict: Joyce Cary's View of Man and Society (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1974); D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, Developing Countries in British Fiction (London: Macmillan, 1977); Douglas Stewart, The Ark of God: Studies in Five Modern Novelists (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1961); and Barbara Fisher, Joyce Cary: The Writer and His Theme (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980).

⁶²Dennis Hall, Joyce Cary: A Reappraisal (New York: St. Martin's, 1983) 18-9.

⁶³Hall 19.

⁶⁴In a 1919 letter to his wife (MSCARY Box 309, Joyce Cary Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University) Cary commented that if he indeed had to have a missionary in his district, he would "rather have a Catholic".

⁶⁵Cary, Letter to his wife 24 April 1919.

⁶⁶Cary, Letter to his wife 24 April 1919

are arrogance, conceit, and self-righteous intolerance-- traits that he associated with evangelical Christianity and its missionaries.⁶⁷ Cary's comments reflect the acrimony that generally characterized the missionary-colonialist relationship at the early part of the century and are indicative of his commitment at the time to the principles of the dual mandate. Even though he was to eventually change his position regarding a colonial policy under Lugard's principles, these observations also anticipate his later criticism of missionaries, following his personal conversion, for failing to anticipate the consequences of importing their 'sophisticated' religious ideas indiscriminately into a 'primitive' culture. Those consequences, explored in the novel, are 'hybrid' Christians whose religion Killam has said takes from the white man's faith those things that appeal to them, while abandoning the rest.⁶⁸ Chief among the things they find appealing are the evangelicals' dogmatic belief in a world pervaded by both a personal god who demands sacrifice

⁶⁷In an unpublished draft preface for the Carfax edition of An American Visitor (Joyce Cary Papers, MSCARY Box 244), Cary related an encounter aboard a river steamer on the Niger with a young missionary couple whom he said became the model for the Carrs. In the essay Cary described the missionary as "a gentle sad man, with a wife and baby", the baby obviously deathly ill. Cary was particularly struck by man's "remoteness. He was aloof; not so much hostile to us as British officials, and servants of the Empire, as calmly assured of our damnation. We were wicked men." He was further struck by the man's "intolerance, his enormous self-assurance", yet also admired the man's courage and self-sacrifice. This experience, he said, led him to recognize the "immense power and dangerous potential of religious conviction."

⁶⁸Killam 134. Killam described Cary's portrayal of the religion of the converts as "a parody of Christianity", implying along with Kanu, Goonetilleke, Stewart, and others that Cary understood contemporary Christianity to be fundamentally different from paganism. On this point I disagree. I do not believe Cary saw the religion of Aissa, Ojo, and the others as a "parody" of Christianity, but rather as the logical manifestation of Christian 'dogma' once it had been liberated from the mediating and restraining influence of post-Enlightenment scientific reason. In suggesting, as Cary does, that contemporary African religious sensibilities are at a level of development equivalent to medieval Europe (Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 217), he is simultaneously suggesting that WITHOUT the mediating effect of post-Enlightenment knowledge Christianity was and can only be interpreted in the literal manner of the African converts, thus not a 'parody' but rather an 'uninformed' or 'immature' interpretation.

and is capable of performing miracles, and also by evil spirits and demons, as well as its emotional appeal that can easily degenerate into self-abandoned rapture.

That Cary's missionaries are evangelical is made evident from the opening pages. First there is the name of the mission--"the Winkworth Memorial Mission"--presumably named in honor of the nineteenth century English evangelical hymn writer/translator and educator.⁶⁹ The choice of names implies an obvious association with music, a highly emotional form of religious expression and experience. Another is the fact that the mission has been established on a site doctors refused to approve for use by the colonial authority because of its proximity to a mosquito-filled swamp. This detail, too, seems a deliberate reference to the Gospel verse about the stone rejected by the builder becoming the keystone,⁷⁰ hinting at the priority given to divine intuition over human wisdom in process of making decisions and choices. Both details are small but serve to suggest the evangelical and enthusiastic nature of the Carrs' brand of Christianity. As the novel proceeds numerous other details regarding their beliefs emerge which show that like the Africans the Carrs are somewhat simple and cling to an equally simple faith.⁷¹ Because their faith is unequivocal, because it is based on a literal reading of the scriptures and provides a catalogue of clear prohibitions and regulations governing all aspects of

⁶⁹Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878). For biographical information see James E. Kiefer, "Catherine Winkworth, Hymnwriter and Educator," Biographical Sketches of Memorable Christians of the Past, Ithaca, NY: Society of Archbishop Justus, 1999, <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/197.html>, 29 July 2002.

⁷⁰Matt. 21.42, Mark 12.10, Luke 20.17.

⁷¹Among these additional details included in the text are their emphasis on the literalness of the scriptures and the priority given to memorizing Bible stories (AS 19, 20); a priority on preaching scriptural prohibitions, such as those against fornication or the consumption of alcohol, rather than communicating the Gospel message of love and fellowship (AS 43); passively accepting evil and the other daily tragedies of life, such as the deaths of innocent children, as either the work of the Devil (AS 25) or as consequences of God's mysterious "will" (AS 147).

behavior, and because it plainly assigns responsibility for tragedy and misfortune Cary suggests that the Carrs' version of Christianity has a strong appeal to African 'primitives' whose traditional religions are similarly rooted in clearly defined dogmas. And for this reason, as the narrator suggests, "[t]heir lessons were easily learned and firmly believed" (AS 20).

If the dogma is appealing, however, complications nevertheless arise when competing dogmatic systems come into conflict. The evangelical Christian may share the animistic proselyte's world-view regarding the reality of a personal god or evil spirits active in the world. However the manner in which these beliefs have been integrated into the psychology of the respective cultures lends quite a different significance to how Biblical stories of demonic possession and of healings and resurrections, or sacramental practices and gestures such as baptism and Holy Communion, are perceived, experienced, or expressed. Thus in Cary's novels when the missionaries preach the Bible as the Word of God, their African converts look to it as an oracle (AS 127-8, 130-3) and elsewhere literally wear its pages around their necks as protective talismans (AS 183). Similarly, for Aissa the reception of Holy Communion, which to the evangelicals is a sacramental gesture of unity with the Lord, becomes an almost literal act of sexual union with Jesus (AS 153-4).

Dogmatism, for Cary, was problematic because, as he suggested in Power in Men, it often breeds closed-mindedness, intolerance, arrogance, and a sense of superiority.⁷² The dogmatic mind is hostile to any truth at variance with its own. Convinced of the superiority of his own truth, the dogmatist seeks to suppress alternative beliefs rather than engage and examine them. We have already noted the contempt

⁷²See Cary, Power in Men, 1939. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963) 194ff.

in which the pagans hold the Christians, the Muslims, and even the white man.⁷³ The Carrs are not very different. They look down on the pagans as people whose religious beliefs have trapped them in "darkness and misery" (AS 39) and who are "making quite an unnecessary mess and misery of their lives, and dying without a glimmer of hope for a better one" (AS 112). There is also a great deal of animosity between the Carrs and Bradgate, the origin of which clearly springs from their sense of religious and moral superiority.⁷⁴ Furthermore, this contempt and superiority shown for those who do not share their beliefs are absorbed by the Carrs' band of converts and similarly expressed in their attitudes as well. Not only do they despise the pagans as cannibals (AS 27) and "bastards" (AS 55), and are supremely confident in the superiority of their god (AS 57), they are also at times smug to unchurched white men like Bradgate (AS 14), and sometimes even look down on the Carrs as cowards for their reluctance to undertake 'dangerous' missions among the pagans (AS 16, 130).

A second, and for Cary more troubling, byproduct of dogmatic thinking is fanaticism. Fanaticism, or 'enthusiasm', by its nature is emotional. The believer rejects reason and logic in favor of intuition and ecstatic experience. Truth is whatever the individual senses it to be. The novel contains numerous examples of the enthusiastic nature of the Carrs' faith. Hilda, for example, is eager to hold the first mission rally at Kolu not for any logical reason, but because she "had a feeling" about the urgency of undertaking such a rally--an idea Carr initially rejects as likely to provoke

⁷³See for example Cary, Aissa Saved 30, 58, and elsewhere.

⁷⁴Kathryne S. McDorman has said their attitude reflects "the chronic acrimony between imperial power and Christian missionary zeal" that often typified the relationship between missionary and district officer in Northern Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century. See "Preachers and Pagans: The Christian Missionary in Joyce Cary's African Novels", University of Dayton Review 16.3 (Winter 1983-84): 61.

trouble with the pagans and result in a government ban on mission work in Yanrin (AS 20). In fact, she believes anything she "felt to be right was God's will" (AS 25). She also believes in 'calls'; that is, in personal appeals from the deity to follow a particular course of action. For example, she trusts Ojo's claim to have had a "call" to lead a rally at Kolu (AS 23). She is also confident of receiving the Lord's protection from harm--or His strengthening grace to endure possible abuse and martyrdom--as the rally collapses into a riot (AS 53). In the aftermath of her first child's death she eventually finds solace in recognizing this tragedy as part of "God's will" (AS 147), similarly encourages Aissa to seek solace in Jesus, and is likewise convinced of the divine source of Aissa's conversion following her traumatic experiences after the first Kolu riots (AS 148-50).

Carr initially appears more rational than his wife. He is quick to recognize the dangers inherent in a rally at Kolu and dismisses the idea as "stupid" (AS 20). He is also well aware of the need for a strategy and for careful planning of their evangelizing activities (AS 25). Yet he too ultimately allows enthusiasm to dominate reason. For example, when he learns that the converts have set off for Kolu he wisely sets out to stop the flotilla before it arrives at the pagan village. However, at the last minute his intentions are turned aside by a hymn, "always a favourite at the mission, which converted him" (AS 28). It is a highly emotional experience, in the ecstasy of which his eyes "filled with tears" and his pride broken, a revelation came upon him "as in a flash of lightning" that he should be following "the way of faith" instead of his own reason (AS 28). And this in turn points to another consequence of enthusiasm that Cary considered an additional hindrance to the enhancement of real freedom: namely self-abandonment; that is the loss,

suppression, surrender, or destruction of individuality. The hymn itself that converts Carr⁷⁵ is significant because it is a consecration hymn, urging the believer towards self-abandonment to the Lord. The final line of the crowning verse, "None of self and all of Thee", points to the evangelical ideal: complete surrender to and possession by God. It is not self-affirming but rather self-denying, not self-asserting but self-obliteration. It is as well a similar hymn⁷⁶ that completes Aissa's re-conversion following her ordeal after the Kolu rally. In fact, all of the hymns introduced in the text are of the same nature, exalting the self-sacrifice of Jesus and encouraging similar self-sacrifice and total submission to the Lord as the perfect imitation of Jesus, the Christian ideal.⁷⁷ And the association of these key incidents with the evangelical hymnal, as well as the dedication of the mission itself to an important evangelical hymn writer, suggest the almost institutional nature of enthusiastic self-abandonment as a central aspect of the Carr's brand of Christianity.

Molly Mahood has argued that the novel is in large part a critique of religious self-abandonment as a response to the injustices of world.⁷⁸ She says that for Cary religions like the animism of the pagans and the evangelical Christianity of the Carrs, that believe in personal gods and evil spirits who can intervene in human events and that also valorize ecstatic experience, are easily "distorted".⁷⁹ That the Carrs believe

⁷⁵Cary, Aissa Saved 29. The hymn, "O the Bitter Shame and Sorrow", was written in English by Theodore Monod, a French evangelical preacher from the Wesleyan tradition in 1874 for a series of consecration meetings in Broadlands, England.

⁷⁶Cary, Aissa Saved 149. The hymn in question here is "I am not Worthy, Holy Lord", composed in 1875 by Henry Williams Baker.

⁷⁷In addition to the two hymns cited above, there is also reference to a Yoruba language hymn, which I have as yet been unable to identify, sung at the disastrous Kolu rally with the refrain exclaiming "All things I like best / I sacrifice to His Blood" (Cary, Aissa Saved 49).

⁷⁸Mahood 110.

⁷⁹Mahood 109.

in a personal God was not in itself problematic for Cary, as he too professed belief in a personal God,⁸⁰ albeit a God to whom individual appeals for favor or intervention were useless.⁸¹ What is problematic is the Carrs' rejection of reason and logic for intuition, personal revelation, and ecstatic experience. First, it can result in impulsive and often self-destructive behavior. Also it can lead to dogmatic thinking--that is, belief in the infallibility of one's own divinely inspired truth--thus closing the mind to other possible sources of truth. Such close-mindedness, in turn, inhibits the development of the sort of 'real freedom' that Cary saw as essential for human advancement.

The Christianity of the Carrs, therefore, in Cary's estimation, rather than being a liberating or uplifting religion that fosters real freedom, is instead a more sophisticated form of juju which, when itself detached from the moderating influence of post-Enlightenment truth, collapses into primitive barbarity. And because it only succeeds in giving new forms of expression to old barbarities, it hinders rather than facilitates what Cary saw as the aims of the colonial mission.

Fatalism and Ignorance: An American Visitor

Molly Mahood has noted that unlike Aissa Saved, An American Visitor was composed at a time when Cary was already becoming critical of the "old protective colonial policy of ensuring that people continued to live as they had always lived, though within the bounds of law and order."⁸² Questions about how the policy was being administered begin to surface in Aissa Saved, but there is no direct criticism of the

⁸⁰See John Burrow and Alex Hamilton, "An Interview with Joyce Cary," 1955, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays, ed. A. G. Bishop (London: Michael Joseph, 1976) 7.

⁸¹See Graham Fisher, "A Great Author Faces Up to Death: An Interview with Joyce Cary," 1957, Joyce Cary: Selected Essays, 252-3.

⁸²Mahood 134.

principles of the policy itself. However, Mahood says, by the time Cary began working on this book he "was clear in his own mind about the need for a new approach in place of the old laissez faire attitude" of Indirect Rule.⁸³ As a young colonial administrator in Nigeria, Cary had been an enthusiastic practitioner of Lugard's policies. In a 1919 letter to his wife he described the aims of that policy as being to "encourage and assist the peoples to develop [sic] on their own natural lives", noting that it was "necessarily a slow process, but the only sound one."⁸⁴ In An American Visitor, however, it is clearly the policy of leaving development up to "natural" processes that comes under fire. His newly emerging views were no less paternalistic vis-à-vis European 'responsibility' for Africans, especially for fostering 'real freedom,' than they had been during his colonial service. What was changing, rather, was his ideas of the best means to achieve the desired goal. As R. W. Noble observed, Cary was becoming convinced that freedom is a dynamic field of power, to be increased by economic revolution and the abandonment of tribal restraints.⁸⁵ If it was Europe's sacred duty to foster 'real freedom,' then it was also Europe's duty to create the conditions under which such development could take place. And if traditional ways of life, traditional structures of social organization and governance, or traditional beliefs and practices were detrimental to fostering such freedom, then it was the responsibility of the colonial power to do everything within its power to modify, change, destroy and replace these inhibiting structures with new ones that would enhance the development of freedom.

⁸³Mahood 134.

⁸⁴Cary, Letter to his wife, 24 April 1919, Joyce Cary Papers, MSCARY Box 309.

⁸⁵R. W. Noble, Joyce Cary (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973) 13.

In an astute observation Noble has suggested that the missionaries at Goshi can be seen as a metaphor for the Birri. The Dobsons, the missionary couple in charge, are interested only in winning converts to their faith. They want as little to do with the colonial authorities as possible, and nothing at all to do with the soldiers. With the threat of an attack from the Birri imminent, Marie Hasluck, the eponymous American visitor, without informing the Dobsons has sent for Assistant District Officer Gore and military attaché Stoker to bring troops. Their arrival unbeknown to the missionaries, Gore and Stoker busy themselves at the perimeter of the compound evaluating the challenge of defending such a vulnerable site and discussing military strategies.⁸⁶ "Their military pretensions and discussions of tactics are absurd", notes Noble. "[T]he defended [i.e. the missionaries] do not know that they are being defended, and do not wish to be."⁸⁷ Similarly, the Birri are completely unconscious of Chief Resident Bewsher's efforts to 'protect' them from outside 'contamination', protection they neither desire nor request. Rather, they are growing suspicious of Bewsher because of his associations with the tin prospectors whom they fear will usurp their lands, just as they hate the missionaries for earlier impingement on both their land and their customs. To Noble's observation I would add that the mission itself, with its indefensibly open and exposed perimeter,⁸⁸ is also a metaphor for the colonial project. The impossibility of isolating the proselytes from 'pagan' influence or of defending the mission against attack parallels the absurd pretensions of a paternalistic colonial policy that seeks to engineer the development of a people by

⁸⁶Cary, American Visitor 127. Further citations are given parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as AV.

⁸⁷Noble 14.

⁸⁸The mission is described as occupying a spot "in a large cleared plain". It is "two miles from the Kifi bush on the east, and . . . open on every side" (AV 106) with a perimeter "about a mile round" (AV 127).

limiting, controlling, or even isolating them from 'contaminating' contact with the outside world.

The mission and its missionaries in fact have a greater dramatic and symbolic function in the thematic structure of the novel than at first appears. Located in the heart of Birri country, the mission is an object of resentment for many of the indigenous people who see the missionaries as merely interfering with their traditional way of life.⁸⁹ It is also the setting for the most significant events of the novel. Twice it becomes the site of bloody conflict between the Europeans and Africans, the second ending with the death of Bewsher himself and triggering a minor three-month anti-colonial war "during which about thirty Birri were killed and three soldiers" (AV 232). It is here that Bewsher's and Marie's amorous relationship is revealed. It is also the setting as well as the stimulation for some of Bewsher's intellectual musings about his ideas for colonial policy and particularly that for nation building among the colonial subjects. It is here as well, among the evangelical Dobsons, that Marie experiences her own sort of 'religious' conversion, exposing and highlighting what is in fact the highly emotional and irrational nature of her seemingly scientific beliefs. Finally, the Dobsons themselves serve as a spiritual and intellectual foil against which Cary exposes the emotional, dogmatic, and fatalistic foundations of Marie's Rousseauesque ideas as well as the short-sighted inadequacy of the sort of traditional paternalistic colonial policy Bewsher represents.

In the preface to the Carfax edition of the novel Cary said that the original American visitor was a young wife and

⁸⁹For instance, the character known as "the Fish", who becomes the main instigator of the two attacks, holds a grievance against the mission for sheltering his wife. She, it is reported, sought refuge there from his "many beatings" (AV 64). Typically, it is only this sort of 'benign' interference that is clearly specified in the text.

mother who believed "'children should get their own ideas of right and wrong.'"⁹⁰ It was, consequently, her practice to leave the children to decide all moral issues for themselves. Cary was amused by this woman, whom he described as an "anarchist", but at the same time "impressed by her conviction".⁹¹ Like other Americans he had encountered in Africa--primarily missionaries--she was antagonistic towards any kind of authority. For the missionaries he had encountered, Cary said, the colonial official "represented the British Empire and administered the law", making him an "anti-Christ" working against divine providence.⁹² For Cary, people like this young mother were the secular counterparts of the missionaries. Their 'gods' were of a different sort, but they too had a mind "completely closed to any need of authority--which trusted absolutely to providence in the narrowest sense".⁹³ They believed "that peace could come by a 'natural' development, without enforcement of law".⁹⁴ As a front-line colonial administrator familiar on a daily basis with what he described as the "everlasting conflict between authority and freedom",⁹⁵ Cary felt such idealists were simply not facing "reality": no state could exist without secular authority, "if only to regulate conflicting purposes".⁹⁶ Government was not only a necessity for the maintenance of order, but as he suggested in Power in Men, it could in fact also facilitate freedom. Indeed, for Cary the need for government was practically a given in the pursuit of freedom.

Marie Hasluck and her ideas about freedom are among Cary's primary interests in the novel. The story, in fact, begins and ends with her. In the opening line one of the

⁹⁰Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 243.

⁹¹Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 243-4.

⁹²Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 245.

⁹³Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 246.

⁹⁴Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 246.

⁹⁵Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 245.

⁹⁶Cary, "Prefatory Essay," American Visitor 246.

riff-raff hanging around the docks at Gwanki questions what she is doing with the miners; in the last line she is kneeling over Bewsher's grave. It was her anarchistic ideas about freedom and civilization that brought her to Africa and to the mission in Birri at the outset, and it was the consequences of her ideas that brought her to this grave at the conclusion. Hers are ideas Cary believed were dangerous for the cause of freedom and development in Africa. In The Case for African Freedom he described her sort of anarchistic idealism as "more dangerous" than racism because it "appeals to some deep instinct in the educated man", namely the notion that the contemporary world has somehow regressed from a "golden age in the past", which 'primitive' peoples somehow still possess but modern civilization has lost.⁹⁷ Such ideas, he suggested, gained wide support "among scholars, idealists, progressives, as well as from the antiquarian nationalist." Their proponents would like most of all to see an end to "modern progress, modern mechanics, modern thought, modern art" which have all only contributed to make life in modern civilization confusing.⁹⁸ They were ideas he confessed to embracing himself during his own service in Nigeria.⁹⁹ But as Cary tries to show in the novel, such ideas are not in fact rational conclusions proceeding from clearly established scientific facts. Rather, they are dogmatic assertions couched in sophisticated philosophical garb.¹⁰⁰ Nor are they progressive or liberating ideas that enhance dynamic freedom. Rather, they are fatalistic and limiting, restricting access to new truths and knowledge in the same way Cary would suggest traditional Christianity does. Further, they deny the individual an active role in shaping his or her own destiny,

⁹⁷Cary, African Freedom 39.

⁹⁸Cary, African Freedom 39.

⁹⁹Cary, African Freedom 40.

¹⁰⁰Ironically, they also derive from the Enlightenment thinking that Cary otherwise highly valued.

instead turning the individual into a passive creature to be acted upon by the determining external forces of nature. In the novel Cary highlights this aspect of Marie's ideas by placing her side-by-side with the evangelical missionaries at Goshi.

Cary's presentation of the Goshi missionaries represents a more sympathetic, even-tempered handling of his missionaries over his portrayal of the fundamentalist Carrs in Aissa Saved. Like the Carrs, the Dobsons and Doll Dans are dedicated people who devote themselves to the work of their mission. Dans, Dobson's "right-hand man" who runs the hospital, is described as an "extremely efficient" woman (AV 110), available at all hours of the day and night to tend to the needs of the sick and injured. Mrs. Dobson, as well, is "full of sympathy and understanding" (AV 118). The Dobsons are highly moral, particularly in sexual matters--they disapprove of Bewsher's affair with Marie (AV 112)--but are discreet about either intruding or expressing their disapproval (AV 110, 112). They share with the Carrs a similar mistrust of and deliberate distancing from the colonial authorities, though this does not manifest itself in the same sort of hostility and condescension that is obvious between the Carrs and Bradgate. Indeed, Bewsher and the Dobsons are "friends" (AV 214), and Bewsher a regular visitor to the mission. The "chronic acrimony between imperial power and Christian missionary zeal" that McDorman said often typified the relationship between missionary and district officer¹⁰¹ remains well below the surface. There are, however, traces of intolerance, such as Miss Dans's loathing for "alcohol and the Roman Catholics" (AV 119).

In matters of religion, as well, the Dobsons receive somewhat more sympathetic treatment. For one, unlike the

¹⁰¹McDorman 61.

Carrs and the other sects introduced in the first novel,¹⁰² the Dobsons are not fundamentalists preaching biblical literalism. If anything, they represent the opposite extreme of an over-intellectualized religion,¹⁰³ which at times gets caught up in pedantic arguments.¹⁰⁴ Nor is Dobson depicted as condescending about religious opinion. On the contrary, he and Bewsher apparently engage in frequent intellectual discussions of missiological issues regarding culture and faith (AV 124, 132-3). If they are not fundamentalists, however, they are nevertheless evangelicals, and their faith is in a God active in the world, who defends the weak and protects the faithful, who commands angels that "are stronger than tanks", and who freed slaves and liberated small children from the bondage of child labor (AV 219). They are not as prepared "to take unnecessary risks" or "seek . . . any kind of dramatic apotheosis" (i.e. martyrdom; AV 121) as is Hilda Carr (AS 53). Nevertheless they embrace the same principle that their fate is in "Gawd's hands" (AV 120) and therefore feel compelled "to be consistent--to one's professions" (AV 121) vis-à-vis accepting protection from British soldiers. It is, in others words, by its nature (so Cary believed) a faith that takes the responsibility for good and evil out of the hands of individuals and posits them in a

¹⁰²In the aftermath of the Kolu riots the establishment of two new and even more fundamentalist missions is reported; "the Original Apocalypse at Ketemfe, who preach the full Bible and the end of the world in five years, and the Mennonites at Yanrin" (Cary, Aissa Saved 159).

¹⁰³Schlemm, the missionary character in The African Witch, is similarly portrayed.

¹⁰⁴Dobson's sermon (AV 217-21) is a good example. In it he argues that "the simplest operations of reason were impossible without faith", so that faith in a God who intervenes in the world is every bit as rational an "a priori" principle as is belief in as "the principle of causation upon which all science was constructed" (217). This represents the sort of pedantry that often angered Cary as a young man. (See for example, the 1917 letter to his wife [7 July 1917, Joyce Cary Papers, MSCARY Box 307] in which Cary railed against a recently published tract by a cleric, the subject of which was what should be done with leftover communion bread.) Particularly in these African missions he thought this sort of didacticism was utterly meaningless to 'primitive' converts whose level of intellectual development he felt had not yet prepared them to grapple with such 'sophisticated' distinctions.

force beyond nature and beyond individual control. It denies individuals any significant voice or role in shaping their own destinies and makes them instead not much more than Pavlov's dogs, objects to be acted upon rather than being self-constituting subjects. And in this regard, Cary suggests, there is little difference between the Dobsons and Marie.

Through much of the novel Marie is convinced Christians like the Dobsons are "stupid" for believing their Christianity can offer a better life to the Birri than they already have by nature (AV 115). They don't understand the real world because Christianity has "the Facts" about life "all wrong" (AV 129). Christians, she believes, "live in a different world . . . They've got great slices of their brain clean taken out and the holes filled up with raspberry preserve" (AV 129-30). She is particularly incredulous of Dobson's fatalism; that is, his perfect willingness about "leaving [things] to God" (AV 129). Yet despite her protests and indignation with the Dobsons, Marie shares much more in common with them than she is prepared to recognize. Her belief in allowing the Birri to live naturally is every bit as fatalistic as Dobson's belief in a God who intervenes in the world. The tin prospector Cottee, in fact, likens Marie and her kind to "primitive protestants" who "leave everything to providence" (AV 92).¹⁰⁵ What distinguishes her from the Dobsons is not the scientific veracity of the ideas she has embraced but rather the nature of the 'myth' in which she has invested her faith. To the extent that they are intuitive assertions packaged in philosophical language--what the narrator dismisses as "resuscitated fancies of Rousseau" (AV 66)--they are essentially no different from Dobson's.

¹⁰⁵Michael Echeruo has described her enthusiasm for protecting the Birri as "a zealot's conviction" (59) and elsewhere referred to it as her "evangelism" (70).

'reasoned' defense of a priori faith in God (AV 217-8).¹⁰⁶ Marie's affinity to the same sort of leaps of 'faith' the Dobsons embrace is further highlighted during her stays among them at the mission. First there is her flirtation with Christian Science and its belief in the healing power of faith (AV 146, 150). This is then followed by her later brief conversion to the Dobson's 'faith' in the protection of the Lord--resulting tragically in her refusal to fetch Bewsher's gun during the second Birri attack, thus ensuring his death (AV 227). By comparing and contrasting Marie with the Dobsons Cary makes it obvious that in an unjust world he considers her sort of secular faith in nature as much a surrender to fatalism as the religious self-abandonment of the missionaries. And the consequences for the Africans, whose interest they both supposedly have at heart, is not freedom but continued enslavement to ignorance and superstition.

Cary also draws parallels between these missionaries and the short-sighted inadequacy of the sort of traditional paternalistic colonial policy Bewsher represents. The narrator suggests that the affection between Bewsher and the Dobsons is rooted in the fact that they "shared the same kind of feelings" for the Birri (AV 213). A closer examination of the text indicates that they share more than just affection. Both share the same short-sightedness regarding the implications of their policies for the people they intend to serve. Neither is fully aware of how the Birri perceive or understand their presence and intentions, nor are they conscious of the gap between the lessons they intend to teach and the way in which these are understood. It is this sort of ignorance, Cary implies, which makes for a colonial policy woefully inadequate for the task of enhancing the sort of

¹⁰⁶Ironically, for all of his championing of 'rational' faith Cary's personal belief in God is founded on a similar 'intuition'. In "My own religious history" (28-9) and elsewhere he has pointed to the existence of love, beauty, and goodness in the world as 'proof' of God's existence.

freedom among the African masses that Cary believed should be the goal of colonial policy.

Cary said that his primary interest in all of his novels was "religion".¹⁰⁷ Douglas Stewart has suggested Cary's view of religion reflects the influence of Paul Tillich, namely that religion "is not one aspect of life set over and against others so that we can divide human experience into the sacred and the secular. The sacred and the secular completely interpenetrate each other."¹⁰⁸ Reformation Protestantism, he said, taught "every house should be a house of God, every table the Lord's table, and every father a priest mediating the love of God to his children." In other words, religion was necessarily and intricately intertwined in every aspect of life. They could not be separated. Modern Protestantism, however, has lost this concept, making religion a special function occupying a specific, compartmentalized, and isolatable 'zone' within the individual or society.

Bewsher and the Dobsons are both interested primarily in making converts: Bewsher for his "all-Birri" nation and the Dobsons for their church. For the Dobsons this mostly involves indoctrinating their converts into the principles of the faith. Practically speaking this translates into teaching them hymns, prayers, and maxims from the Bible. So long as their converts are capable of parroting these back they are considered good Christians. However the missionaries are often painfully unaware of the gap between their own faith and the 'mistranslation' of their proselytes.¹⁰⁹ Dobson, for example, considers Uli one of his "star pupils" for the devotion with which he approaches his prayers and his Bible lessons (AV 143). He is totally oblivious to the fact that Uli is diligent because he perceives these Biblical maxims to

¹⁰⁷Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 216; cited n4 above.

¹⁰⁸Stewart 137.

¹⁰⁹See Stewart 139-41.

be powerful "Christian spells" for the "curing of evil spirits" (AV 144). What Uli actually desires is "power"--and to him all religion is power (AV 144)--and the material benefits (including, sometimes, sexual benefits) that come with membership in the white man's community of converts (AV 144, 170).¹¹⁰ Dobson fails to see this. Rather, to him Uli is someone who can be "useful" in the expansion of the mission, especially with their anticipated move to Nok, Uli's home village (AV 143, 170). Because of this ignorance Dobson is shocked and outraged by his star's betrayal when the danger of war approaches (AV 172).

Bewsher is just as woefully ignorant. To most of the Birri, who have no tradition as a unified nation, his "all-Birri" nation is a joke--and a funny one at that (AV 56). Nor is he really aware of just how he is regarded among the various elements of the Birri. He has long cultivated good relationships with the 'chiefs' whom he mistakenly believes have real authority. He fails to recognize that much of their good will is based not on genuine friendship but on their perceptions of his usefulness in fulfilling their own personal objectives. Obai, for instance, "a favourite with Bewsher" (AV 33), is in fact mostly suspicious of the Resident but maintains good relations with him because he sees practical advantage in Bewsher's federation (AV 50). Others cooperate with him mostly out of fear, particularly the fear that he is something "sacred" that either cannot be killed or whose death might unleash an avenging spirit--a belief which had more than once saved his life (AV 71). Nor is he aware that most of the Birri believe--mistakenly--he is

¹¹⁰Life in the mission has provided Uli with the opportunity for an easy illicit sexual liaison with Atua, herself a refugee from an adultery charge which would bear severe consequences should she return to her home (144). Although he has a violent temper and occasionally beats Atua, his behavior is at times modified by his fear of being tossed out of the mission and losing "all his comforts, his rich food, his idle life" (170).

in league with the prospectors in a plot to confiscate their lands (AV 60, 164, 202). Right up until the climactic second attack on the mission, carried out specifically for the purpose of killing Bewsher and led by his 'friend' Obai, he is unaware of Birri hostility towards his plans for them (AV 229).¹¹¹

The mission and the missionaries at Goshi, then, serve the important function in this novel of highlighting the limitations and failings of the differing colonial policies represented by Marie and Bewsher. Just as their religion is fatalistic and inhibits the fostering of dynamic freedom, Marie's secular fatalism--itself a form of orientalism--similarly limits the African's ability to dynamically shape his own future. And just as the Dobsons' ignorance about how their Christian message is being perceived and 'translated,' British colonial officials also have been too often ignorant of African perceptions and applications of colonial policy.

Mission Education and Colonial Policy: The African Witch

In his discussion of The African Witch Dennis Hall catalogues a fairly long list of contrasting pairs of characters through whom he says the thematic issues of the novel are dramatized.¹¹² One significant pairing that fails to make Hall's list is that of Louis Aladai, pretender to the Emirate of Rimi, and the local 'Christian' preacher Selah Coker. At first glance the two seem near-complete opposites. Aladai is a gentleman, well-versed and well-practised in English manners, more so than most of the British colonial officials and military officers stationed in Rimi. Educated at both an English public school and Oxford, he is widely read and articulate in English on subjects ranging from theology and religion to literature (he quotes Wordsworth

¹¹¹Ironically, it is Obai who carries out the execution.

¹¹²Hall 32-4.

appropriately from memory) to astronomy. He is, in short, the epitome of an English gentleman. Coker on the other hand is a fiery, semi-literate, self-ordained preacher of a blood-Christianity sect. His command of English is a pidgin at best. He is violently emotional and deadly serious about his 'Christian' beliefs. Despite their differences, both are products of a mission education. Coker, a Syrian-Yoruba mulatto,¹¹³ was raised at "a local American mission" in his native Cameroon¹¹⁴ while Aladai, of remotely princely Rimi blood, received his early education at the Kifi mission in Rimi (AW 131). One is a thoroughly Europeanized African who shares little in common with the people with whom he longs to identify, while the other is a Christo-pagan whose juju Christianity speaks a language the local people are readily able to comprehend. By contrasting the two Cary intends in this novel to dramatize what he considered two quite distinct dangers for the colonial project of an uninformed and unregulated mission education policy. The one, represented by Coker, is a virulent form of anti-European African nationalism that misappropriates and perverts Western ideas and values. The other, represented by Aladai, is a Europeanized elite alienated from the uneducated masses.

The role of education in the colonial mission is a theme Cary hinted at in Aissa Saved. In the present novel it jumps to the forefront. As we saw in the previous chapter, Cary believed the greatest stumbling block to 'progress' in Africa was traditional religious beliefs and practices, which he saw as stifling development of the sort of free mind he deemed essential for Africans to successfully make the transition into the modern world. To counter this Cary called for implementation of a 'new' universal education that stressed

¹¹³Echeruo (81, n1) suggests in passing that Coker's status as a mulatto symbolically points to the "mongrel" nature of his Christianity.

¹¹⁴Cary, African Witch 45. Further citations are given parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as AW.

literacy, rejected rote memorization, and promoted toleration for and free exchange of a variety of ideas.¹¹⁵ Education, however, was not a panacea that would instantly eliminate 'barbarity' and 'violence.' In the preface to the Carfax edition he dismissed such assumptions as "hollow".¹¹⁶ Rather, he said, education would bring "more violence, more barbarities" as it broke down "what is left of tribal order". Nevertheless, he considered it a "religious duty" of all people to desire "enlightenment . . . for all God's souls." He also believed that such an education would be worthless unless it were extended to the women of African societies, for, he held, it was among the women that the "juju man still exerts his power" via the considerable influence women exercise in forming the minds of their children.¹¹⁷ Consequently, as long as women remained under the influence of juju, all other efforts at education would only be exercises in futility.

Although education is the central focus of the novel, the fundamental issue Cary seeks to examine is not, as Golden Larsen has suggested, whether priority should be given to raising up a select, Europeanized elite or to providing a universal education operating at a necessarily lower level.¹¹⁸ Rather it questions who should be responsible for this education. Kathryne McDorman is correct in noting that Cary believed education must be state supported and extended to great numbers of people.¹¹⁹ Missionaries were ill-prepared and ill-equipped to assume complete responsibility for a program of such magnitude. In addition, their priorities--preaching

¹¹⁵See Cary, Power in Men, Chps. 12 and 13 (192-237); and African Freedom, esp. Chps. 11 to 13 (107-27).

¹¹⁶Cary, "Prefatory Essay," African Witch 312. This and the next two quotations.

¹¹⁷Cary, African Freedom 119.

¹¹⁸Golden L. Larsen, The Dark Descent: Social Change and Moral Responsibility in the Novels of Joyce Cary (London: Michael Joseph, 1965) 36-7.

¹¹⁹McDorman 64. This was one of his fundamental arguments in The Case for African Freedom.

the Gospel and winning converts--were often at odds with what Cary considered more urgent secular priorities. That is, the nature and demands of the dogmatic type of faith they preached, as he tried to dramatize in his earlier novels, inhibited rather than facilitated the development of free minds. He was not arguing that missionaries should be excluded from education. Elsewhere he praised their efforts as one of the few things Europe had to be proud of in its African adventure.¹²⁰ Rather he felt there had to be greater government support and input into such areas as the design of curriculums, creation of textbooks, and training of teachers, without which the colonial project would end in failure.

The text offers little in the way of detail about the content or extent of colonial education. What information that can be gleaned emphasizes three points: that it is reserved for the privileged few--five hundred out of a million people in Rimi, Aladai says, in both government and mission schools; that it is restricted to boys; and that, in its mission variety at least, the content is very shallow, amounting to little more than learning "hymns" (AW 21). Education equivalent to that of Europeans was simply not available. Because of its limited dissemination and shallow content, at best missionary-controlled education might occasionally produce a candidate for 'grooming' in Europe--the privileged elite that Aladai recognizes himself to be (AW 64). Such individuals, however, were likely to be culturally divorced from their people and therefore incapable of becoming the sort of leaders the people would be willing to follow. At its worst it produced anti-European, Christo-pagan zealots like Coker. Such people are deadly earnest in their convictions and vital in propagating their faith. However, the Christianity they embrace is not a contextualized

¹²⁰Cary, African Freedom 18.

Christianity in the sense of Luzbetak,¹²¹ which has integrated the Gospel message to the core of the indigenous culture and its forms. It is, rather, a very superficial appropriation of Christian forms replacing pagan counterparts. Below the surface it is the same sort of violent, spirit-filled blood-religion that Cary imagined traditional African religion to be. Thus what the novel makes clear is that, in Cary's estimation, mission education on its own is insufficient in promoting any sort of progress that will promote maximum freedom for the African masses.

The missionaries responsible for producing Coker make no direct appearance in the text. It is simply noted that he was raised at "a local American mission" in his native Cameroon (AW 45). The fact that Cary makes it specifically an American mission strongly suggests fundamentalism, which George Marsden described as "primarily an American phenomenon".¹²² Fundamentalist sects such as the Southern Baptists were particularly active in Nigeria from the mid-nineteenth century,¹²³ while the Watchtower movement, another offshoot of American Protestantism that was gaining strong followings in southern Africa, was similarly gaining adherents in West African in the 1920s and 1930s.¹²⁴ Many of these sects were

¹²¹See Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) especially 69-84.

¹²²Marsden 191.

¹²³E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966, 197-201). Ayandele notes that it was this same sect from which the Native Baptist Church in Nigeria became an offshoot in 1888. Their appeal came in part for their support of institutional slavery as consistent with the Bible. This appealed in part to the African membership because the reasoning could similarly be applied to other traditional social institutions such as polygamy.

¹²⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Advance of Christianity, Vol. VII (New York: Harper & Brothers 1945) 246. In the "Preface" to the Carfax edition of the novel (309), Cary specifically referred to notes he had made on the "watch-tower movement" and other "primitive" sects in Africa as being among the material that contributed to the development of this novel.

anti-government and, in addition, their indigenous offshoots at times also had a strong racial, anti-European character.¹²⁵

Coker is similar to the members of the convert community at the Carr's Shibi mission in Aissa Saved. Like Ojo and the 'reborn' Aissa, he is earnest about his faith: the narrator describes him as "a sincere believer and disciple" who 'knows' God and trusts He will reveal Himself through an inner voice (AW 254). Where Cary hints at occasional haughtiness, self-righteousness, and superiority in the attitudes of the Shibi converts towards Europeans, which sometimes extends to the Carrs as well, Coker is portrayed as an anti-European racist who particularly resents foreign missionaries (AW 129, 210). Also like his Shibi counterparts his version of Christianity emphasizes particular symbols frequently associated with primitive religion, particularly his emphasis on blood and blood sacrifice.¹²⁶ The details of Coker's religion imply that the sort of Christian education he received at the American mission cannot be very different from the sort of education the Carrs have given to their converts. It was undoubtedly very limited, stressing the absolute authority and literalness of the Bible as the ultimate source of truth and salvation. That his personal religion is preoccupied with blood sacrifice in the same way as the Shibi Christians; that it gives to the Bible as word of God a supernatural power; that it believes in, fears, and itself makes use of the power of juju are all indicative of a Christian education that simply 'translated' Christianity

¹²⁵Latourette 244-5. Latourette specifically refers to an African named Garrick Sokari Braid. Braid, who was active during World War I, proclaimed himself the prophet Elijah returned and was consequently placed under arrest by British authorities out of fear for the influence he could wield among the masses during these dangerous war years. Latourette's description of him--a charismatic leader who claimed the power to heal through prayer and called for repentance--almost makes him sound like a model for Coker. Their difference lies in that Braid condemned fetishes--something that Coker still firmly believes in.

¹²⁶See, for example, Cary, African Witch 204, 207, 254 and elsewhere.

into juju at a very superficial level. Instead of becoming a liberating and dynamic power that enhances the freedom of its adherents, it is another form of juju that uses fear of the irrational to enslave.

Juxtaposed against Coker and the anonymous fundamentalist missionaries responsible for molding him are Louis Aladai and his mentor, Doctor Schlemm. Schlemm is a "German-American" belonging to "some Danish branch of the Protestant Church", whose services were "a mixture of the Anglican prayer-book and his own, composed by himself, or perhaps translated from the Danish" (AW 123-4). In Schlemm Cary brings together what he saw as the best and the worst of missionaries. He comes closest perhaps to the ideals that Cary would have expected of a missionary. For one, Schlemm is a great humanitarian. He is a man "devoted to one cause--the alleviation of human misery" (AW 130). His mission has perhaps a few hundred converts, but it serves the medical needs of thousands in the area (AW 251). The text deliberately connects him with Schweitzer (AW 130, 213-4), upon whom he is at least partially modeled.¹²⁷ He also has a tremendous affection and concern for individuals, as the events surrounding his introduction into the narrative reveal.¹²⁸

In addition, like most missionaries, Schlemm actually lives among the local peoples, in close daily contact with them. Consequently, unlike many of the colonial officials who are completely ignorant of what is happening among the Africans, Schlemm is the only European who has a clue of what is really taking place. He is, for example, the only European

¹²⁷Mahood (149) suggests he is also modeled after Walter Miller, a pioneer missionary in Northern Nigeria whose arrival preceded Lugard's. Miller made a reputation for protesting against British support for the Fulani emirs, and his detailed report on their brutality eventually led to their deposition in 1921.

¹²⁸Cary, African Witch 125ff. Schlemm is prompted to come into Rimi from the mission out of concern for a young girl whom he suspects is being tortured and tried as a witch.

aware that witch trials, which include hideous torture, are being carried out in the city even as District Officer Burwash insists such practices have been outlawed for years. Still, while he may be more aware than the colonial authorities of what is going on, he is at the same time somewhat naive about the nature and depth of faith among his converts, and of the extent of his influence over them. For men like Schlemm their faith, which often included a naive faith in human nature, as Echeruo notes, frequently blinded them to "the riddles and difficulties of political and social order, or how these affected the conduct of men".¹²⁹ For example, during the riot that pursues Rackham's assault on Aladai, Schlemm attempts to put a stop to at least a small part of the violence by trying to exercise his authority over a group of hooligans which includes students of his own mission. To his utter dismay he himself is also assaulted-- and by his own students (AW 214)! Similarly, although Schlemm is convinced no one but himself and his staff holds influence over his flock (AW 245), it is members of the mission-- including communicants--who become Coker's disciples, burn the mission and kill Schlemm, turning his severed head into their juju (AW 288).

In Cary's estimation this naivety also rendered such missionaries worse than ineffectual. He believed that it resulted not in the fostering of 'real freedom' for the masses of Africans but in indirectly facilitating the perpetuation of primitive juju thinly veiled in the clothing of 'civilized' Christianity. This is because "African primitives" were not intellectually prepared to comprehend 'sophisticated' religious ideas.¹³⁰ The passion of medieval Christian literalism, he believed, had been supplanted in contemporary European Christianity by a system of rational

¹²⁹Echeruo 83.

¹³⁰Cary, "Prefatory Essay," Aissa Saved 216-7.

metaphysical speculation that sublimated the "[b]asic obsessions" of human nature under "all sorts of decorous scientific or theological or political" abstractions¹³¹ which were beyond the comprehension of most Africans who still thought "with their feelings."¹³² Like Dobson in An American Visitor, Schlemm is an intellectual, a fact painfully illustrated by his homilies. The density of his intellectualism often operates as a barrier between him and his congregation. His sermons are usually impenetrable, often turning into discourses on "the Gnostics and Aquinas, and, sooner or later, Hegel" (AW 131). His conversation as well is permeated with philosophic analysis (AW 245), esoterica (AW 249), and dialectic idealism (AW 250) that put him quite out of touch with the people--Europeans and Africans alike--and events around him. Sometimes his intellectual preoccupations become a ridiculous priority, as demonstrated in his arrival at Kifi after the mission had been ransacked and burned: his first instinct is not to check on the safety of his colleagues or his flock, but of his books (AW 257). If he is a bore to the Europeans, who have at least some familiarity with the topics of his sermons and conversation, to the Africans he is unfathomable. They much prefer Coker's emotion, his enthusiasm, for it gives them "pleasure" and goes "to the heart" (AW 252). The work he does as a medical missionary contributes to the alleviation of physical suffering and misery. But because the Christian doctrines he preaches are couched in dense and impenetrable philosophical arguments they fall on deaf ears. Lacking any connection to the cultural context of the Africans to whom they are presented but who are not intellectually prepared to receive them, they are meaningless and therefore totally useless.

¹³¹Cary. "Prefatory Essay," African Witch 310.

¹³²Cary, African Freedom 121.

While Schlemm may not represent Cary's religious beliefs, to some degree he does share Cary's views regarding traditional religion, which he calls "the curse of Africa" (AW 126), and the consequences of its perpetuation. Molly Mahood is therefore correct when she says that he is the only character who shares Cary's evolving political views about the danger of indirect rule,¹³³ namely that it only serves to perpetuate the cruelty and corruption propagated by the indigenous regimes that it props up and the traditional customs that it protects. Still, I do not feel that Schlemm represents Cary's position on the policy. Rather, by drawing parallels between indirect rule and a mission policy of indigenization and accommodation--namely grooming a traditional African elite through whom the uneducated masses can be 'governed'--he uses Schlemm to dramatize the weaknesses and dangers he saw in this policy. As a missionary Schlemm is committed to bringing 'progress' to Rimi via social and cultural change. Like most missionaries and social engineers of his day he seeks to direct the nature, course, and shape of this change in accordance with his ideas of what constitutes civilization. Further, like missionaries who accepted the guiding principles of indigenization and accommodation--and their secular counterparts who practised indirect rule--he seeks to do this indirectly through an indigenous proxy whom he has molded, namely Aladai. Aladai's claim to the throne makes him a potential conduit of influence and power in Rimi, and his natural intelligence makes him a good candidate for an English education. These two characteristics contributed greatly to making the young Aladai one of Schlemm's "favourite pupils" on whom he built "great hopes" for the future of his mission work: "What could not be done in Rimi with a Christian chief as intelligent and courageous as Louis?" (AW 131): What Schlemm fails to

¹³³Mahood 149.



realize, however, is that Aladai is not necessarily receptive to the idea of being the missionary's instrument. In fact, he resists being identified with the Christians for fear that it would weaken his standing among the "pagans" whose support is vital to his claim to the emirate (AW 128 and elsewhere). He may share Schlemm's views about the relative levels of achievement of European 'civilization' and traditional culture, he may even share Schlemm's desire to bring 'civilization' and progress to Rimi, but he is less idealistic and selfless than his mentor.

While Cary uses Schlemm to dramatize his apprehensions regarding missionary and colonial education policies, Louis Aladai embodies his beliefs regarding the sort of African those policies are likely to produce. Aladai himself notes it is a policy that provides for only a very privileged few (AW 64). African by birth, in taste and manners he is thoroughly English. Owing to his public school and Oxford education he is articulate on subjects ranging from European poetry, art, and music to politics, religion, and astronomy (AW 16, 112). His room resembles the drawing room of an English manor house, complete with piano, brass fixtures, and portraits of the English royalty (AW 102). His favorite pipe tobacco--another English affectation--is from the Oxford High Street (AW 108-9). He wears English grey flannel suits--complete with suspenders--which seem ridiculously out of place at times (AW 49-50), and dresses his servants in blue jumpers with his initials embroidered in six-inch letters on the breast, in imitation of the Resident's servants (AW 110). He worries about proper manners (AW 19), longs for the company (AW 111) and the approval (AW 34, 103, 128 and elsewhere) of Europeans, and even refers to England as "home" (AW 265).

Just as he is enamored of all things English, Aladai is equally ashamed of Rimi civilization, which he dismisses as "ju-ju--so crude and stupid" (AW 20 and elsewhere). Instead

of traditional education--which he says amounts to little more than "ju-ju, and the proper way to dig yams . . . and some folk-songs"--he wants schools that will give Rimi "something worth calling a civilization" (AW 21). He has a tendency to look down paternalistically on the people of Rimi as "so simple, so brave", and in need of his leadership in order to achieve "civilization" (AW 102)--ironically just as colonial discourse similarly patronizes him.¹³⁴ Although he has some of the characteristics that Raoul Granqvist argues make him a stereotype for the African nationalist,¹³⁵ I think he is more correctly seen as the epitome of what Frantz Fanon would later describe as a culturally and psychologically colonized individual.¹³⁶

In addition to being Fanon's colonized man, Aladai is also what Harry Barba described as a "split" personality.¹³⁷ That is, the well-mannered English gentleman he has become is, in Granqvist's words, "constantly being menaced by the primitive African in him."¹³⁸ Despite his education and manners, Aladai can be emotional and impulsive. For example, Virginia Ola points out that when confronted with the narrow-minded racism of the European characters--culminating in Captain Rackham's assault over his gentlemanly attentions to a white woman (AW 202-3)--Aladai is "not allowed to apply his reasoning to the shocking event". Rather Cary permits him to "disintegrate psychologically and emotionally under the

¹³⁴For example, the narrator and a number of the European characters repeatedly refer to him as a "boy" although he is in his twenties! See Cary, African Witch 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 32, 62 and elsewhere.

¹³⁵Granqvist specifically refers to Aladai's "love of his country and people, British-based education, and the charisma needed to unite the disruptant forces around him". See Raoul Granqvist, Stereotypes in Western Fiction on Africa: A Study of Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, Ernest Hemingway, Karen Blixen, Graham Greene and Alan Paton (Umea: Umea University, 1984) 14.

¹³⁶See Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967) 169ff.

¹³⁷Harry Barba, "Cary's Image of the African in Transition," University of Kansas City Review 29.4 (1963): 292.

¹³⁸Granqvist 14.

strain", which drives him ultimately to Coker's "fanatical and bloody sect."¹³⁹ But it is neither this one incident, nor even the whole catalogue of European racism, that gradually drives Aladai away from reason and into an irrational war against the colonial authority. Already before the assault there are other signs of a 'primitive' side to his character that leaves him predisposed to recidivism. He is, for one thing, somewhat conceited, a characteristic Cary associated with 'primitive' man.¹⁴⁰ For instance, although only one of many claimants to the emirate--and apparently a minor one at that--he has an inflated estimation of his own importance, which is hinted at by his letters to the Resident regarding colonial policies.¹⁴¹ Also, although he ridicules belief in juju, at the same time he carries his own "big new ju-ju"--a prayer book sewn into the lining of his coat, which by chance deflects a spear and saves his life (AW 50-1, 61-2)--that he exploits to rally the masses behind him, and the power of which he himself gradually and grudgingly begins to believe in (AW 63, 101, 108, 132). There is even a hint of prurient interest in sexual aberration (AW 103).¹⁴² All of these and other details point toward an 'uncivilized' side of his character in conflict with the English gentleman he wishes to be.

In short, Cary's characterization of Aladai is marked by the assumptions of a colonial discourse that reduces the modern African to the sort of recently-civilized human being who at the core is still an impulsive, emotional, potentially violent, superstitious, and immature creature, less capable of mastering his primitive impulses than his longer-civilized

¹³⁹Virginia U. Ola, "The Vision of Power: Joyce Cary and African Women," ARIEL 9.1. (1978): 94.

¹⁴⁰Cary, African Freedom 112ff.

¹⁴¹For instance, he writes to the Resident to discuss "my education policy" for the future of Rimi (Cary, African Witch 109).

¹⁴²Among the books on his shelf is one titled "Notable Sex Crimes of the Nineteenth Century".

European counterparts. For sure, Aladai is by far the most sympathetically drawn African character Cary has produced, having more depth than any of the Africans in either Aissa Saved or An American Visitor--or the eponymous Mister Johnson who had received so much acclaim from early European critics. I therefore have difficulty in agreeing completely with Virginia Ola when she accuses Cary of sacrificing the Christian, mission-trained, and Oxford-educated Aladai to his own "antipathy towards the educated African".¹⁴³ Rather I believe he is making this sacrifice to the demands of his thematic concerns and the religious beliefs and assumptions behind them; beliefs he discussed just a few years later in Power in Men, The Case for African Freedom, and elsewhere concerning the power and danger of dogmatic ideas, especially among the sort of 'primitive' and illiterate peoples he saw Africans to be.

In this novel, then, Cary roots Aladai's tragedy squarely in the failure of the colonial authority and its missionary counterpart to establish a program of universal liberal education. This failure isolates Aladai in a sort of no-man's land: he is scorned by the European community whose recognition and approval he desires yet, as the sole western-educated Rimi, he is also out of touch with his own people. It is, as well, this failure of policy, Cary concludes, that is ultimately responsible for the continued appeal and power of traditional beliefs and practices among Africans, beliefs and practices which he saw as preventing the development of 'real freedom' among the African masses and thus inhibiting 'progress.'

In all three novels Cary draws parallels between the Christian missions and the colonial civilizing mission in order to dramatize and make his case regarding the shortcomings of colonial policy. Like the missionary

¹⁴³Ola 94.

characters of Huxley's and Achebe's novels--and Ngugi's early fiction--his are also dedicated, selfless, and well-intentioned people. However, whereas Huxley's missionaries represent the hope for the future of a 'civilized' Africa, and those of Achebe and Ngugi precipitate the tragic disintegration of traditional culture before imperial power, Cary's are failures, their failure directly attributable to the nature of the faith they possess, practise, and propagate. This faith, which Cary generally characterizes as dogmatic and based on 'false' ideas about the nature of God and the world, fails to facilitate the development of 'real' freedom and hence hinders rather than enhances progress.

In his treatment of Christian mission Cary anticipates both Huxley and Achebe. He shares with Huxley, who began writing about Africa just as he stopped,¹⁴⁴ a firm conviction in the superiority of European civilization, of which liberal Christian humanism is the pinnacle. Like her, he was convinced that only Christianity--properly propagated and on a universal scale--could mediate, master, and properly channel the African's primitive, emotional instincts. This was the role both saw for Christianity in the civilizing mission. Oddly, he also anticipates Achebe. Both explore the consequences for society of rigid dogmatism, and both portray Christianity and traditional society as equally dogmatic. It is in their conclusions that they differ: for one the consequence is the continued reign of 'savagery,' and for the other social disintegration before superior power.

¹⁴⁴Huxley's Red Strangers and Cary's last African novel, Mister Johnson, were both published in 1939.

Chapter Four

Elspeth Huxley (1)

Christianity and the Civilizing Mission to the Black Man in 'White Man's Country'

Introduction

Writing in 1963 as the British colonies of Africa were one after another entering into political independence, Elspeth Huxley looked back nostalgically at the British colonial enterprise and likened it to the Church's missionary efforts throughout the continent. After noting that "[t]he British came first as missionaries, to convert East Africans to Christianity", she said they then came "as consuls, to impose British law" and finally as "missionaries again, to preach a democratic form of government."¹ She likened the whole colonial service to "a secular Church" spreading the "gospel" of democracy whose "dogmas" included elections, parties, taxation, welfare services and trade unions. She went on to add that once independence has been achieved and "the missionaries have gone home" Europeans must now "expect changes in dogma to result from changes in their Church. It is sometimes hard to realise that, when people rule themselves, they will alter the rules. They will rule themselves as they wish, perhaps badly, and not as Westerners think they should."² While Huxley's comments obviously refer specifically to British efforts to transplant into the colonial territories structures of government modeled wholly on their own notions and forms of democracy, they are also indicative of her understanding of the colonial project as a whole. Her choice of metaphors, as well, is indicative of what she perceived as the role of the Church in the colonial project, which in turn shaped her representations of

¹Elspeth Huxley, Forks and Hope: An African Notebook (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964) 66.

²Huxley, Forks and Hope 66-67.

Christianity, missionary characters, and converts to mission Christianity in her fiction.

Huxley's Background

Huxley was no stranger to Africa. Although she was born in London in 1907, the only child of Josceline and Nellie Grant, in 1913 the family emigrated to colonial Kenya, where Elspeth was raised on a settler farm first at Thika and later at Njoro in the years immediately before and after World War I.³ She received her early education at home and later finished her secondary schooling at the Government European School in Nairobi before returning to England for university.

In terms of religious upbringing, Huxley's background is quite different from Joyce Cary, a practising Anglican in his youth, or Chinua Achebe, the son of Anglican missionaries. Though her mother grew up in a family where attendance at Sunday church services was "obligatory",⁴ Elspeth was raised in an environment that did not particularly stress church affiliation or attendance. Writing of her childhood in rural Kenya she said that the nearest churches were in distant Nairobi, with no means of getting there. Occasionally a parson would come out to Thika to hold services in the local bar, but the family did not often go.⁵ Rather, Sunday mornings were usually devoted to social events with other nearby members of the settler community or to recreational activities, with pony rides into the forest among the most frequent.⁶ If her parents

³Biographical facts are drawn from the following sources: C. S. Nicholls, Elspeth Huxley: A Biography (London: HarperCollins, 2002); Robert Cross, "Elspeth Huxley: A Voice from the Flame Trees," Guardian, 13 Jan. 1997: 16; Mary Ann Fitzgerald, "Elspeth Huxley," Independent, 13 Jan. 1997: 12; "Elspeth Huxley," Times, 13 Jan. 1997: 22; Huxley, The Flame Trees of Thika (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959); Huxley, The Mottled Lizard (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962).

⁴Huxley, Nellie: Letters from Africa, 1973 (London: Widenfield and Nicolson, 1984) 18.

⁵Huxley, Nellie 47.

⁶Huxley, Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985) 31.

were indifferent to organized religion,⁷ they did not try to nurture hostility in their daughter. As Huxley noted in The Mottled Lizard, the second installment of her fictionalized autobiography, her mother included as part of the young Elspeth's home schooling bible study and commentary on the scriptures.⁸ As an adult Huxley consequently took an eclectic view, one of her admirer's suggesting Elspeth's outlook itself had been "profoundly coloured by the spiritual life of the Africans among whom she had grown up."⁹

Elspeth left Kenya for university studies in 1925, first pursuing a diploma course in agriculture at Reading University in England and then for one year at Cornell University in the United States, after which she never returned to live full-time in Africa. In 1929 she went to work for the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) as an assistant press officer, where she met Gervas Huxley, whom she married in 1931. Together they made their home in southern England, though Elspeth maintained close contact with Africa, where her parents continued to reside.¹⁰ She established her reputation as a writer and authority on African affairs with her 1935 publication of White Man's Country, a biography of Lord Delamere, the early leader-hero of the Kenyan settler movement. In addition to her work for the EMB, at various times she also worked and wrote on Africa for the BBC and the Colonial Office, and was an independent member of the Monckton Advisory Committee on Central Africa in 1960. Throughout her long career she eventually produced more than 47 books and over 760 journalistic and academic articles,¹¹ much of which is concerned with Africa, its peoples--indigenous as well as

⁷Nicholls reports that Nellie Grant claimed to be a "convinced atheist" (34).

⁸Huxley, The Mottled Lizard 111-112.

⁹"Elspeth Huxley," Times, 13 Jan. 1997: 22.

¹⁰Her father died in Njoro in 1947, after which her mother continued to operate the farm until after Kenyan independence, migrating in 1965 to southern Portugal. See Huxley, Nellie 164, 243ff.

¹¹Robert Cross and Michael Perkin, Elspeth Huxley: A Bibliography (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1996).

European settler--and their ways of life, commenting on issues as wide-ranging as agriculture, economics, culture, politics, and race relations.

Huxley on Africa and Africans, the Church, and the Colonial Project

Huxley's writing is, in the words of Micere Githae-Mugo, "controversial".¹² To her admirers she was "one of the most distinguished and versatile writers of her generation" who possessed "acute powers of observation and . . . wit";¹³ she was "a meticulous researcher" whose "sharp insights, there until the last, tenacity, compassion and dry sense of humour made her loved by her friends of all generations and nationalities."¹⁴ As recently as 1998 an early novel like Red Strangers has been described as "gripping, moving, historically and anthropologically illuminating, humanistically mind-opening. . . ."¹⁵ Her critics, on the other hand, have regularly voiced a harsher view. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has been among the most critical, labeling writers like her "racist"¹⁶ and "driven by the racism of contempt."¹⁷ Echoing Ngugi's charges, many have regarded Huxley as "the most adamant spokesman for the Kenyan settler"¹⁸ and "'one of the world's best-known

¹²Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978) 40.

¹³Cross, "Elspeth Huxley" 16.

¹⁴Fitzgerald 12. Though the anonymous obituary writer for the Times said that her books were at times "marred by inaccuracy and carelessness thanks, in the main, to hasty composition" ("Elspeth Huxley" 21).

¹⁵Richard Dawkins, "Introduction," in Elspeth Huxley, Red Strangers (London: Penguin Classics, 1999) vii.

¹⁶See for example Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, 1986 (London: James Currey, 1997) 92; and Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms (Oxford: James Currey, 1993) 35.

¹⁷Ngugi, Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 12.

¹⁸Githae-Mugo 19. Ngugi similarly described her as "that liberal apologist for Kenya's settlers." See Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann, 1972) 43.

apologists for colonial rule'¹⁹ whose later writings were at times a "celebration of European settlement",²⁰ a sentiment not limited to either African critics or their contemporary 'postcolonial' counterparts,²¹ while others have categorized her a "segregationist".²² These charges mostly "puzzled" Huxley,²³ who considered herself sympathetic to the situation of ordinary Africans. In her "Foreword" to the Cross and Perkin bibliography she said that she was fortunate "to have enjoyed a childhood and adolescence in an African country just before the tide of Western customs and values swept away the cultures of the indigenous peoples", and that it was in hope of "pinning down on paper some of the sights and sounds, dreams and realities of a bygone Africa that [she] hammered out inexpertly on an obsolete manual typewriter" her Africa books.²⁴ Indeed, a perusal of her immense body of writing on the one hand reveals a profound respect and appreciation for the African peoples, their cultures, and their societies, as well as a deep concern for their dignity, their material development, and their eventual full political and economic participation in the developing colonial societies--albeit, societies constructed in accordance with European notions of what a contemporary multiracial society ought to look like. On the other, her writing also clearly demonstrates her unwavering belief in a highly romanticized and idealized understanding of the

¹⁹Thus said Nairobi's Daily Nation in a review of the 1980s film version of her fictional autobiography, The Flame Trees of Thika. Quoted in "Elspeth Huxley" 21.

²⁰Abdulrazak Gurnah, "Settler Writing in Kenya: 'Nomenclature is an Uncertain Science in these Wild Parts'," Modernism and Empire, ed. Harold J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 282.

²¹In 1942 Margery Perham had labeled White Man's Country "the best apologia for white settlement that has been written". At the same time, however, Perham found Red Strangers to be "an astonishing exercise of sympathy and imagination on behalf of the Africans." See Elspeth Huxley and Margery Perham, Race and Politics in Kenya (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1944) 17.

²²Barbara Bush, Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945 (London: Routledge, 1999) 34.

²³"Elspeth Huxley" 21.

²⁴Huxley, "Foreword," in Cross and Perkin, viii.

aims of Britain's self-appointed colonial mission in Africa.

All of these conflicting views of Huxley's writing are symptomatic of what Abdulrazak Gurnah has described as a general and profound ambivalence characteristic of most Kenyan settler writing. According to Gurnah, already in the early part of the twentieth century a shift was taking place in European discursive constructions of the settler in Africa in such a way that even the term 'settler' itself had undergone a metamorphosis from "the ambivalently heroic imperial icon" to encompass an indefinite list of "ambivalent pairings".²⁵ The settler of this period, he says, was constructed as "both a courageous pioneer and someone driven to such desperate measures by poverty; Christian warrior and religious fanatic; a civiliser taming the wilderness with unexpected sympathy but also being made uncouth by the intemperate exercise of power over lesser people."²⁶ As the century wore on more frequently the settler became an object of shame and ridicule, an indictment of imperial society, and, increasingly in the period after World War II, "connected in what at first were ambiguous ways to the notions of 'racial' and cultural difference and hierarchies which had resulted in the obscenities of the war."²⁷ More importantly, Gurnah suggests these ambivalent constructions of the settler figure were present "even within settler culture itself, much earlier than the period after the war."²⁸

This ambivalence is clearly evident in Huxley's writing. In her non-fiction she was an ardent defender of European settlement and intervention, both in Kenya and throughout Africa, and of the romanticized ideals of the imperial project. At the same time, she was also conscious of the damaging and irreparable changes to traditional culture that contact with Europe was responsible for; she

²⁵Gurnah 275.

²⁶Gurnah 275.

²⁷Gurnah 276.

²⁸Gurnah 276.

was painfully aware of the injustice of colonial society and was deeply concerned that Africans should have an equal opportunity to earn their share of its benefits.²⁹

Huxley made no bones about her sympathy for the European settlers throughout Africa. In her correspondence debate with Margery Perham conducted in 1942-43,³⁰ for example, she vigorously defended the record of the settler community in Kenya, their contribution to the development of the colonial economy, and the beneficial consequences of their economic activities for the 'development' of the native African population. She argued that the role of the Europeans in Kenya was systematically being misrepresented in the press;³¹ that "the people of Kenya as a whole must go forward, not just the white minority", while also adding the proviso that "the progress of the whole will be warped and embittered if that minority is frustrated, alienated, and driven finally and fruitlessly into a hostile camp";³² that Gikuyu claims to land under European cultivation were frequently exaggerated or erroneous;³³ and that Europeans had in fact neither dispossessed Africans of the best land nor even of the major share of arable land.³⁴ Nor was she completely dismissive of David Livingstone's belief in settlement as "the quickest way of bringing civilization to the natives."³⁵ She termed European settlement a "'beneficial occupation'" of the land because it enhanced

²⁹In a draft essay for New Commonwealth, for instance, she argued that Africans should receive equal pay for equal work. See Huxley, "The Cause and Cure of Mau Mau," 18 January 1954, draft essay for New Commonwealth, Church Missionary Society Archive, G3 A5/6/13, Birmingham University.

³⁰Huxley and Perham; cited in n21 above.

³¹Robert Cross quotes Huxley as saying she took up the settler's case in this debate because, in her view, "almost the whole of the British press was very much against them, perhaps rightly in some respects, but it was overdone. Things were said that were not true and nobody was trying to answer back, and there are always two sides to every case." See Cross and Perkin 31.

³²Huxley and Perham 32.

³³Huxley and Perham 54.

³⁴Huxley and Perham 41. Specifically she claimed that land in European hands amounted to approximately 10,000 square miles, or a little over 13% of the usable land, while the "native reserves occupy 50,000 square miles, five times as much as the Europeans."

³⁵Huxley and Perham 40.

the production of "food and raw materials for the country's, and the world's, benefit"³⁶ while also providing a source of livelihood for "themselves and a large number of Africans on a rising standard of living".³⁷ Elsewhere she argued for limited expansion of settlement in Kenya within lands already designated for European occupation, agreeing that while Kenya can never become "another white Dominion", nevertheless "an economically prosperous and enterprising white community would be better for the general health of East Africa than a struggling one which would have to lean on subsidies and contribute little to the common pool of wealth."³⁸ In later years as the march towards political independence in Africa quickened she looked back nostalgically on what she called a time of "Progress", and rhetorically asked the reader whether the results were "on the whole beneficial, or the reverse, to the human race."³⁹ Through the 1960s and 1970s, as well, while criticizing and condemning a South African style of apartheid,⁴⁰ she repeatedly called for the British government to negotiate with, rather than shun, the white minority government of Rhodesia, claiming that the country's economic health--and by extension, the well-being of the African population--was dependent on the "whites who have sunk their fortunes in Rhodesia, have nowhere else to go and have built up the economy."⁴¹

Race relations, as well, were a central and complicated concern in Huxley's writing. While it is unfair to simply label her a "segregationist" as Barbara Bush

³⁶Huxley and Perham 71.

³⁷Huxley and Perham 72.

³⁸Huxley, "The Empire Conference and the Colonies--II," Time and Tide 25.21 (20 May 1944): 438.

³⁹Huxley, A New Earth: An Experiment in Colonialism (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 9.

⁴⁰See for example her comments in "The Future of Africa," Letter, Times, 24 Sept. 1963: 11. Also see "No Flowers for Welensky's Baby," National Review, 16.4 (28 Jan. 1964): 65-66; and "Sniping at Springboks: A New British Game," National Review 21.49 (6 Dec. 1969): 1265-66.

⁴¹Huxley, "The Road to Johannesburg," National Review, 16.26 (30 Jun. 1964): 352.

does,⁴² Micere Githae-Mugo is not too far off the mark when she suggests that Huxley was convinced of "the superiority of the white man and the inferiority of the black man"⁴³-- at least in terms of their respective levels of technological and cultural development⁴⁴--, while remaining critical of apartheid-like policies. In the Perham debate, for example, she emphatically stated, "in spite of all the difficulties in a mixed community, an economic or social colour bar can't be and shouldn't be maintained or set up."⁴⁵ For her the color bar was a "moral question" that was deeply concerned with issues of "justice and ethics"; yet she believed that its dismantling was a matter of pragmatics, of "what is possible, and what isn't, in tropical Africa, with its great preponderance of black over white."⁴⁶ Although she saw a color bar that automatically placed the European in a superior position as "dangerous as well as very bad manners", she also agreed that, at their present stage of social development--in European terms, that is--, the "mass of Africans patently are not" the

⁴²Bush 34.

⁴³Githae-Mugo 18.

⁴⁴Huxley had some interesting ideas about the source of this supposed superiority. As early as 1936 she was promoting the idea that differences in technological, cultural, and (presumably) intellectual levels of development were related to climate. For example, in a 1936 article for Times ("The Nature of the Native: An East African Inquiry: Why is He Backwards?" 23 Jul. 1936: 16) she called for research into the environment "to discover how far this might be a contributory cause of [Africans'] apparent backwardness." Years later she would expand her thesis to include modes of production and divisions of labor, suggesting that whereas Europeans in their northern climate have had to work hard to cultivate the land, Africans have had to do "infinitely less, because there is no winter and plant growth is so much quicker, and what work there was he managed, for the most part, to delegate to his wives." (Huxley, "Some Impressions of East Africa Today," African Affairs 46.185 [Oct. 1947]: 206.) Eventually she even applied her theory to political life, suggesting the "Puritan spirit" and its "passion for individual liberty" to be a product of the northern climate which she said "promoted forethought, doggedness of character and a tendency to brood over matters of principle," characteristics she said were not indigenous in Africa. (Huxley, "West Africa in Transition," Geographical Magazine 25.6 [Oct. 1952]: 318.). As recently as 1960 she was still suggesting that the African climate had led to "the emergence of ways of living rather than of civilizations or cultures in the received sense" ("The Ethos of the Negro: An Inspissated Consciousness," Round Table 51.201 [Dec. 1960]: 8).

⁴⁵Huxley and Perham 193.

⁴⁶Huxley and Perham 193.

social equals of Europeans.⁴⁷ Rather, borrowing a phrase from Cecil Rhodes she argued for equal rights "for all civilized men";⁴⁸ and while acknowledging the cultural arbitrariness of defining what standards constitute 'civilized', she nevertheless called for this to mean equal rights "for all who have reached a certain standard of education . . . for all who accept certain common standards of social behaviour, ethics, respect for the law, service to the community."⁴⁹

If Huxley lamented the impact of the European presence and culture on African society, she was not of the opinion that European involvement or even influence on the continent was undesirable. Indeed, she had said unequivocally in 1946 that Africans were better off because of colonization,⁵⁰ a view she never stepped back from.⁵¹ The image she presented of Africans, as well, was consistently an Orientalist one. For instance, she wrote in 1962 that before the coming of the white man Africans "were very primitive. They wore skins instead of clothes, they hunted and fought with spears and bows and arrows, they had no roads or towns, no carts or horses--let alone any kind of machinery--no plows or pumps, no plates or glasses, and they could neither read nor write."⁵² Like Joyce Cary, she took pride in the British initiative in Africa, likening it to the ancient Roman presence in Britain and asserting that the British purpose likewise was to create "the bare bones of civilization, the things that we take completely for granted".⁵³ Included in this catalogue of beneficent

⁴⁷Huxley and Perham 195.

⁴⁸Huxley and Perham 194.

⁴⁹Huxley and Perham 194.

⁵⁰Huxley, "The Future of the Colonies" 713.

⁵¹As recently as 1986 she praised the early colonial administrators, "whose task . . . was to introduce the rudiments of law and order among a thin and scattered population of mutually hostile and in some cases nomadic and warlike tribes." See Huxley, "Introduction," in Arnold Curtis, Memories of Kenya: Stories from the Pioneers (London: Evan Brothers, 1986) xiv.

⁵²Huxley, "Foreword," in Campbell K. Finlay, A New Home in Kenya (London: George G. Harrap and Co., 1962) 6.

⁵³Huxley, "A Challenge to Us All," Listener 30.761 (12 Aug. 1943): 181.

objectives, which similarly echoed Cary's recently published The Case for African Freedom, was the establishment of "law and order"; suppression of the slave trade, intertribal wars, and cattle-raiding "that had been going on for some thousands of years"; the construction of railways, roads, and bridges; wiping out disease; and "create[ing] towns out of bush."⁵⁴ Africa, in short, would be far worse off without European beneficence.

Although Huxley frequently defended settler interests in Kenya and elsewhere; although she was convinced of the technological and cultural superiority of Europeans over Africans; although she embraced a romantic vision of the colonial project; and although she firmly believed in the positive contribution of both the settler community and European society as a whole to the modernization of Africans, she was at the same time painfully aware of the negative, destructive consequences for traditional African society that contact with Europe produced. For one, she was not wholly convinced of the appropriateness or suitability of many aspects of European society for Africans. The African countries themselves, she had frequently pointed out, "are purely European abstractions, drawn on maps by Foreign Office officials 50 or 60 years ago and corresponding to no ethnic or geographic realities",⁵⁵ and was therefore pessimistic about European attempts to impose or otherwise hastily nurture western, democratic forms of government in these arbitrarily drawn states. From at least as early as 1943 she was criticizing these efforts, noting that while democracy as a form of government "suits us well . . . are we justified in forcing it on colonial peoples?"⁵⁶ Rather, she insisted that the various African peoples had their own traditional forms of government which had evolved, as they had in Europe, over a period of centuries to suit the particular needs of the social group

⁵⁴Huxley, "A Challenge to Us All" 181.

⁵⁵Huxley, "Aims in East Africa," Letter, Times, 11 Feb, 1955: 11.

⁵⁶Huxley, "A Challenge to Us All" 181.

concerned.⁵⁷ This would remain one of her major criticisms of colonialism throughout her career.⁵⁸

Ironically, Huxley also blamed many of the problems of colonial Africa less on European arrogance or exploitation than on European 'superiority.' Western society in her view was "dynamic" while traditional African societies were marked by "static tribalism", and in the collision between dynamism and stasis, she said, "indigenous customs, religions, beliefs and economies went down like ninepins."⁵⁹ She suggested that Africans were "dazed and shaken" by Western material and technological superiority and tended to divide into mutually antagonistic groups which either "clung with desperate conservatism to their old ways" or "snatched with an equally desperate avidity at the new Western notions which, they believed, would reveal to them the sources of Western supremacy."⁶⁰ More than the overall injustice of colonial society, she seemed to believe that it was the disruption of traditional life and beliefs, the rapid change of social, economic, and family structures that accompanied European settlement and resulted in chaos and confusion that eventually exploded in 'Mau Mau' revolt of the 1950s.⁶¹

Confronted with the revolt, Huxley believed Christianity "in its simplest and most literal form" was the best "guide-rope" with which Africans could pull

⁵⁷See, for example, Huxley, "Reflections on Colonial Policy--II: The Mirage of 'Common Citizenship'," Time and Tide 27.34 (24 Aug. 1946): 799-800; "Kicks for the Sacred Cow," Time and Tide 38.33 (17 Aug. 1957): 1014

⁵⁸See, for example, her comments in a BBC discussion, "The Future of the Colonies: A Discussion," Listener 35.907 (30 May 1946): 712-718; also such articles as "Democracy: An African Experiment," Time and Tide 26.24 (16 Jun. 1945): 493-494; "Reflections on Colonial Policy: Palestine, India, and the Colonies," Time and Tide 27.33 (17 Aug. 1947): 773; "West Africa in Transition," Geographical Magazine 25.6 (Oct. 1952): 310-320; "The Falling Altars," Time and Tide 39.47 (22 Nov. 1958): 1390; "What Future for Africa?" Encounter 16.6 (Jun. 1961): 8-20; "Some Observations on the African Personality," Virginia Quarterly Review 38.1 (1962): 79-95; "Death in Nigeria," National Review 18.6 (22 Feb. 1966): 163-164.

⁵⁹Huxley, "Foreword," in Prince Modupe, I Was a Savage (London: Museum Press, 1958) ix.

⁶⁰Huxley, "Foreword," I Was a Savage, ix.

⁶¹Huxley, "The Roots of Mau Mau," Time and Tide 33.46 (15 Nov. 1952): 1321-1322.

themselves out of "the bog of doubt, fear, materialism and amorality in which so many flounder", adding that "a score of sincere but not unbalanced Christian evangelists . . . would do more good at the present time than ten battalions of National Servicemen or a fleet of bombers."⁶²

Anticipating the eventual military defeat of the forest fighters and looking ahead to a time when colonial order would be restored, she went on to add that for the Churches "[the] greatest task is to restore a lost sense of purpose in life, to fill the spiritual and moral void"⁶³ left by the disintegration of traditional ways of life and its accompanying values under the cultural assault of European colonization and urbanization. The contradiction here is obvious: the Church on the one hand has been part of the cause of the cultural disintegration that produced a generation "deprived of its old religions and its moral code", yet on the other it is now expected to provide for that generation's "spiritual regeneration".⁶⁴ In this same contradictory manner Huxley portrays missionaries and the Church in her African fiction: they are partly responsible for cultural upheaval among Africans, yet are also representative of a European culture that is infinitely superior and will eventually edify Africans. Gradually, they also emerge in her later novels as the greatest source of hope for Africans blinded by what she saw as a vulgar, recidivist nationalism based on a doctrine of "race-hatred"⁶⁵ and "perversions" of traditional culture.⁶⁶

⁶²Huxley, "The Cause and Cure of Mau Mau." In a letter to Canon T. F. Bewes she similarly commented that what was needed were more European missionaries "who'll make personal contact with the Kikuyu (& indeed other Africans) & give them an alternative to the doctrines of race-hatred & nationalism" that she believed was at the heart of the forest fighters. See Huxley, Letter to Canon T. F. Bewes, 19 December 1953, from Njoro, Kenya, Church Missionary Society Archive, G3 A5/6/13.

⁶³Huxley, "Kenya Scene" 107.

⁶⁴Huxley, "Kenya Scene" 107.

⁶⁵Huxley, Letter to Canon T. F. Bewes.

⁶⁶Huxley, "The Cause and Cure of Mau Mau."

Colonialism, Christianity, and the Civilizing Mission: Red Strangers.

About midway through Red Strangers, Huxley describes an exchange between Matu, the Gikuyu medicine man, and the young European missionary known as Sasi. To Matu's statement about every people having their own gods, Sasi replies that there is only one God and stresses that he has "come to teach this to the Kikuyu, who live in an ignorance as dark as night."⁶⁷ Both Sasi's remark in itself and the wider context of the scene in which it is uttered are indicative of ambivalence in Huxley's views of Christian missionary activity in Africa and, by extension, of the entire British colonial enterprise. For it is a scene which is intended, on the one hand, to critically expose the cultural arrogance, insensitivity, and ignorance of the Europeans vis-à-vis traditional African ways of life. On the other it highlights a perception of African culture as in fact stifled by superstition and scientific ignorance, and consequently having actually benefited by the European arrival. The scenes of the Christian missions in this novel thus form a microcosm of the colonial project and her handling of them gives evidence to Huxley's ambivalence regarding that project.

Red Strangers appeared in 1939 and is among Huxley's earliest published fiction. Divided into three books, the novel is set in what was the South Nyeri district of the Gikuyu reserves of Kenya Colony, beginning in 1890, shortly before the arrival of the Europeans in the region, and leading up to 1937. Focusing on the members of one family over the course of three generations, Huxley attempted here to represent the experience and consequences of colonization for the African people. Book I covers the period from 1890 to 1902. It centers on Waseru and his

⁶⁷Elsbeth Huxley, Red Strangers (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939) 241. All references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

sons, Muthengi and Matu, and presents Huxley's version of life among the Gikuyu before the arrival of the white man. Book II then spans the years 1902 to 1919, focusing on Muthengi and Matu and dramatizing the initial impact on traditional life of the coming of the colonial administrators, missionaries, and settlers. Finally, Book III follows Matu's sons Karanja and Kaleo in the post-war period, exploring the destructive consequences for Gikuyu life of the imposition of colonial government and law, the rapid transformation from an economy centered on peasant farming to one of settler agriculture and a labor market, and the introduction of mission Christianity, mission education, and other forms of close contact with European culture.

Huxley has said that though the novel is a work of fiction, "most of the incidents related are true."⁶⁸ And while she categorically denied any claims to "scientific exactitude" for her descriptions and observations, she said that the historic, anthropological, and sociological material for the story was gleaned largely from personal observation, from interviews with Gikuyu elders, from published sources such as Katherine and W. Scoresby Routledge's With a Prehistoric People, and from unpublished notes borrowed from L. S. B. Leakey.⁶⁹ From the outset she said it would be "absurd" to pretend she was "speaking for the Kikuyu people or putting forth their point of view", but nevertheless she undertook to do just that because, she said, the older generation who remember life before the imposition of British rule "cannot present their point of view to us because they cannot express it in terms which we

⁶⁸Huxley, "Foreword," Red Strangers vii.

⁶⁹Huxley, "Foreword," Red Strangers vii. She did, however, enroll in an anthropology course in 1937 with Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics in order to "get some kind of order into the material [she] had gathered" during her 1936-37 research trip through Kenya. It was at this seminar that she became acquainted with Jomo Kenyatta, who she said had also joined the seminar for the purpose of facilitating his own writing project, Facing Mount Kenya, which was published in 1938, one year before Red Strangers (Huxley, Nellie 124-125).

can understand."⁷⁰ Presumably she was referring to a combination of the language barrier, contamination by European culture, and the conventions of the novel, for she added that the young Gikuyu educated in the European sense were likewise unable to speak for the older generation since they too used "the thought-tracks of the Europeans" and were thus "scarcely more able than his European teacher to interpret the feelings and outlook of the generation to whom the processes of European thought were always alien."⁷¹ It is an odd statement considering her personal acquaintance with Jomo Kenyatta at precisely the time he was writing Facing Mount Kenya. Nevertheless in this novel Huxley undertook to do what she believed educated Africans were incapable of doing for themselves.

At the time of its release Red Strangers received a modicum of praise from its European reviewers.⁷² One in particular lauded it as "the elegy of a culture" for which "the urbanized Kikuyu of the future will owe her their gratitude."⁷³ Even Huxley's critics in later years praised her, albeit sometimes grudgingly, for what they considered the positive achievements of the novel. Ezekiel Mphahlele, for example, noted that in the novel Huxley successfully documented "Kikuyu customs and beliefs in great detail and has captured much of the African's symbolic manner of talk."⁷⁴ He added that her characters

move freely from one patch of ground to another; they raid and are raided by Masai for cattle and goats; the elders dispense justice as a council; everyone goes through recognized initiation ceremonies, like

⁷⁰Huxley, "Foreword," Red Strangers viii.

⁷¹Huxley, "Foreword," Red Strangers viii.

⁷²See Wilfred Gibson, "Four New Novels," Manchester Guardian, 2 Jun. 1939: 5; William Plomer, "Red Man's Country," The Spectator, 16 Jun. 1939: 1058; "New Novels," Times, 2 Jun. 1939: 8; "White Man's Path," Times Literary Supplement, 3 Jun. 1939: 325.

⁷³John Mair, "New Novels," The New Statesman and Nation 17.432 (3 Jun. 1939): 866.

⁷⁴Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) 176.

circumcision; there is a strong sense of communal responsibility, belonging and ownership of property.⁷⁵

Micere Githae-Mugo, as well, pointed to Huxley's representation of communal life, saying that she "brings out this sense of sharing and oneness very successfully."⁷⁶ She further credited Huxley's "very detailed knowledge about the Gikuyu", and also praised her attempts "to season her English with a special Gikuyu flavour, indicating that to a large extent she understood and spoke the language well."⁷⁷

One of the chief criticisms of the novel already from the time of publication concerned Huxley's method of characterization.⁷⁸ In this and her other novels Huxley has tended to draw on stereotypical images and create stock characters, a choice Mphahlele regrets because it leaves too many opportunities for creating interesting characters "unexplored".⁷⁹ Mphahlele has described Huxley's pre-colonial African world and characters as "prehistoric."⁸⁰ It is a world much like the one Joyce Cary presents in his

⁷⁵Mphahlele 176-177.

⁷⁶Githae-Mugo 45.

⁷⁷Githae-Mugo 19. In fact Huxley did not speak Gikuyu. She did claim to speak Kisettla, a Swahili pidgin frequently used between settlers and Africans. However, in doing research for Red Strangers she needed to rely on a Gikuyu translator for interviews with the tribal elders because, to her regret, she "had not learnt" the Gikuyu language in her youth (Huxley, Midday Sun 185).

⁷⁸The reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement pointed to Huxley's weak characterization, noting that the novel failed "to excite that interest in individuals which is expected from a novel" (325). John Mair similarly said that her characters were primarily "symbols, with sufficient individuality to make them sympathetic but not enough to isolate them from their types" (866). V. S Pritchett ("Arnold Bennett's Mechanism--Miss Mannin's Pacifism--A London Letter," Christian Science Monitor Weekly Magazine Section, 8 July 1939: 11) and William Plomer (1058) similarly noted Huxley's preference for 'types' over 'individuals'.

⁷⁹Mphahlele 181. Interestingly, among the early reviewers Plomer and Pritchett both thought this a deliberate and wise decision. Plomer, for instance, wrote that using types was preferential because "so long as the white (or red) races continue to lean on the colour bar their observations are likely to lack the intimacy essential to the novelist" (1058). Pritchett similarly thought using types preferable to a writer attempting "to get under the skin of people of a race and culture different from their own," which he said too often "failed grotesquely" (11).

⁸⁰Mphahlele 178.

novels, controlled by superstition, magic, and fear, while her characters are stereotyped men "to whom so many things happened without stirring in [them] a will that [they] would impose on the scheme of things and deflect its course."⁸¹ It is a world "of sorcery and witchcraft", Mahenia tells the young Muthengi, "from which you must learn to protect yourself; for the world is full of evil, and the ignorant man who lacks protection is like a lost kid who strays outside the goats' enclosure in a land that is infested with hungry hyenas" (37). And indeed, the first part of the novel is in part a catalogue of what the modern Christian European readers would consider primitive superstitions. These include beliefs and assumptions about sources of impurity and bad luck (12, 57, 187), those governing the construction of a homestead or dwelling (11, 55), the coming of the rains (56), and taboos concerning things from cooking ware (57) to the hyena (64). There is an obsessive fear of curses (20, 32, 186ff, and elsewhere), of divinely ordered afflictions (138) and plagues (154), and reliance on the often cruel and brutal rituals of the medicine man to lift these misfortunes (45-47, 155-7). It is, in effect, a hostile world over which the Africans have no control and in which they can take no initiative, but only react and respond.

Her African characters, particularly the males, are primitive brutes. Like Bamu's family in Cary's Mister Johnson, they are ruthless and malicious men, almost wholly lacking in feelings of tenderness or compassion. They are, as Githae-Mugo notes, "corrupt with greed. Goats, cows, women and children are seen as the commodities that make the Gikuyu man. . . .; at the very best they are treasured for being his valuable acquisitions."⁸² They "lust for cattle and for glory" (4) and consequently spend much time planning and carrying out raids on rival groups (4, 118ff; 126ff). Relatives wrangle to best each other over

⁸¹Mphahlele 178.

⁸²Githae-Mugo 43-44.

intrafamilial and intracommunal debts (24, 43). Ndolia, Waseru's father-in-law, in particular stands out as greedy and malicious, placing a mortal curse on his own grandchild in order to extort additional bride-payments from the child's father as a reward for his daughter's fertility (13, 186ff). While their women work cultivating the fields the men go off to the "beer-drink" (7, 11-2, 19, 44, 83 and elsewhere). They also trade in women and children (84), and value their females primarily for the rich bride-price they will eventually bring (86). Women in addition are mere sexual objects: Muthengi engages in what is effectively an incestuous relationship with foster-sister Ambui (94), while his father pursues the woman Muthengi intends to marry (143-46).

Githae-Mugo suggests that Huxley spins this primitive world with its primitive occupants "in order to demonstrate the immenseness of the task that lay before the missionaries, administrators and settlers".⁸³ Indeed, the level of technical, moral, and cultural achievement in comparison to Europeans with which Huxley credits the Africans demonstrates her primitive assessment of them. In a letter to her husband written during her research tour, for instance, Huxley said that one of her difficulties in writing the book was in the fact that "[t]o us Kikuyus seem to have very little compared to a civilised people".⁸⁴ This gap she felt would limit her ability to "get a real insight into the native mind", seeing and experiencing the world and the changes taking place as the native would see it. Still, it was a theme she felt "better in a way than say 'The Good Earth'" because of the colossal changes taking place among the Gikuyu, "which is itself a dynamic." There is, in other words, a tension in Huxley's purpose. On the one hand, as Wilfred Gibson noted, one of the major themes of the novel is "the impingement of what we complacently

⁸³Githae-Mugo 41.

⁸⁴Huxley, Letter to Gervas Huxley, 29 Dec. 1936, from Njoro, Elspeth Huxley Papers, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford University.

regard as Christian civilization on the consciousness of those whom we deem to consider heathen savages."⁸⁵ On the other Huxley also viewed her task as that of a chronicler recording the birth pangs of a society emerging from primitivism into mature civilization. And in that drama the missionary characters are the midwives witnessing and directing the birth.

The chapters "Men of God" in Book II and "Forbidden Dances" in Book III focus on events in and around Christian missions. The earlier chapter describes the beginnings of the mission at "Tumu-Tumu" (233), historically a Church of Scotland mission which was established in 1908,⁸⁶ while internal evidence shows the latter chapter draws on events at the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) at Kijabe and elsewhere during the so-called 'circumcision controversy' of 1929-1930.⁸⁷ In these chapters the missions and the events connected with them function metonymically as microcosms for the colonial encounter. The European and African character types Huxley creates, the attitudes and beliefs they hold, the practices and conduct they engage in, the manner with which they interact and view each other, reflect her perceptions of Europeans and Africans in the context of the colonial project.

The mission setting provides a site of contact between African and European, which Huxley uses with varying degrees of 'success' to enlighten her European audience about Gikuyu society and culture by comparing and contrasting the ideas, beliefs, and practices of the two. In some of the minor details she does succeed in demonstrating her familiarity with Gikuyu life while also exposing the missionaries' fundamental ignorance about the

⁸⁵Gibson 5.

⁸⁶Roland Oliver, The Missionary Factor in East Africa, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1965) 170-171.

⁸⁷Specifically, the forced circumcision of the female missionary character on page 355 corresponds to an incident at Kijabe. For a detailed account of the circumcision crisis, see Carl G. Rosberg Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) 106-125.

people they wish to edify. She notes, for example, the young missionary's beard, which to Matu is evidence of serious illness and hence inappropriate for someone who wishes to present himself as a vigorous leader to the Gikuyu (233). She similarly notes Matu's surprise at the youth of this missionary who claims to have brought a message from God since "only old men could talk with God" (234), a detail that suggests a gap in their respective notions of age and authority. Elsewhere she demonstrates familiarity with traditional healing practices, acknowledging their effectiveness though also turning the scene into a critique of African arrogance by having her character only grudgingly recognize the superiority of Western medicine (239). However, as she ventures into issues and practices which touch the core of Gikuyu culture Huxley often finds herself on less familiar ground, armed with what she readily admitted was only "very superficial" knowledge.⁸⁸ Consequently in these places she falls back on stereotypical Orientalist notions of primitive people as she compares the beliefs, social institutions, and practices of the Gikuyu with those of the Europeans.

One of these areas is Huxley's representation of African religious ideas. Like Joyce Cary in his novels, she stresses the animistic nature of a 'primitive' African world-view. Though she may be well-meaning, she in fact presents a very condescending image of traditional beliefs that like Cary reduces them to childish superstition. In doing so she fails to appreciate--in a way Chinua Achebe does⁸⁹--that these ideas, like European Christianity, represent a metaphysical system of beliefs constructed through the ages by generations of Gikuyu intellectuals that reflect their experience of the world; that seek to meet the needs of the individual and community, and that demarcate the boundaries of human reason and power. To her

⁸⁸Huxley, Letter to Gervas Huxley, 29 Dec. 1936, from Njoro, Elspeth Huxley Papers, Box 8, File 2, leaves 12-15.

⁸⁹See C. L. Innes, Chinua Achebe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 83.

Africans, god is a temporal presence in the world, living atop Kerinyagga (233); he demands sacrifices of goats and rams, which are his source of nourishment (234). Illness is caused by either a "thahu" (pollution), which has to be purified, or "the malignant activities of spirits" which must "be appeased or driven out" (237), while initiation practices are directly linked to fertility (352). Nor are such beliefs limited to the traditionalists. Rather, like Cary's converts, Huxley's also cling to similar unsophisticated interpretations of Christian beliefs that exceed even the literalness of fundamentalist European Christianity. To the convert Kamau, for instance, the Virgin birth is an example of God's "magic", the Holy Spirit is literally "a very big bird in the sky" whom God sends among humanity with "messages"; the punishment for sin is being roasted "like a yam for many, many, seasons" in "a very big fire" (235), while heaven is located in the sky and filled with "much singing, and a kind of musical instrument, bigger than a flute" (236). Their beliefs, in other words, represent a 'translation' in the sense of Luzbetak⁹⁰ and Bevans⁹¹ of Christian ideas, but only at a superficial level into corresponding animistic forms. At its core this form of Christianity remains what Cary dismissed as juju.

Differences in marriage practices and family structure, along with the closely connected issue of the place of women in society, are other areas of comparison in which Huxley augments her "superficial" knowledge with Orientalist stereotypes. Matu, for instance, sees Christian monogamy as imposing a "cruel and senseless" burden on men (241). For him women are a commodity to be acquired in the form of wives; they are indications of a man's wealth, whose purpose is bring "increase" to the clan primarily by

⁹⁰Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology. 1988, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 79-81.

⁹¹Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 30-46.

breeding, much like his goats (240). Elsewhere it is implied that daughters, too, are "the property of their fathers" (355) whose main interest in educating them is the increased bride-price they will command (351). These males, further, like those Africans that populate Cary's novels are also prone to emotional outbursts and violence. A few, for example, react menacingly toward the missionary who speaks against their circumcision practices (351), some eventually causing that missionary's death in a "crudely" performed forced circumcision (355).⁹² The females, in turn, are childishly passive. In the scenes surrounding the circumcision controversy, for example, most of the daughters submit meekly to the demands of the fathers, while those who do defy them are still portrayed as doing so in the fashion of little girls who sheepishly "turned their heads away and wiggled their shoulders" when the fathers commanded them to leave (352). Although Huxley may sympathize with the plight of Africans confronted with the economic, socio-political, and cultural assault of Europeans, while she may mourn the loss of a pristine culture unpolluted by modern European materialism, she nevertheless depicts that culture-under-siege as one that is repressive to the individual, especially its females, and enslaved by irrational and immature superstitions.

While her Africans conform to our (European) expectations of 'primitive' people, Huxley's treatment of her missionary characters is more complex, and this complexity is indicative of her ambivalence about both missionary activity and the entire colonial project. When they are first introduced, Huxley makes a clear distinction between the missionaries and other agents of colonialism. She begins by noting that unlike the colonial administrators the missionaries had no material ambitions, that they "did not collect rupees or goats" (233). Rather,

⁹²The reference is to Miss Hulda Stumpf of the AIM, who on the night of 2-3 January 1930 was forcibly circumcised by unknown assailants and subsequently bled to death. See Rosberg and Nottingham 124.

they came with a message from God "which they wished to give to the Kikuyu people" (233). Unlike the administrators or settlers who communicated either through translators or themselves spoke a Swahili pidgin, when Matu first encounters these strangers he finds that they speak "in Kikuyu", albeit "so badly pronounced that Matu wanted to laugh" (234). The female missionary who opposed circumcision as well spoke with the Africans in Kikuyu (351). Seemingly a small detail, this emphasis on missionary use of native language has two purposes. First it reinforces the presumed intellectual superiority of the Europeans who make efforts to establish modes of communication. That they try to use Gikuyu further ranks the missionaries superior to the administrators and settlers who rely on a functional pidgin, albeit this too is a pidgin based on an African language. Second, it also hints at the genuineness of missionary--and by extension European--concern for Africans. Stressing the use of local languages rather than the lingua franca Kiswahili or its pidgin suggests that missionary concern for the well-being of the African is so sincere as to motivate efforts to reach out to each in his native language.

If Huxley emphasized the deep concern of the missionaries for Africans, she also pointed to examples of their at times patronizing attitude, their paternalism, their arrogance, and their relative ignorance of native culture. In doing this she touches on some significant missiological issues while also displaying some surprising missiological sophistication and advanced missiological thinking. Occasionally she raises significant issues that touch on legitimate concerns for inculturating the Gospel, while at other times she points out seemingly trivial aspects of missionary behavior indicative of a strong ethnocentric bend. In a trivial detail, for example, Huxley points out the missionary couple's public expressions of affection, which her African characters consider "obscene"

(240). Though small, it does demonstrate ignorance of, or even blatant disregard for, local notions of morality. In a later scene, Huxley describes the Gikuyu men as "disturbed" to find that their daughters at the mission school "had thrown away their aprons", the traditional manner of dress, in exchange for "a cloth dress covering their breasts but giving, it seemed, no real protection elsewhere" (351). Public expressions of affection such as kissing, it seems, are acceptable even though it may offend local sensibilities, while bare breasts, which violate European senses of propriety though common in tropical climates, are not.

Not only do the missionaries adhere to European attitudes regarding gender relations and impose European standards of modesty, they also impose European understandings of God, God's relation to humanity, and practices of worship that frequently conflict with Gikuyu notions of spiritual propriety. In a scene touching on the conduct of public worship, for example, Huxley notes Matu's surprise that in prayer Sasi "appeared to ask nothing of God that was worthy of his attention"; that "[u]ncircumcised children joined [services] without understanding"; that "no sacrifice or tribute was offered"; and that "Sasi mumbled his prayers into the earth instead of lifting his face to speak to God" (239). "God", he concludes, "would certainly pay no attention" to "so irreverently" offered prayers (239). What are at first glance minor examples of cultural differences in attitudes and postures of prayer in fact point to a general European disregard for African notions of spirituality, of the relationship of God to humanity, and even missionary questioning of the legitimacy of African forms of worship. As Matu's observations reveal, what may be the appropriate or even preferred forms of behavior within a European context are in fact out of place in the Gikuyu context. The missionary, then, by imposing his forms of worship on his

Gikuyu congregation rather than accommodating Gikuyu forms of spiritual and liturgical propriety reveals a strongly ethnocentric orientation in his missiological thinking. And if ethnocentricity dominates the missionary's behavior in matters that touch on the surface level of culture, such as those of liturgical forms, it will surely play a greater role in more significant cultural issues that touch the psychological core of the culture.

One of these more significant issues is polygamy, which has long been a sticking point for missionaries in Africa. In this novel Huxley presents a complicated view. Huxley noted that early converts objected to the Church's ban on polygamy, "point[ing] out, rightly I believe, that Christ Himself had nowhere laid down a rule of one man, one wife."⁹³ In the novel the attitude of her missionaries on the subject is condescending and paternalistic. To Matu's questions about why Christians regard polygamy as wrong the missionary simply replies, almost as if to a child, that "God forbids more than one wife" (240). When Matu persists in asking the reasons God forbids it, he only repeats that "[i]t is the law of God" (240), and makes no further attempt to answer the question. Rather, he suggests that Matu come to the mission for two years, during which time he will "explain to you all these things" (241). The missionary believes the African presently too ignorant, too naive, too simple and too intellectually immature to grasp the 'truths' of the Gospel message.

If Huxley did have doubts about the need to convert Africans to European Christianity, if she had doubts about the superiority of what she referred to as the "Western gentleman in the sky",⁹⁴ she nevertheless had little doubt about the superiority of those other aspects of European civilization that missionaries were bringing to Africans. Education, for example, is depicted as the realm of the missionaries. They are the purveyors of "the magic from

⁹³Huxley, *Midday Sun* 186.

⁹⁴Quoted in "Elspeth Huxley" 21.

whose secret so much of the strangers' power was drawn: the magic by which words could be made visible" (236). In a later chapter improvement in agricultural methods taught at the missionary Alliance High School are credited with Crispin's success as a farmer (386). Western medicine, as well, is placed side-by-side with traditional Gikuyu assumptions about sickness and its remedy. While Matu, a traditional "mundu-mugu" or medicine man, could not believe that the missionary doctor's methods were "sound" (237), he nevertheless admitted that the doctor "knew of a neat way to sew up cuts with a bent iron needle, and had a black medicine that stung like hornets and that seemed to heal wounds better than cowdung" (239). Even on the subject of polygamy, for which we have already seen she did have some degree of sympathy with the Gikuyu position, closer examination shows Huxley's agreement to be only partial. For one thing, the Gikuyu position as Matu states it reduces women to the status of a commodity, much like his goats (240). Also in a later chapter she correctly notes the centrality of the polygamy issue to the growth of the Independent Church movement. However, in her treatment of the issue she also implicitly undermines the credibility of the movement. She does this by grounding Karanja's initial motives for becoming a Christian in the material and social advantages he anticipates conversion will bring him then subsequently defecting to the "Independent Orthodox Church" so he can still claim those advantages while also 'owning' multiple wives (400ff). She further portrays the leadership of the movement as motivated by monetary gain. The "Archbishop" who comes to Kenya to validate the orders of the new Independent Orthodox Church arrives in a car that is described as "new and shiny" (401). He baptizes anyone desiring the rite while his attendants stand behind. "demand[ing] ten shillings as the fee", "refusing to return the initiates' clothing until it is paid (402).

Then there is Huxley's handling of the scenes surrounding the circumcision controversy, which share certain similarities with Ngugi's portrayal of the same issue in The River Between. Neither personally approved of the custom,⁹⁵ but both are critical of European interference in things whose significance they do not fully understand. Huxley herself appreciated the central role of circumcision in Gikuyu life, namely that no girl could be a "true Kikuyu" without being circumcised (347). In a letter to publisher Harold MacMillan she said her reason for including a detailed description of the ritual in the early scenes of the novel, scenes described by Githae-Mugo as "well done",⁹⁶ was "to make [European readers] a little more familiar with [native customs] than they were at present."⁹⁷ She objected to MacMillan's wish to cut the scenes, saying it was "utterly impossible merely to present those aspects of native life which are pleasant and acceptable to the European mind and to omit those which do not commend themselves to Europeans."⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in the latter scenes surrounding the controversy, she makes the European case for opposing the custom. The female missionary, for example, in her confrontation with the angry males, describes the custom as "cruel, and therefore against the wishes of God." She tells the girls it is "a crime to mutilate [their bodies] wilfully in a way which God did not intend", and calls on them not to be like their "blind and deaf" fathers who are "unable to understand how evil is the thing they wish to do" (351). She even voices the European point through one of her African characters, a hospital dresser and Christian convert who, in the debate

⁹⁵In a 1962 article for the Sunday Nation Ngugi described the custom as "brutal". See Ngugi, "Let Us Be Careful About What We Take from the Past," Sunday Nation, 5 Aug. 1962: 31; cited in Bernth Lindfors, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Early Journalism," World Literature Written in English 20.1 (Spring, 1981): 28.

⁹⁶Githae-Mugo 45.

⁹⁷Quoted in Cross and Perkin 16.

⁹⁸Quoted in Cross and Perkin 16. As a result of their difference the book was withdrawn from MacMillan and subsequently published by Chatto and Windus.

among Africans, readily asserts that "many European customs are better" (354). Even Karanja, Matu's son, sees many customs as "stupid and dirty, and no longer practised by young men" (354). Circumcision, as well, may be "a custom of the same kind", but still, he--and Huxley, I suggest--maintain, "the Europeans had no right to interfere" (355).

These scenes of encounters and conflicts between the Gikuyu and the missionaries, then, are a metonym for the colonial encounter. The conflicts that arise in these scenes anticipate and parallel similar conflicts that arose between the Gikuyu and the settlers, and between the Gikuyu and the colonial government. The missionaries, because of their 'higher' motives and the material benefits they brought to the Africans in the form of such things as medicine, hygiene, and Western literary education, represent for Huxley all that was good about the colonial enterprise. The social and cultural upheaval that was also a consequence of their activities is likewise acknowledged and regretted, but the novel suggests that, on the whole, Africans had benefited from colonization.

Chapter Five

Elsbeth Huxley (2)

Christian Missions and African Nationalism in The Walled City and A Thing to Love

Introduction

The period immediately following the Second World War, according to Rosberg and Nottingham, was a "watershed" for African nationalism in Kenya.¹ In the decades before the war political organizations generally failed to generate mass followings, nor did they often challenge the legitimacy of the colonial state. What major political organizations there were, such as the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), tended to have a tribal focus and to draw their support from the so-called 'detribalized' urban populations of Nairobi and Mombasa, while the rural peasantry who made up the overwhelming majority of the population stood aloof. Further, what organizations that did exist among the peasantry--the Kikuyu Association (KA) and the Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (KTWA) most notably--were either originally founded by the European missionaries or were under the influence of the missions. Whether they were urban-based organizations like the KCA or the rurally based and mission-influenced KA and KTWA, most of these prewar organizations saw the future of the African peoples as being within the colonial state. The postwar years, however, were to witness the birth of "mass political movements under a leadership determined to replace colonial rule with African majority rule."² The leaders of this new generation were more highly educated--sometimes at institutions of the metropolitan center--and were often returning combat veterans who had traveled more

¹Carl G. Rosberg, Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger) 188.

²Rosberg and Nottingham 188.

widely and experienced more of the world beyond the colonial setting than their predecessors.

Huxley as well was conscious of the rise of African nationalism. Writing for the Times in 1946 about her first postwar visit to East Africa, she noted a "sharpened political temper"³ throughout the region. Beginning before the end of the war, and increasing steadily in the 1940s and the years of the 'Mau Mau' Emergency of the 1950s, the closely interconnected subjects of African nationalism and British colonial aims began to assume a prominent position in her journalism, essays, travelogues, and even her fiction. Like her views on colonialism, Huxley's views on African nationalism were also marked by ambivalence and contradiction. She was, on the one hand, a firm believer in Britain's stated aim of preparing Africans for "self-government on modern democratic lines as soon as possible."⁴ In line with this, particularly in settler-colonies like Kenya, she found the system of 'native representation' in government--i.e. usually Europeans, appointed by the government, and limited to one or two members of the Legislative Council--to be "crude in the extreme."⁵ Yet she also believed Africans were not ready for self-government. Rather, it was Britain's "self-imposed task to guide their first steps" along the road to constructing a modern society;⁶ to raise up a class of

³Elsbeth Huxley, "East Africa Revisted I--Growth of Population on Poorer Soil: Political Tempers Sharpen," Times 25 Mar. 1946: 5.

⁴"The Future of the Colonies: A Discussion between A Questioner; And Administrator; H. M. Grace; and Elspeth Huxley," Listener 35.907 (30 May 1946): 713. Huxley frequently endorsed this stated objective. See, for example, her articles "Democracy: An African Experiment," Time and Tide 26.24 (16 Jun. 1945): 493-494; "African Vista: The Spring of Discontent," Time and Tide 27.9 (2 Mar. 1946): 198-199; "Reflections on Colonial Policy--II: The Mirage of 'Common Citizenship'," Time and Tide 27.34 (24 Aug. 1946): 799-800; "The Gold Coast Disturbances," Time and Tide 29.33 (14 Aug. 1948): 828-829; "Rome in Africa: Days of Service to an Empire," Letter, Times, 13 Jan. 1949: 5.

⁵Huxley, "The Empire Conference and the Colonies--II," Time and Tide 25.21 (20 May 1944): 438.

⁶Huxley, "Some Impressions of East Africa Today," African Affairs 46.185 (October 1947): 207.

educated elites, "schooled in European methods and ways, [who] should become the political as well as the intellectual leaders of their people", gradually taking over administration of the country "under our general supervision, until the time comes for a complete change of management."⁷

Although hers was a paternalistic view of British colonial aims, Huxley was not without her doubts. She recognized, for instance, the specifically cultural origins of European forms of democracy and questioned its suitability to African societies.⁸ Her reasoning was often based on Orientalist notions of 'the African'; namely that his societies were 'tribalistic' and lacking a sense of the individual that is at the heart of European democracy,⁹ and questioned if the British were "justified in forcing it on colonial peoples?"¹⁰ She also criticized the British for being "too godlike" in managing African independence, "[b]ent on creating new countries in our own image",¹¹ and for their reluctance to allow Africans to develop their own forms of democracy, saying that if the colonial powers tried to direct Africans too much "they will never learn to run their own affairs; they will become a mere facade in front of our control."¹²

⁷Huxley, "African Vista" 198.

⁸Huxley, "Democracy: An African Experiment" 493.

⁹See for example "The Future of the Colonies" 713ff. She maintained this position over the years, repeating it frequently. See, for example, "A Challenge to Us All," Listener 30:761 (12 Aug. 1943): 180-181; "Reflections on Colonial Policy: Palestine, India, and the Colonies," Time and Tide 27.33 (17 Aug. 1946): 773; "African Independence and After: Some Reflections on 'SG'," Round Table 46.180 (1955): 19ff; "Freedom in Africa: The Next Stage," Virginia Quarterly Review 36.3 (1960): 368ff; "What Future for Africa?" Encounter 16.6 (June 1961): 10ff; "Some Observations on the African Personality," Virginia Quarterly Review 38.1 (1962): 83-85ff; "Sacred Cows," National Review 20.38 (24 Sep. 1968): 962.; "Introduction," in Arnold Curtis, Memories of Kenya: Stories from the Pioneers (London: Evan Brothers, 1986) xii-xvi.

¹⁰Huxley, "A Challenge to Us All" 181.

¹¹Huxley, "West Africa in Transition," Geographical Magazine 25.6 (Oct. 1952): 318.

¹²"The Future of the Colonies" 716.

Huxley saw Africa as a place that had "slumbered" for several millennia.¹³ Because they were isolated from contact with more technologically advanced civilizations and living in a climate she would elsewhere assert made life relatively easy and discouraged ingenuity,¹⁴ Africans she claimed had become locked into a rigid tribal structure, "neither striving after nor desiring change."¹⁵ Now, however, they were being overwhelmed by changes affecting every aspect of life: familial and social, economic and political, secular and religious. Africans were "suddenly conscious of a new, bewildering, turbulent world and faced with the colossal task of building a new society from the ruins of the old."¹⁶ However this new society could not be drawn up upon the older system of tribal affiliations and clan loyalties, which would hinder cohesion in the culturally pluralistic states that colonialism had created. She therefore called for a colonial education policy to preach "a crude but effective type of nationalistic propaganda" that would instill a "genuine pride in citizenship of the British Empire" in a fashion similar to the Russians who (from her 1946 perspective) apparently succeeded in instilling into the youth of its Asiatic 'republics' a "most ardent, not to say arrogant, pride and loyalty towards their union of republics, which is directed by Europeans."¹⁷ In essence, she likened the British colonial enterprise to ancient Rome and its extension of civis Romanus.

African nationalism was another matter. While 'nationalism' in the form of imperial pride was potentially

¹³Huxley, "British Aims" 43.

¹⁴See "The Nature of the Native: An East African Inquiry: Why is He Backwards?" Times 23 Jul. 1936: 16; "Some Impressions" 206; "West Africa" 318; "The Ethos of Negro Africa: An Inspissated Consciousness," Round Table 51.201 (Dec. 1960): 8.

¹⁵Huxley, "British Aims" 43.

¹⁶Huxley, "British Aims" 43.

¹⁷Huxley, "Reflections on Colonial Policy: The Future of Divided Colonies," Time and Tide 27.35 (31 Aug. 1946): 820.

"an incentive to good", in the case of African nationalism Huxley felt more cause for concern than hope.¹⁸ First there were her not entirely unfounded fears about the difficulties confronting culturally pluralistic colonial states. These she compounded by generally equating African nationalism with recidivistic tribalism.¹⁹ Though she supported the cause of eventual self-government and even sympathized with Africans about the slow pace at which it was being achieved,²⁰ she took a dim view of nationalist leaders. For instance, during the war years she invoked the worn image of nationalist leaders as an unrealistic and semi-educated "so-called intelligentsia" who claimed, "with very little justification, to speak for the people of their country" and would lead them to self-government "regardless of the primitive state of the great majority of their fellow-countrymen."²¹ She accused them of fomenting "unreal and selfish political agitation, whilst losing touch with the still primitive man in the bush."²² Even where she would admit that the new elite were educated beyond the level of their predecessors, she still maintained that "[w]ith some notable exceptions, their aim is personal aggrandisement, not service",²³ implying a moral gap between them and their 'altruistic' British counterparts. These 'elites', in turn, were supported by a vernacular press which she described as "irresponsible and ultra-parochial",²⁴ and elsewhere accused of being communist

¹⁸Huxley, "Reflections on Colonial Policy: The Future of Divided Colonies" 820.

¹⁹See Huxley, "West Africa" 316; "The Lion Needs the Jungle," 1159-1160; "No Parrot's Egg in Nigeria," Time and Tide 39.36 (6 Sep. 1958): 1070-1071; "Democracy or Government?" Time and Tide 39.40 (4 Oct. 1958): 1183; "What Future for Africa?" 15ff; "Death in Nigeria," National Review 18.6 (22 Feb 1966): 163-164.

²⁰Huxley, "African Vista" 198.

²¹Huxley, "The Grouping of Colonies," Time and Tide 24.50 (11 Dec. 1943): 1017.

²²Huxley, "Democracy: An African Experiment" 493.

²³Huxley, "The Empire Conference and the Colonies--I," Time and Tide 25.20 (13 May 1944): 413.

²⁴Huxley, "Empire Conference I" 413.

agitators²⁵ and of spreading "vituperative and inflammatory half-truths and sometimes lies, directed against the Government and Europeans in general".²⁶ Poised against this 'exploitive' elite she saw the British colonial civil service, "forced into the role of the protector of the inarticulate peasant masses," and confronted with a "rising tide of native nationalism on which all [British colonial aims] may be wrecked."²⁷

The Revolt of the Prodigal Son: The Walled City

Against this background of rising African nationalism Huxley published her fifth novel, The Walled City, in 1948. Written in a sequence of seemingly random-ordered scenes spanning the period from 1913 to 1933, the story relates the development of an unnamed British West African Protectorate²⁸ and is essentially a study of two opposing types of colonial administrators. The protagonist is Robert Gresham, cynical and moody, yet idealistic and sympathetic to the Africans he administers. He is a liberal humanist whose confidence in Western civilization has been dealt a serious blow by the barbarity of the twentieth century. Paired against him is Freddy Begg, an efficient, ambitious, pretentious and career-wise yet unimaginative colonial functionary who does things 'by the book.' Gresham's is a paternalistic yet sympathetic and flexible approach to colonial administration, while Begg's is an approach that is patronizingly racist, ethnocentric, and mechanical. Their rivalry is complicated by the presence of Benjamin

²⁵Huxley, Sorcerer's Apprentice 60-61. Here she was referring specifically to Jomo Kenyatta, noting that he had spent time in Moscow.

²⁶Huxley, "Some Impressions" 203. She has made similar comments elsewhere. See, for example, her article "African Vista" 198, and The Sorcerer's Apprentice (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) 34.

²⁷"The Future of the Colonies" 716

²⁸The walled city of the title appears to be modeled on Zaria in northern Nigeria, which Huxley visited in October 1945 and described in a letter to her husband. See Huxley, Letter to Gervas Huxley, 13 Oct. 1945, from Zaria, Elspeth Huxley Papers, MSS Afr. s. 2154, Box 9, File 3, leafs 7-9, Rhodes House Library Oxford University

Morris, the mission-raised and educated African, an Oxford graduate turned journalist and nationalist-agitator.²⁹ In the end it is the political intrigue and mob violence incited by Benjamin's self-aggrandizing, self-seeking, yellow journalism that eventually undermines Gresham's position.

The novel appeared to mixed reviews. Several saw in it an informed and balanced study of the problems of colonial administration,³⁰ while others criticized it for its weak characterization.³¹ Interestingly, most of the reviewers made no mention of Huxley's African characters at all, as if the competing approaches to colonial administration were irrelevant to these colonial subjects. The few that did mention them tended to only briefly acknowledge their relevance to Huxley's thematic concerns.³² Only P. H. Newby recognized the significance of Benjamin, calling the character "[m]uch the best thing in the book".³³ He lamented that Huxley had not centered the book around this character rather than her Europeans because, in his words, everything she had to say about colonial administration "is implicit in her portrait of Benjamin".³⁴ While I would hesitate to call Benjamin the "best thing" about this novel, I nevertheless agree with Newby's assessment of the role he plays in dramatizing Huxley's ideas about colonial administration. I would also add that everything Huxley had

²⁹A possible model for Benjamin is Wycliff Awori, whom Huxley described in The Sorcerer's Apprentice as the "son of a minister of the Church, recently returned from a trip to England disillusioned about the prospects of succour but breathing fire and brimstone, and editor of Radio Posta, the first African daily" (60).

³⁰Robert Kee, "Fiction," Spectator, 2 Apr. 1948: 416; John Barkham, "Colonial Career Man," Saturday Review of Literature, 8 Jan. 1949: 11; George W. Bishop, "The Latest Fiction," Daily Telegraph and Morning Post, 25 Mar. 1948: 3.

³¹P. H. Newby, "New Novels," New Statesman and Nation 35.896 (8 May 1948): 380; Peter Quennel, "Deep Were the Hates," Daily Mail, 20 Mar. 1948: 2; Lionel Hale, "New Novels: African," Observer, 21 Mar. 1948: 3.

³²See Kee 416, and "Colour Bar," Times Literary Supplement, 27 Mar. 1948: 173.

³³Newby 381.

³⁴Newby 381.

to say about the romanticized aims and objectives of colonialism is implied in Father Anselm, the missionary who raised Benjamin; and everything she had to say about African nationalism is implicit in her portrayal of the relationship between the two. Benjamin's is very much the story of the Prodigal Son--minus the son's repentant return to the father. It is the story of a patient, loving father and an immature, rebellious son. On the one hand is Anselm; kind, generous, self-sacrificing, a protective father-like figure who rescues the child Benjamin from savagery, raises and educates him, and holds high hopes for the child's future progress. On the other is Benjamin; initially gentle and submissive to his adopted father; later seduced by the material wealth and lure of the metropolitan center; and then when confronted with the stark realities of naked racism, he rejects that father and turns rabid, self-serving nationalist.

Anselm makes only one direct appearance in the novel, during one of Gresham's visits to the mission in 1929. He is "a little Italian",³⁵ and is based upon the missionaries Huxley encountered as a child at the Mangu Mission near her Thika home.³⁶ Gresham admires Anselm for his vast knowledge of the "hill tribes" and credits him with having a special quality, "a sort of innocence and simplicity" (WC 64) which sets the priest apart from Gresham's own class of secular colonial administrators and from the materialistic traders and settlers. Anselm epitomizes the romantic ideals of

³⁵Huxley, The Walled City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) 64. All references are to this edition and will hereafter be identified as WC and given parenthetically in the text.

³⁶The Consolata Fathers established a mission at Mangu, near Thika, in 1909. (Roland Oliver, The Missionary Factor in East Africa, 2nd ed. [London: Longmans, 1965] 70.) Huxley refers to this mission in numerous places throughout The Flame Trees of Thika.

The character's name is significant. Both he and his namesake, the 11th century archbishop of Canterbury, were Italian by birth. St. Anselm was a doctor of the Church and one of the founders of the scholastic movement in philosophy, appealing to man's rational mind in explaining and understanding God and the world, just as the missionary appeals to reason in his discussions with Gresham. Both Anselms, as well, find themselves at odds with the 'civil' authorities.

civilizing colonialism: he is selfless and wholly devoted to the underprivileged, primitive people he serves. At his mission he teaches reading skills to children described as "half-naked" and instructs their elder brothers in "the rudiments of carpentry and blacksmithing, as new to them as goat-herding to an English boy" (WC 74). The farm around which the mission is built and domestic life organized is under his direct supervision, "accounts kept, savage visitors interviewed, and masses to be said" (WC 74). At the center of it all is a chapel, built "with his own hands, and with the help of his clumsy apprentices" (WC 74). Although the narrator calls it a "hideous" chapel, still "there was something endearing about it, for if it was without taste, yet its building was an act of worship" (WC 74). It is, in other words, a testimony to the sincerity of European intentions, despite its imperfections.

The scene primarily relates a debate between Anselm and Gresham about the propriety of introducing European Christianity among primitive Africans. It is important to the thematic concerns of the novel because of the parallels it implies between missionary activity and Huxley's idealized vision of the colonial project. Martin Tucker has suggested that the debate in particular and the novel as a whole represent Huxley's "protest against the destruction of faith in rational behavior and compromise" symptomatic of European secular liberal humanism in the aftermath of the 'Great War'.³⁷ While Huxley sympathizes with much that the 'liberal' Gresham represents, she is not in total agreement with his completely negative assessment of the colonial project. Employing Christianity as a metaphor for European civilization, she uses Anselm to counter the anti-colonial position of the liberals. Anselm and Gresham are both idealists who desire to improve the situation of their

³⁷Martin Tucker, Africa in Modern Literature: A Survey of British Cotemporary Writing in English (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1967) 49.

fellow human beings, unlike the functionary Begg whose dedication is to the smooth running of the colonial institution and the advancement of his own career. Where they part company is in the matter of 'faith' in their respective missions.

In the debate (WC 69-75) Gresham iterates the 'liberal' position, faulting the missionary for destroying the African soul, while Anselm counters him point-by-point, placing blame for Gresham's pessimism on his own lack of convictions and his foolish confidence in the supremacy of human beings as the pinnacle of an anthropocentric universe. While Gresham laments the impossibility of faith Anselm espouses the Pauline formula of faith, hope, and love, with love in the form of selfless service to others as the fertile soil in which faith and hope are nurtured. To Gresham Anselm is a "brave and pathetic figure" battling "heathen superstition and western repudiation" for the sake of his small flock of "bowed woolly heads" and "anxious Negro children" who cannot possibly hope to comprehend the subtleties of a faith "passed on like second-hand clothing" from the Jews to the Greeks and Romans, to the British, and now to pagan African subjects of a Moslem state (WC 75). To them, he says, it is no more than "shreds and pieces of doctrine", a "hotch-poch of undigested fragments . . . incomprehensible . . . to the dark congregation" which they are only able to parrot (WC 75). For Huxley Anselm represents imperial idealism that has been swamped by the barbarities of the early twentieth century. Through him she articulates her conviction about the superiority of the European Christianity, and by extension the civilization it underlies.

On the heels of this debate Benjamin's first name is introduced into the narrative, as Gresham and Anselm recall the circumstances of his arrival at the mission. (As a small child Benjamin had been "rescued" from certain death by Gresham, who subsequently named the boy then turned him

over to the missionary to be nurtured back to health and raised (WC 75). He proved to be a "bright boy," impressive to the point that Anselm began privately to hope he had found "among this backward people" a candidate worthy of priesthood (WC 76). Having reached the limits of education offered at the mission, Benjamin then went on to the coastal college, and at the time of Gresham's visit to the mission it has been decided that he would go on to Oxford, after which Anselm continues to hope he will return "a giant among his people" and "dedicate himself to Christ's ministry" (WC 76). Later it is revealed that in England he experienced a "direct collision with the colour bar" (WC 143), which set him on the path of radical racial politics, becoming a founding member and secretary of the "African Freedom League" (WC 139, 144). Upon returning to Africa he became the founding owner-editor of a small weekly newspaper, "the Chanticleer" (WC 206), the Chaucerian reference to the cock crowing on a dung-heap Huxley's comment on the African nationalist and the quality of nationalist newspapers.³⁸ Now he is an ambitious, egotistical, self-righteous political agitator, not above publishing gossip, rumor, and lies for the purpose of advancing his personal agenda. In the end it is his editorial campaign aimed at inciting a riot in order to unseat the British-installed emir that ultimately results in the triumph of Begg's approach to colonial administration over Gresham's, precipitating Gresham's resignation and retreat into the African desert.

Benjamin's story is Huxley's metaphor for Africa and the African experience. First there is "the Africa of 1913" from which Benjamin is rescued. It is reminiscent of the pre-colonial Africa of Red Strangers, an irrational world of oracles, witch-doctors, and black magic where men lived in "terror . . . not merely for their lives, but for their souls" (WC 161-162). It is a land where humans are

³⁸Canterbury Tales, The Nun's Priest's Tale.

"sacrificed and dismembered" to appease the demonic powers (WC 165) and where African traders still kidnap fellow Africans--like Benjamin, often mere children (WC 165)--selling them into slavery in a Moslem kingdom in the interior "whither the arm of British authority had as yet scarcely reached" (WC 162). Into this world of terror and chaos arrive colonial soldiers like the veteran Pawley and the young Gresham, tracking and hunting the slavers and liberating their captives from unimaginable horrors. Hastily abandoned by his retreating captors, little Benjamin was "naked", his back "marked from top to bottom with weals and cuts on which blood had congealed", and "one leg broken" (WC 165), all indications of a primitive, savage, indeed inhuman world which exceeds in its barbarity the worst of European perversities, lacking the "dignity and form" of the "Faustian bargain" or "the trappings and order of an Inquisition; . . . the obscene made frivolous, the reduction of human torment to the stature of an idiot's jest" (WC 165-166).

Whatever human identity the child may have previously had is obscure, almost as if it did not exist prior to European intervention. Having been rescued from savagery, he is given a new civilized identity by Gresham, who named him Benjamin on an "impulse" because it "seemed to suit the boy and no doubt the mission [to which he would be turned over] would approve of it" (WC 166). The name, too, is suggestive of Huxley's beliefs about the colonial mission. The biblical Benjamin in his birth was the cause of his mother Rachel's death, who in her dying moment named him 'Ben-oni', meaning 'son of my sorrow.'³⁹ His father changed the name to Benjamin, meaning 'son of the right hand', suggesting the arrival of a good omen even in the midst of tragedy. Similarly, this nameless bit of "cast-up human wreckage" (WC 75) is reborn as an African Benjamin, the

³⁹Gen. 35:16-18.

hope for a new and 'civilized' Africa under European tutelage, born from the sorrow and pain of the retreating 'savage' Africa of witchcraft and slavery.

Such hope, however, proves to be in vain. That is because Benjamin, as Martin Tucker suggests, is a character who initially adores everything British but later "rejects enlightened Europeanism."⁴⁰ Tucker observes that journalist and missionary characters abound in fiction about Africa by Western writers, with the former usually a "villain" and the latter a "fool".⁴¹ For Tucker religion and journalism, which he calls the "reputed forces of progress and enlightenment", fail not only to bring understanding between individuals and groups, but "cause damage and despair."⁴² The journalist on the one hand is normally cast as "a purposeful liar or a fervent propagandist" whose activities cause "great damage and mischief."⁴³ The missionary, on the other, in one variation is "a sincere proselytizer caught in the dilemma of educating the African to the point where he must turn on his teacher in a burst of independence."⁴⁴ Tucker's observations are quite insightful, but I believe he fails to take into consideration those circumstances and assumptions peculiar to the colonial situation that shape and underscore Huxley's discursive practices. Those include assumptions concerning the relative levels of intellectual, political, and moral (im)maturity of educated Africans, the unsophisticated nature of traditional African beliefs, and the not-consistently-realized moral superiority of Western Christian civilization.

Huxley viewed educated young Africans as politically naive and immature. In a 1945 letter to her husband, for instance, she remarked that the schools and colleges in

⁴⁰Tucker 49.

⁴¹Tucker 230.

⁴²Tucker 230.

⁴³Tucker 234.

⁴⁴Tucker 244.

Africa were producing "rabid nationalists who think they know all the answers".⁴⁵ This 'swelled-headedness' often expressed itself as impatience and resentment regarding the slow pace of Africanization of colonial government. Elsewhere she suggested that the conceit, impatience, and discontent were at least in part due to over-inflated European expectations about the African's ability to "absorb & digest all we have tried to pour into him".⁴⁶ Africans were quick to appreciate the material benefits of European civilization but were lagging when it came to the accompanying moral responsibilities. All of the negative opinions she held of African nationalists--selfish political agitators seduced by the lust for power and personal aggrandizement⁴⁷ and supported by an irresponsible and parochial press⁴⁸--coalesced in her creation of Benjamin. The "quirks" of his mission upbringing and education left him ill-prepared for the world of material socialist political intellectualism that he encountered first at the coastal college and later at Oxford, all of which he absorbs uncritically, just as he had Christianity from Anselm (WC 140-141). Exposure to the material and intellectual richness of European life gradually transforms him into "a conceited young man with a racial inferiority complex" (WC 143). Back in Africa he is self-important (WC 206, 208), egotistical (WC 215), conceited (WC 217, 219, 261), evasive (WC 257), supercilious (WC 263), and temperamental (WC 256). As a journalist he is manipulative of the truth (WC 213) and willing to exploit his position in order to "take sweet revenge for the nagging sense of inferiority brought about by association with a people and scale of values not his own" (WC 213). He is, in the end, concerned primarily with enhancing his own position,

⁴⁵Huxley, Letter to Gervas Huxley, 21 Oct. 1945, from Khartoum, Elspeth Huxley Papers, MSS Afr. s. 2154 Box File 3 leafs 10-14.

⁴⁶Huxley, Letter to Gervas Huxley, 10 Nov. 1945, from Kampala, Elspeth Huxley Papers, MSS Afr. s. 2154 Box File 3 leafs 22-23.

⁴⁷Huxley, "Democracy: An African Experiment," 493.

⁴⁸Huxley, "Empire Conference I," 413.

whether in the form of power, social and sexual status, or material wealth. His arrogance, vanity, and condescension, as well, leave him susceptible to the chicanery of his corrupt African associates who dupe him into marrying a prostitute whom they have convinced him is a virgin (WC 294ff).

Although Anselm makes no further direct appearance after his discussion with Gresham, his memory is invoked on several occasions, usually in conversations between Gresham and Africans, for the purpose of emphasizing Western Christian moral superiority. For instance, Anselm's presence in Africa "where the dirty work [of preparing Africans for independence] is being done" (WC 138) is juxtaposed against Oxford-student-turned-African-radical Benjamin's preoccupation with avenging personal affronts from petty racism while in the materially comfortable surroundings of London. Elsewhere, Gresham wonders how Anselm would respond to the Muslim who believes that he who uses the sword to spread the faith "serves God and the cause of brotherhood" (WC 283). Although Huxley does attempt impartiality, acknowledging in the first instance the hypocrisy of both Church and Western civilization for failing to live up to the ideals of the faith it preaches (WC 142ff), and in the latter admitting the equally uncompromising dogmatism of Christianity (WC 283), nevertheless her firm conviction in the moral superiority of the West comes through.

Interestingly, Huxley suggests that the missions are partly responsible for creating the sort of nationalism Benjamin represents. First she found fault with the inconsistent quality of education they offered. Sharing a concern Joyce Cary articulated in The Case for African Freedom, Huxley criticized the missions for their lack of a unified education policy, one mission teaching "dictation and hellfire, the next community singing and carpentry; one pupil studies creation in the Book of Genesis, while his

brother struggles with evolutionary theory."⁴⁹ Emphasis was placed on teaching people "how to read, not what to read", producing a semi-literate class uncritically absorbing ideas that left them feeling dissatisfied and disconnected from the world of their uneducated kinfolk, "yet not belonging to, or accepted by, the white man's world".⁵⁰ In the novel this is the sort of mission education Benjamin received. It emphasized "the literal truth of the Bible", which left him with a "wide gap" in his knowledge when he entered college (WC 140). Untrained for critical thinking, he was there exposed to "modern" ideas of materialist politics of the left, which he "embraced . . . with all the fervour of a convert" (WC 141-142), and set off in pursuit of "racial glory" and personal "power" (WC 144).

Huxley also suggested that European and missionary beneficence, which was "softening" living conditions for Africans,⁵¹ was a second cause of virulent African nationalism. Europe, she said, at times too generously doled out social services such as famine relief, education, and medical services "without any obligation to work for it."⁵² Such beneficence failed to build character or instill moral virtue and a sense of responsibility.⁵³ Instead it was producing a generation "materialistic in outlook";⁵⁴ one that was lazy, dependent, and resentful; one that was jealous of European material achievements and believed these same things to be their entitlement.⁵⁵

⁴⁹Huxley, "The Nature of the Native: An East African Inquiry: Why Is He Backwards?" Times 28 July 1936: 15-16. She expressed a similar view several years later in an article for Geographical Magazine. See "East Africa and the Future," Geographical Magazine 16.1 (1943): 16.

⁵⁰Huxley, "East Africa and the Future" 22.

⁵¹Huxley, "Some Impressions" 206.

⁵²Huxley, "Some Impressions" 206.

⁵³Huxley, "Some Impressions" 205-206.

⁵⁴Huxley, Sorcerer's Apprentice 108.

⁵⁵See Huxley, "Empire Conference I" 413; Sorcerer's Apprentice 33ff; "Foreword," in Campbell K. Finlay, A New Home in Kenya (London: George G. Harrap and Co.) 6-7.

In the novel Anselm is symbolic of this disinterested European benevolence. He is an "all-pervading" presence in the young Benjamin's life, from whom "food, shelter, instruction, guidance, all derived" (WC 140). When the mission can no longer meet his needs, Benjamin is sent to the coastal college with the backing of the mission (WC 76), and then, "with the eager help of his teachers" (WC 142) and government scholarships (WC 76), to Oxford, where even his radical activities are financed by the subscriptions of white "sympathizers" (WC 139). Ironically, it is not the "kindness and disinterested help" he had received from people like Anselm (WC 142) that he recalls in later years. Rather, it is the "rare punishments" and material deprivations of mission life (WC 139), the social slights of some white staff members of the coastal college (WC 142), the "sense of inferiority" produced by the material and intellectual splendor of Oxford life (WC 142), and European failure to be more dutiful in raising Africans from their savage state (WC 143). Benjamin's rejection of Anselm thus constitutes a symbolic rejection of European paternalism. However, it is not an affirming rejection. For in rejecting Anselm's priestly hopes for him Benjamin chooses self-interest and personal aggrandizement as opposed to his mentor's selfless dedication to others. And in doing so he affirms Huxley's conviction about European moral superiority.

The Anselm-Benjamin relationship, then, is Huxley's metaphor for the colonial relationship between Europe and Africa. Anselm is the moral, caring father whose decisions are well-intentioned though at times made in ignorance and not always in the son's best interest. Benjamin is the rebellious son whose immature self-centeredness blinds him to the father's loving concern. The African nationalism that Benjamin embraces is a politics of self-interest in the hands of an unscrupulous educated African elite. It is fueled by jealousy of European material and cultural

achievement, and by a not-wholly-unjustified resentment of European arrogance and hypocrisy, and is rationalized by a 'naive' materialist politics of the left. Anselm's and Europe's sin, ironically, is one of loving Africa too much. By giving too unselfishly they have exposed themselves to the pain of resentment and rejection.⁵⁶

Christianity and 'Mau Mau': A Thing to Love

In October of 1954, with the 'Mau Mau' revolt and Kenya's State of Emergency moving into its third year, Huxley published her sixth novel, A Thing to Love, which dealt with the revolt as its major theme. As the novel draws to a close the guerrilla leader is dead, but not before leaving a bloody trail of savagery; the mission saved, though not without losses among its adherents; and Sam Gibson, a refugee from twentieth-century European savagery, is deep in reflection. Africa has turned out not to be the utopia unspoiled by "the disease called civilization" he had supposed; and Africans, far from preserving the primitive simplicity of "man's infancy", are "retarded, . . . piteously poor and stunted, without hope for the future".⁵⁷ They remain enslaved to "wanton destructive impulse[s]" that "delight in cruelty" and seek to "buy with other's blood a cloak of self-esteem" (TTL 253). Western Christian civilization, for all its failings, is the only force that can instill the virtue and courage needed to overcome these "dark barbaric demons" still possessing the African soul, and Europeans the only agents who can deliver it (TTL 253). In these passages Gibson articulates Huxley's own views regarding the moral superiority of Western civilization and the debt that civilization owes to Christianity in particular as the

⁵⁶Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978) 115.

⁵⁷Huxley, A Thing to Love (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954) 252. All references are to this edition and will hereafter be identified as TTL and given parenthetically in the text.

wellspring of this not-consistently-realized superiority. In doing so he at the same time articulates her assumptions regarding the causes and cures of the revolt.

This is Huxley's most political novel. Set at the beginning of the revolt, it focuses on a handful of settlers, the Africans with whom they deal on a regular basis, and a small group of urbanized, educated 'malcontents' who exploit legitimate African grievances against colonial society for their own selfish ends. With her focus on the European characters and the emphasis placed on African violence, treachery and atrocities, it is easy to agree with Martin Tucker's conclusion that Huxley was presenting "the white man's point of view, partly as justification and partly in response to African prejudices against white civilization",⁵⁸ though in fairness I feel Tucker fails to recognize that she also acknowledged the legitimacy of many African complaints. Rather, I concur with Micere Githae-Mugo in crediting Huxley for having "gone further than anywhere else in her writings, not only to try to bring together the various groups of people, but the races as well", while also agreeing that she nevertheless clung to a belief that the white man must remain in Africa "as the beacon, 'to show . . . the way and the future.'" ⁵⁹ For Kenya Huxley saw that future as a 'multiracial' society grounded on the Rhodesian principle of equal opportunities for all 'civilized' individuals,⁶⁰ regardless of racial or ethnic background. However, for the foreseeable future it remained the responsibility of the European segment of society to provide the moral, political, and economic leadership.

Although Huxley understood that African social and economic grievances were real and had to be addressed if

⁵⁸Tucker 135.

⁵⁹Githae-Mugo 123.

⁶⁰See Huxley and Perham, Race and Politics in Kenya (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1944), 194.

peace were to be restored,⁶¹ she believed that the violent nature of the revolt was indicative of a spiritual sickness that possessed the African soul. This sickness fed on a perversion of primitive religiosity, manipulated by an educated elite who were themselves morally perverted by the narrow-minded tribalism such religiosity inspires. The African masses, she felt, were caught in a destabilizing process of cultural upheaval and detribalization resulting from European cultural colonization. Changes to traditional ways of life brought about by rapid modernization of the economy that included a shift to a labor market, of material standards of living, and of education had, in her words, "drained" rural life of nearly all its "colour, excitement, poetry, and above all, drama, reducing life to a pretty drab, workaday, unsatisfying affair."⁶² Gone were the excitement of "cattle raids" and "tribal wars", and the hedonistic revelry of festivals and dances "condemned by Western opinion as indecent", replaced by unsatisfying new pastimes such as knitting circles, reading rooms, and more sedate religious services, all of which made modern life boring.⁶³

The Church, she felt, bore a great deal of blame for creating this situation.⁶⁴ Huxley understood that the role of religion in communal life was not limited to matters of ritual and belief. Rather, in Britain traditionally the Church played a significant role in breaking up the monotony of rural life. The annual cycle of festivals and fasting that marked the Christian calendar "gave a pattern and rhythm to life and provided occasions for communal indulgence in joy and sorrow, denial and celebration"; it gave a framework and focus for artistic expression; perhaps

⁶¹See Huxley, "The Cause and Cure of Mau Mau," 18 January 1954, draft essay for New Commonwealth, Church Missionary Society Archive, G3 A5/6/13, Birmingham University.

⁶²Huxley, "The Gikuyu's Lament," Time and Tide 34.9 (28 Feb. 1953): 278.

⁶³Huxley, "The Lion Needs the Jungle" 1159.

⁶⁴Huxley, "The Gikuyu's Lament" 278.

most importantly, it provided a sense of stability, security, and control that made the mysteries of daily existence less frightening.⁶⁵ Traditional African religions served similar functions of providing outlets for emotional release, for which the Church, in its over-concern for "stamping out paganism", had failed to provide alternatives.⁶⁶ In a rather missiologically perceptive comment she added elsewhere that this was a mistake "[t]he Early Church in Europe did not make".⁶⁷ Instead of proscribing traditional rituals, festivals and practices; instead of 'Judaizing' the Hellenistic culture of the ancient world, or subsequently 'Hellenizing' the various European cultures with which they came in contact, the early Christians tended to adopt the cultural forms and practices of each society and use these to re-express the Christian Gospel. The failure of contemporary Christianity to follow a similar pattern of contextualizing itself to the African situation rather than attempting to Europeanize Africans, she felt, was responsible for much of the turmoil and confusion. "Where", she asked, "are the saints' days and fiestas, the processions and miracles, the living angels and devils of African Christianity?"⁶⁸ Because these things, which had been an intricate part of African life, were completely missing from African Christianity, because they had been banished by a missionary culture which then failed to provide alternatives, she concluded, "[i]n their place, we have the dark and beastly ritual of the Mau Mau."⁶⁹

If Huxley felt that the Churches were in part responsible for the cultural turmoil behind 'Mau Mau,' she also felt that much of the hope for the future rested with them. 'Mau Mau,' she said, presented "a tremendous

⁶⁵Huxley, "The Lion Needs the Jungle" 1159.

⁶⁶Huxley, "The Lion Needs the Jungle" 1159.

⁶⁷Huxley, "The Gikuyu's Lament" 278.

⁶⁸Huxley, "The Gikuyu's Lament" 278.

⁶⁹Huxley, "The Gikuyu's Lament" 278.

challenge to Western leadership and especially to the Christian Churches, . . . Men and women, money and the evangelist spirit are needed desperately. Their greatest task is to restore a lost sense of purpose in life, to fill the spiritual and moral void."⁷⁰ The Christian Gikuyu in particular, she felt, were the key to resolving the "whole muddled tragedy" of 'Mau Mau.'⁷¹ They were "the only men who had the courage to stand against the constant pressure of inner fear and outer threats", and she believed once the forest fighters had been defeated the future must be built on these "steadfast few, with its Christian core."⁷² She recognized that preaching Christian religious and moral codes without also addressing social and economic grievances would be fruitless. Still, she saw the short-term role of the Christians as one of 'rehabilitating' 'Mau Mau' sympathizers, supporters, and fighters.⁷³ In the long term, that role was in providing an enlightened alternative to what she considered a perverted, irrational, primitive system of religiosity while simultaneously continuing efforts aimed at 'improving' the material situation of Africans, especially through education and technical training.⁷⁴ European input, in particular, she felt was essential, in the form of "padres, genuine welfare workers" and others who would "make personal contact" with Africans and provide an "alternative to the doctrines of race hatred & nationalism" that she believed 'Mau Mau' represented.⁷⁵ These assumptions about the moral perversion behind the revolt and the role of Christianity in purging it from the

⁷⁰Huxley, "The Kenya Scene: A Summing Up", Time and Tide 35.4 (23 Jan. 1954): 107.

⁷¹Huxley, "The Kenya Scene--I: A Raid Against Mau Mau," Time and Tide 34.48 (28 Nov. 1953): 1540.

⁷²Huxley, "The Kenya Scene I" 1540.

⁷³See, for example, her articles "The Kenya Scene II", Time and Tide 34.49 (5 Dec. 1953): 1569-1570; and "Kenya Screening," Time and Tide 34.52 (26 Dec. 1953): 1695-1696.

⁷⁴See Huxley, "The Kenya Scene II"; and Huxley, "Kenya Screening".

⁷⁵Huxley, Letter to Canon T. F. Bewes, 19 Dec. [1953], from Njoro, Church Missionary Society Archive, G3 A5/6/13, Birmingham University.

African psyche, in turn, are the underlying assumptions of A Thing to Love.

The novel is set in the Tetu district of Kenya at the beginning of the Emergency, and focuses on Patricia Foxely, a Kenya-born missionary teacher and daughter of a settler couple, Mike and Mamie Foxely.⁷⁶ Other central characters include Sam Gibson, a divorced settler-farmer who has romantic interests in Patricia; Gitau, an independent-school teacher and rebel leader; and Matthew, a Gikuyu government clerk and Christian. In addition to these are minor though significant characters intended to represent a cross-section of Kenya's population: Raphaelo, Foxley's most trusted farmhand and secretly a rebel oath-giver; Mr. and Mrs. Macalister, a Scottish Protestant missionary couple; Vi Wren and her crippled son Roger, English settlers; Piet Hendricks, an Afrikaner settler; Kimani, a 'loyalist' warrant chief; Josiah, his British-educated son, a leader of the conspiracy, and Matthew's brother; Sister Mary, an Irish Catholic nun; Zachariah, a Gikuyu 'revivalist' minister; an assortment of African peasants, including Njombo and Karioki who work for the Europeans; and the unnamed tracker who helps hunt Gitau down along with the anonymous members of the Gikuyu Home Guard.

While Huxley's sympathies are clearly with the settlers, in the novel she acknowledges European racism and injustice as primary contributing factors fueling the revolt, which make the settlers, in Tucker's words, "as responsible for the tragedy [of Mau Mau] as any extremist."⁷⁷ Hendriks the Afrikaner, for example, has no hesitation about resorting to violence to teach Africans their place (TTLs90), or answering atrocity with atrocity

⁷⁶A possible model for Patricia Foxely is Nancy Shepherd, the daughter and granddaughter of missionaries and principal of a Jeanes School whom Huxley met during her 1953 tour of Kenya. See Huxley, "Mau Mau 1953: Notes on various parts of Kenya on Mau Mau Emergency, used for novel 'A Thing to Love'" 67 leaves, Notebook, Elspeth Huxley Paper MSS Afr s 2154.

⁷⁷Tucker 136.

(TTL 73, 210). Roger Wren ridicules them as primitive and dismisses any notion that Africans can be 'civilized' (TTL 95). Sam Gibson, in turn, is initially arrogant and condescending, particularly towards educated Africans (TTL 11, 13), his attitude only altered by Matthew's heroic resistance near the end of the novel. Mike Foxley likewise considers educated young Africans dishonest, immoral, lazy, temperamental, and gullible racists (TTL 30, 65-66). He is what Michael Harris described as "conservative" and "reactionary", wanting most for "Kenya to remain a 'white man's country'",⁷⁸ and is consequently at a loss over his daughter's choice of vocation (TTL 25). Other nameless Europeans in cameo appearances catalogue the daily parade of humiliation, rudeness, and petty racism to which the Africans are subjected (TTL 103, 124, 148-149). Even more noble characters like Mamie Foxley and Vi Wren, who want to establish a clinic and community center for the Gikuyu, are patronizing and paternalistic. Mamie for instance at one time feels it necessary "to insist" on medical care for one African woman who does not want it (TTL 65), and elsewhere describes their project as something to benefit "our boys" (TTL 90).

Nor are the missionaries excused. Just as Huxley inscribed blame in the settler population for creating the conditions that would contribute to breeding the revolt, she likewise acknowledges the failings of the institutional Church, which at times lent credence to perceptions of Church complicity in colonial exploitation among rebels and Church members alike (TTL 102-3; 123; 150; 184). She refers to land disputes involving mission acquisition of vast tracts through 'sales' under European terms and concepts, the implications of which the Gikuyu did not understand (TTL 61). She points to mission failure to treat their

⁷⁸Michael Harris, Outsiders and Insiders: Perspectives of Third World Culture in British and Post-Colonial Fiction (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) 113.

African employees as equal to whites in terms of pay (TTL 111). She highlights missionary ethnocentrism that disapproves of African forms of religious expression deemed too emotional (TTL 131-133) and stokes intolerance for customs of dress and body adornment unconnected with religion (TTL 144 and elsewhere). She also questions Christian naming practices that suppress traditional identity (TTL 121, 153). She even hints at the sort of sectarian intolerance she said often became another form of tribalism (TTL 128, 136).⁷⁹ Finally, she also makes plain that this same Christian civilization has repeatedly failed to live up to the ideals it preaches, cataloguing atrocities that have been committed through the centuries "in the name of Christ" (TTL 252).

If Huxley paints an accusing portrait of the Europeans, her Africans are no better. The 'loyal' Gikuyu are generally primitive and morally corrupt. Kimani, for one, is a despot who illustrates the legitimacy of Gikuyu complaints about the power structures supported by the colonial government (TTL 49, 156),⁸⁰ while police corruption is rampant (TTL 78, 115-116). Family members are intimidated into betraying each other (TTL 194). Even Matthew, who eventually triumphs as a steadfast Christian hero, is at first an indecisive cuckold, vacillating and easily bullied by Gitau (TTL 118, 152-155, 185).

The rebels are far worse. Harris describes them as "ruthless and brutal savages who intend to destroy every vestige of white civilization in the country."⁸¹ The leaders of the 'conspiracy' are mostly educated urbanites motivated by a mixture of resentment, greed, and lust for

⁷⁹Huxley, "The Kenya Scene: A Summing Up" 107.

⁸⁰Though as David Maughan-Brown points out, throughout the novel Huxley frequently exploits racial stereotypes--in the present case, African predilection for alcohol and Kimani's refusal to allow its unlicensed brewing--reinforcing the stereotypes and undermining the dignity of the Africans she purports to defend. See David Maughan-Brown, Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya (London: Zed Books, 1985) 107.

⁸¹Harris 113.

personal and 'tribal' power. They refer to each other as "comrade", suggesting Marxist influences (TTL 53). They are dishonest, extorting "oath fees" and contributions from the peasants in exchange for worthless promises of huge farms once the Europeans are driven out (TTL 79, 86 and elsewhere), then they embezzle the fees for their own personal use (TTL 78, 101). They indulge excessively in such creature comforts as alcohol and sex (TTL 54, 110, and elsewhere). Beneath this urbanite leadership are ordinary peasants like Raphaelo and Karioki. Far from being sketched with the "sensitivity and affection" that Harris suggests,⁸² they are simple, naive, superstitious, and easily manipulated by the rebel leaders. With their European employers they are treacherous (i.e. TTL 207-208); with each other they are dishonest (i.e. TTL 78). They gullibly cling to promises of European farms (TTL 79-80) and intimidate other peasants into oaths (TTL 191ff). They are also ignorant and easily trapped by their lies (i.e. TTL 215-216).

The "conspiracy" itself is inscribed as atavistic, brutal, and terroristic. It initiates members with hideous ritual oathing ceremonies (TTL 192-196), sadistically maims livestock (TTL 73-74), brutally hacks defenseless elderly Europeans (TTL 207-208, 214-215), and gruesomely tortures and murders its African opponents (TTL 157, 195-196, 226-234). Peasant and educated urbanite alike are possessed by a bloodlust. Gitau, for instance, finds the act of strangling an African boy "pleasurable" (TTL 114). Raphaelo similarly is charged up with frenzied excitement as he hacks Mamie Foxely to pieces (TTL 214). Faceless mobs grow "excited" as Njombo is savagely abused (TTL 195) and are later "delighted" by Matthew's cries of agony (TTL 231). Nor is this bloodlust limited to the "conspirators" either. The Home Guards who kill Gitau's 'forest gang,' for example, are "happy because they had killed", killing

⁸²Harris 113.

enabling them to affirm their "manhood" (TTL 251). What distinguishes these Africans from Europeans, especially the more rash like Hendriks, is that the Africans act on their savage impulses--maiming, killing, and copulating--while the Europeans are restrained by the notions of 'right' and 'civilized' law fostered in Western civilization by the Christian moral code (TTL 173, 201)--an assertion inconsistent with historic fact regarding European atrocities against suspected 'Mau Mau.'

For Huxley one of the fundamental differences between African societies and European civilization was the nature of their religiosity. This assumed difference directs her examination of the causes and cures of 'Mau Mau,' in the process making her text something of an exercise in comparative religions. Unlike Joyce Cary who dismissed African religions as superstition, Huxley was closer to Achebe in recognizing traditional beliefs to be metaphysical constructions developed over time that shared similarities with the Judeo-Christian tradition. This she illustrated with such scenes as the prayer of the Council of Nine, the urbanized Western-educated rebel leaders (TTL 53). It invokes Ngai, the chief deity of the Gikuyu pantheon, Gikuyu and Mumbi, "the joint founders of the tribe", and all the ancestors, petitioning their blessing for the "struggle" against the "invader" and help to "overthrow" any individual who opposes the movement (TTL 53). In ways it is reminiscent of ancient Israel's biblical claims to election, her petitions for divine protection and liberation from bondage, and her hope for the establishment of Zion.

She also recognized, as does Achebe, that such things as Christian belief in evil spirits and divine punishment (TTL 125), biblical sacrifice (TTL 174), and the particularly Catholic practice of burning votive candles (TTL 212) parallel many traditional beliefs and practices Europeans dismissed as superstition and magic. However, she

was less concerned with the contesting 'truths' of revealed religion than with the value systems they imply. For Huxley, where Christianity and traditional religion parted company was in the nature of the message they articulate: traditional beliefs were grounded in a narrow-minded tribalism that fanned hatred, sanctioned violence, valorized material status, promoted greed, and fed on irrational fear; Christianity in contrast transcended materialism, emphasized selfless service to others, and promoted a universal brotherhood of love. Huxley does on occasion articulate through Pat a degree of appreciation for aspects of traditional religiosity, particularly its sense of the omnipresence of God (TTL 59-60, 72). However, these are incidentals that accommodationally-oriented missionaries would consider 'naturally good' elements which may be exploited for the purpose of forming an indigenous Christianity.⁸³ Their significance is outweighed by the xenophobic tribalism of traditional spirituality, and it is this aspect she focuses on in her comparisons with altruistic Christianity. Having prepared the stage for a serious exploration of traditional religiosity, she then resorts to the same stereotyped representations of 'primitive' religion that Cary employed. For what Gikuyu religiosity inspires here is perverse oath-taking ceremonies that Kimani says "mock the customs of our fathers" (TTL 120). These incorporate unspeakable sexual perversion, foment "hatred", and demand hideous acts of violence against Europeans, their animals, and Africans who refuse to support the rebellion (TTL 192-193). Instead of ennobling Gitau and his fellow rebels, it turns them into jealous, greedy, and sadistic monsters who prey on Europeans and their brother Africans (i.e. TTL 195-196, 232-233). And instead of liberating the African soul, they

to ... TTL 110, her commitment is with ...

⁸³See Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 67-69.

enslave it with terror of ghastly retribution from terrible and hostile supernatural powers (TTL 85).

If Huxley pays passing lip service to the metaphysical nature of traditional belief while highlighting the perversions perpetrated under its influence, her representation of Christianity follows an opposite approach, acknowledging its repeated and countless failures, including those of the institutional Church, while stressing the ultimate triumph of its ideals. As she catalogues the Christian Europeans' hypocrisy and failings Huxley simultaneously inscribes in them moral superiority. The ethnocentrism, paternalism and condescension of the Macalisters, for example, are offset by the genuineness of their selfless desire to bring moral edification to the Gikuyu (TTL 127). The same may be said of Mamie Foxley and Vi Wren, the object of their project being improved standards of hygiene and medical treatment for the Africans (TTL 65ff). Mike Foxely's opposition to welfare projects for the benefit of Africans is attributed not to meanness or racism, but to a Protestant work ethic that valorizes self-reliance (TTL 66-67) and to personal scruples about patronizing and being patronized (TTL 90). The rash Piet Hendriks, too, in the end remains in control of his frustrated sexual passions (TTL 31-32) and his murderous temper (TTL 210). The suggestion, made plain by Gibson in the end, is that what distinguishes these Europeans from their African counterparts is the civilization--"however imperfect"--which molded them and subdues the "demons" inside (TTL 253).

Pat Foxley and Matthew are the obvious Christian heroes through whom Christian moral superiority ultimately triumphs over 'Mau Mau' perversion. Pat in many ways seems too good to be true. Unlike her parents who are "enslaved" to their farm (TTL 146), her commitment is with bringing edification to the Gikuyu (i.e. TTL 28, 30, 133-134, 142, 147). She also holds no bitterness in her heart, even after

the brutal murder of her parents. Instead she desires to "understand" the causes of such savagery and "how to cure it" (TTL 222), unlike the tracker, whose desire to avenge the massacre of his son's family motivates him to hunt down Gitau (TTL 238). She even chooses to forego marriage--at least temporarily--for work too important to be left "undone" (TTL 255).

By comparison Matthew is more realistic, insofar as a stereotype can be. He is on the one hand what the Europeans would consider a 'good' Gikuyu: a Christian sincere in his beliefs and a district officer in the colonial service who recognizes the moral superiority of European civilization (TTL 123) and understands the African need to learn from these Europeans (TTL 118). On the other, he is keenly aware of European hypocrisy and racism (TTL 123-124) and as eager as the 'conspirators' for the Europeans to leave (TTL 183). Also, although a believing Christian he is still respectful of traditional beliefs as a perhaps less perfect way in which men communicate with God to which arrogant Europeans were "deaf, blind and insensitive" (TTL 125). He articulates Huxley's own respect for 'quaint' aspects of traditional belief,⁸⁴ a detail that otherwise seems to contradict the overall theme of the novel. He also has his doubts (TTL 183) and his moments of weakness (TTL 231). In the end, though, Christian virtue and courage win out, giving him the strength to resist Gitau's savage abuse "without hatred or fear" (TTL 232).

While Pat and Matthew are Huxley's testing ground for superior Christian morality, that morality itself is epitomized for each in their own Christ figures. One is Sister Mary, a teacher whose material detachment and selfless devotion to others become a source of inspiration for Pat. Sister Mary makes only one brief appearance in the text, in Pat's memories as she begins to doubt her own missionary calling. Pat recalls her as someone who lived

⁸⁴See "Elsbeth Huxley," Times, 13 Jan. 1997: 22.

"to give rather than grab, to serve and not seize", and from her Pat learned that real freedom was in "indifference to material things rather than with the possession of them" (TTL 146). She forms for Pat a contrast with her parents and the other settlers, whom Pat realized were "enslaved" to materialistic success (TTL 146), and by her example suggests to Pat that she can "do something" on a personal level to "dispel the darkness of centuries" that have enveloped the African soul (TTL 147).

The other Christ figure is Zachariah, the revivalist minister. Gitau turns him into a sacrificial ram whose hideously abused form and dying prayer for forgiveness for his abusers instills in Matthew the moral courage and strength to turn to Jesus, reject hatred for his tormentors, and resist the oath of Mumbi (TTL 232-233). Like Sister Mary, his appearance in the narrative is brief. He is introduced about midway through the novel as a revivalist who has "publicly denounced the conspiracy" but also resists association with the colonial government in favor of "the love of Jesus" (TTL 126). There are similarities between him and Ngugi's Teacher Isaka⁸⁵ and the original version of Rev. Jackson Kigondo.⁸⁶ However, whereas Isaka is murdered by white racism and Kigondo more closely resembles a quisling, Zachariah is a Christian martyr whose death inspires the birth of new hope for Africa--and that new hope is Matthew.

Zachariah's name connects him with the father of John the Baptist, herald of the Messiah. Like his namesake this Zachariah is the spiritual father of Matthew, the new African Baptist and herald of the African Messiah, whose coming for Huxley, as Githae-Mugo suggested, was still "a long way off."⁸⁷ Matthew himself is not that Messiah. However, both Pat and Gibson see in him "light from the

⁸⁵Ngugi, Weep Not, Child, 1964 (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987)

⁸⁶Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, 1967 (London: Heinemann, 1968).

⁸⁷Githae-Mugo 123.

dark, faith from agony" (TTL 255). He is the herald for a new, civilized, Christian Africa that will shed "the tyranny of fear, the religion of hatred, the code of revenge and the degradation of cruelty" and join forces with a Christian Europe that will "show them the way and the future" (TTL 256).

The armed phase of the struggle against colonialism would continue for another two years beyond the publication of this novel. Eventually the forest fighters would be overwhelmed by British military superiority. However, gradual revelations of European atrocities against prisoners, suspected 'terrorists', those suspected of complicity, and innocent bystanders gradually undermined and exploded the myth of European moral superiority. Initially Huxley only grudgingly acknowledged that such atrocities were occurring, suggesting that reported incidents, while not isolated, were "unusual" and more often acts perpetrated by African elements of the security forces without European approval.⁸⁸ Elsewhere she even excused certain police excesses as acceptable, but "only if the chances of gain outweigh the certain losses."⁸⁹ When she did write about the detention camps she tended to focus on what she considered humane conditions and efforts, particularly by Churchmen, to reach out and 'rehabilitate' the detainees.⁹⁰ She continued to believe that the "Christian core" of 'loyal' Africans would be the "key" to stability in any post-revolt Kenya; for her the question remained whether "British leadership will be sufficiently wise, decisive and strong" enough.⁹¹

⁸⁸Huxley, "Kenya Screening" 1695; also "Realities in Kenya," Time and Tide 36.8 (19 Feb. 1955): 226-227.

⁸⁹Huxley, "Nairobi Balance Sheet," Time and Tide 34.41 (10 Oct. 1953): 1299.

⁹⁰For example, Huxley, "The Kenya Scene--I"; "The Kenya Scene II"; "The Kenya Scene: A Summing Up"; and "Kenya Screening"; "The Cause and Cure of Mau Mau"; and Letter to Canon T. F. Bewes.

⁹¹Huxley, "Kenya Scene--I" 1540.

In all three of these novels the Christian church is simultaneously a contributing factor to the cultural upheaval brought by colonial intervention and the remedy for that confusion. In Red Strangers the damage to traditional ways of life is offset by improved material standards of living and by moral edification. Father Anselm in The Walled City is guilty of loving Africa too much and consequently too soon holding too high an expectation for his adopted son, which drives the son into immature rebellion. Finally, in A Thing to Love European Christianity, however imperfectly lived, is the only hope for Africans to master the "dark barbaric demons" that keep them primitive. Throughout the novels the criticisms she makes about missionaries anticipate some of the issues raised by Achebe and Ngugi. The conclusions she reaches, however, are quite opposite.

Chapter Six

Chinua Achebe (1)

Colonialism and the Cultural Impact of Missions:

Things Fall Apart

Introduction

In a 1983 interview Chinua Achebe described the real tragedy of colonialism for the African peoples as "a loss of initiative" in matters of their history, their culture, their political and economic institutions, and their religious life.¹ Having been dominated militarily and politically by Europe, Africans gradually lost control over one aspect after another of their history and culture until, as he noted elsewhere, the history of Africa had become the history of an alien race on the continent; Africa's indigenous peoples and their indigenous institutions had merely become a "footnote".² One area in which this loss of initiative was perhaps most obvious--an area personally touching closer to home for Achebe than all others--was in their religious life. The conquering Europeans generally dismissed Africans as savages who had no history, whose culture and institutions were primitive, and who were in overall need of enlightenment and civilization by a superior European culture. Their religious beliefs in particular, along with their accompanying rituals and celebrations, were frequently dismissed as superstitious and barbaric. Stirred by stereotypical images of a primitive and savage continent, European missionaries by the hundreds rushed to Africa to bring light to ignorant heathens living in darkness, to liberate African minds from the bonds of superstition, to rescue African women from sexual slavery, and to fill the

¹Biodun Jeyifo, "Literature and Conscientization: Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1983, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997) 116.

²Chris Searle, "Chinua Achebe and the Bruised Heart of Africa," 1987, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 157.

moral void created by licentious and hedonistic paganism. Many of these missionaries were quick to recognize the necessity, in the name of expedience, to quickly establish an indigenous corps of catechists and clergy who would carry the Gospel message to the villages, and of even accommodating certain indigenous festivals, customs, and ceremonies to give the new religion at least a semblance of indigenization. Despite this African face lent to the new religion, however, control over the content of the Gospel message, over its interpretation and contextualization, remained clearly in the hands of the Europeans. And it is this aspect of the failure of the missions that is at the heart of Achebe's critique of missionaries and missionary Christianity in his novels.

Achebe's Background

Achebe is more than a disinterested observer of the religious situation in both contemporary and colonial Africa. For him it is very personal. He stands at what he called the "crossroads" of the religious and cultural encounter between Europe and the Igbo people.³ His father, Isaiah Okafor Achebe, was one of the first converts to Christianity in his town Ogidi, being baptized at the CMS mission sometime before 1904.⁴ He subsequently trained as a catechist at the Awka Teacher Training College and embarked on a long missionary career that took him and his family on evangelizing journeys throughout Igboland. Albert Chinualumogu was born the fifth of six surviving children of Isaiah Okafor and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam Achebe on November 16 1930, late in his parents' evangelical career.⁵

³Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," 1973, Hope and Impediments: Selected Essays (New York: Anchor-Doubleday Books, 1990) 34.

⁴Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Chinua Achebe: A Biography (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 3. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information is drawn from this source.

⁵Bernth Lindfors, "Chronology," Conversations with Chinua Achebe, xv. Ezenwa-Ohaeto identifies Achebe's mother as Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam (4) whereas Lindfors gives her name as Janet N. Iloegbunam.

In 1935, after nearly thirty years of missionary journeys, Isaiah Okafor retired from the active evangelical service and settled his family in his hometown of Ogidi, where young Chinua grew up and received his early formal education.

Ogidi in 1935, like most towns throughout Igboland, was divided between Christian converts and followers of the traditional beliefs. While the two groups lived in generally peaceful co-existence,⁶ Achebe has said that the Christians were often smug in their relationship with the 'pagans', referring to themselves as "'the people of the church'" or "'the association of God'" and to the pagans as "the heathen" or "'the people of nothing'".⁷ In matters of the religious life of the community--the rituals, festivals, and celebrations--the Christians generally stood apart. Some adopted the extreme position that "everything in the traditional society was bad or should be suppressed",⁸ while others were more tolerant in their views. Achebe has said that his parents were "strong and even sometimes uncompromising in their Christian beliefs, but they were not fanatical."⁹ Isaiah in particular "retained a respect for the tradition he had left", which deepened with age.¹⁰ Despite occasional tensions the two groups lived side by side, interacting on a regular basis

⁶Robert Serumaga, Interview with Chinua Achebe, 1967, African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972) 12.

⁷Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 30. In the Serumaga interview Achebe also said that the pagans were referred to by the Christians as "the people of the world" (12).

⁸Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 8.

⁹Achebe, Home and Exile (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 10.

¹⁰Ezenwa-Ohaeto 6. This was particularly evident in the interest Isaiah took in how well traditional masquerades were prepared. In the Jeyifo interview Achebe said that as "proper Christians" they were "were not supposed to be interested or excited by the things of the 'heathens'". Yet insofar as masquerades were concerned Isaiah was often "ambivalent" to the point that he would be "offended if a masquerade came out improperly set up." Achebe concluded from this that although Isaiah "had turned his back on those things" at the time of his conversion, he had never lost his instinct for good form or his appreciation for "the artistic element in our tradition" (Jeyifo 113-4.)

in the market and in the daily life of the community.

Families as well were often divided along religious lines, and the Achebe family was no exception. While the immediate family members were all devout and practising Christians, many of the close relatives remained faithful to the traditional practices. This at times was the cause of tensions between the members of Isaiah's generation, yet they nevertheless remained close.¹¹ For young Chinua the family and the village became a "crossroads of cultures".¹² Among his Christian family and friends they sang hymns, read the Bible, and celebrated the Christian festivals. Certain traditional rituals and practices as well, such as the sharing of kola nut and palm wine, were regularly observed at the Achebe home though in a slightly modified Christian form.¹³ At the same time in the homes of the non-Christian members of his family and community young Chinua was exposed to the traditional festivals, rituals, and celebrations. As a child, he said, the idols and the food of his neighbors and relatives "had a strange pull on me in spite of my being such a thorough little Christian".¹⁴ Although his parents frowned on participation in certain festivals and cautioned their children against eating in the homes of non-Christian family and friends so as not partake of food offered to idols, Chinua "was not past taking my little sister to our neighbour's house when our parents were not looking and partaking of heathen festival meals. I never found their rice and stew to have the

¹¹Achebe, Home and Exile 9-11. Isaiah reportedly constructed his retirement home in Ogidi several years before he was actually prepared to occupy it. In the intervening period he permitted his half-brother use of the compound, only to discover upon his return that the brother had installed a shrine to the local deities in the piazza. Isaiah was "furious" and demanded its immediate removal from the compound. Such conflicts were common enough, but not serious enough to result in complete ruptures in the relationships. Relatives and friends, "Christian or not", still gathered frequently in the piazza to discuss all sorts of matters.

¹²Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 34, cited in n3 above.

¹³Ezenwa-Ohaeto 6.; Achebe, Home and Exile 11.

¹⁴Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 35.

flavour of idolatry."¹⁵ Rather than being torn by spiritual agonies between two competing and irreconcilable traditions, he grew up possessing no doubts about the truth of the Christian faith¹⁶ but at the same time holding a "fascination for the ritual and life" of the non-Christian side of the community and family.¹⁷

As he matured this fascination grew gradually, first into toleration and then into sympathy and open-minded respect for the traditional beliefs and practices.¹⁸ It also led to serious questioning, not so much about the truths of the Gospel message, but about the claims to exclusive possession of the truth made by European Christianity. By the time he had reached maturity Achebe admits that he had lost faith not only in Christianity but in the efficacious power of all religions.¹⁹ This is not to say that he had embraced an agnostic or atheistic position. Religion, in fact, is and has always been important to Achebe. The frequency with which he invokes and appeals to God together with his extensive use of scriptural reference in his non-fiction and interviews is indicative of a strong religious sentiment. Although Achebe's loss of faith had come already in his university days, it was during this period that he came under the tutelage first of Geoffrey Parrinder and then James Welch, both renowned missionaries and religious scholars, and subsequently chose religious studies as one of his courses at Ibadan.²⁰ From Parrinder in particular he began to understand that Christianity and traditional practices were not necessarily mutually exclusive, that it is possible to "be a Christian and yet be able to worship your ancestors".²¹ This gradually led

¹⁵Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 35.

¹⁶Jeyifo 114. See also, in Makro, *From the Heart of the Continent*.

¹⁷Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 35. See also, *Things Fall Apart*.

¹⁸Serumaga 12.

¹⁹Robert M. Wren, "Those Magical Years," 1983, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 107. See also, *Things Fall Apart*, 11.

²⁰Wren "Those Magical Years", 104. See also, *Things Fall Apart*, 11.

²¹Wren "Those Magical Years" 104. See also, *Things Fall Apart*, 11.

him to the conclusion that European culture and religion were guilty of grave "irreverence [and] arrogance", as well as stupidity, for presuming that Africa was devoid of history, civilization, culture and religion prior to colonization by Europe.²² Rather, as he said elsewhere, the experiences of the African peoples in their particular African environments down through the millennia had provided them with unique insights into life that are the basis for the values and attitudes which shape contemporary African life.²³

This is not to imply that Achebe gradually descended into open hostility toward Christianity, particularly in its European variety. Unlike Ngugi, whose youthful enthusiasm for Christianity gradually dissipated as he came more under the influence of Marxist materialist political ideology and subsequently came to view Christianity as a simple instrument of colonial and neocolonial oppression, amidst his continued criticism of mission Christianity's role in both the colonizing process and the disruption of traditional African life Achebe has continually acknowledged and even highlighted the contribution made by missionaries and Christianity to both the material and the moral development of African societies. He rejects the idyllic romanticized traditional society that the Negritude movement sought to recapture. Rather, in his writing he casts "a cold eye on things",²⁴ acknowledging that traditional society was not utopian, that it was not some sort of Rousseauesque world of noble savages blissfully living in a state of natural harmony, that some traditional practices were in fact brutal and inhumane. In many instances, he said, Christianity "stood firmly on the side

²²Bernth Lindfors, Ian Munro, Richard Priebe, and Reinhard Sander, "Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1969, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 29.

²³Kalu Ogbaa "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1980, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 69.

²⁴"An Interview with Chinua Achebe," trans. Judith E. McDowell, 1962, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 8.

of humane behavior" against the worst of these atrocities, teaching, for example, "twins were not evil and must no longer be abandoned in the forest to die".²⁵ Rather, while acknowledging the positive contributions European Christianity has made to African life, particularly in his fiction Achebe has continually criticized the Church and its representatives for their patronizing and often condescending attitude towards African cultures and African people which enabled even the best-intentioned to regard Africans as the "'junior brother'" in the Christian family of man.²⁶ Such an attitude reduces Africa to a continent of children, presupposing that Africans have little or nothing to contribute to understanding and interpreting the Gospel message or applying it to their unique situation. It deprives them of their right and indeed their responsibility to receive and to contextualize the Gospel so that it becomes a truly African Christianity. In this way, then, Achebe anticipates the developing understanding of missiologists and missiological theologians regarding the relationship and distinction between the Gospel message and the cultural forms through which it is expressed, regarding the role of the missionary in the process of evangelization, and regarding whose is the primary role and responsibility in the process of contextualizing the Gospel.

Accommodation versus Contextualization

Missionary activity from the end of the nineteenth century was guided for the most part by the principles of accommodation. From the earliest days of the great missionary undertaking at the end of the eighteenth century, most missionary activity was ethnocentric. Missionaries and religious leaders assumed a direct link

²⁵Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 31.

²⁶Quoting Albert Schweitzer. See Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," 1974, Hopes and Impediments 69; also "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness," 1977, Hopes and Impediments, 11.

between the substance of Gospel message and the European cultural forms through which it was expressed. That is, they assumed that the European way of life, its values and its mores, its rituals and practices, its social structures and relationships all were direct reflections of the Gospel message. Preaching the Gospel and converting the heathens, then, meant destroying their previous ways of life, suppressing their rituals and traditional social structures and practices, and introducing a European lifestyle. Influenced in large measure by the newly developing social sciences, particularly anthropology and sociology, missionaries and theologians at the end of the nineteenth century were gradually becoming aware that there was a distinction between cultural form and religious truth. They were beginning to recognize that indigenous rituals and practices were not necessarily inconsistent with the Gospel message and that if they were indeed going to convert the heathen then it was necessary to package the Gospel message in a form that was at least in some ways familiar to the potential proselytes. They therefore made efforts to 'accommodate' local cultures by translating the scriptures into indigenous languages, by employing indigenous art forms such as music and dance in their liturgical services, and by Christianizing and otherwise adapting indigenous rituals and celebrations.

The trouble with accommodation is that it is often little more than benign ethnocentrism. Accommodational models of mission, Luzbetak has said, tend to be "overcautious, paternalistic, distrustful of the local community, with the sending church (not the new or local church) determining the type of accommodation".²⁷ Practitioners of accommodation presume that their culture possesses the fulfillment of revelation in its entirety and in its most perfect form of expression. In what is perhaps

²⁷Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 68.

a small advance over ethnocentric orientations, accommodational models presuppose "the recognition of 'neutral' and 'naturally good' elements in non-Christian ways of life",²⁸ yet it is their own European interpretation of the Gospel message and the cultural forms through which it finds expression that become the standard for deciding what is and is not 'Christian.' Anything in the non-Christian culture consistent with European values and mores is either good naturally or present in that culture quite accidentally and may be used to introduce the Gospel message, while anything inconsistent with the European interpretation needs to be purged. Such approaches to evangelization, Luzbetak says, fail to recognize that local cultures already contain "the germ of Jesus' message" and do not need the Gospel to be introduced so much as they need to be helped to discover the Gospel already present and active in their lives.²⁹

Following from this, accommodational models of evangelization also usurp responsibility for contextualizing the Gospel message from the local community. Too often decisions about what is and is not consistent with the Gospel message are in the hands of outsiders so that mission has frequently been about "'transplanting'" European Christianity rather than "'sowing'" the Gospel in the soil of the new culture and allowing it to find its own forms of expression.³⁰ Foreign missionaries with little or at best imperfect understanding of local cultures, and an interpretation of the Gospel message laden with their own cultural assumptions and prejudices, have presumed to rule on fundamental and defining issues such as what constitutes a Christian marriage or family structure.

Finally, because decisions about accommodation are in

²⁸Luzbetak 67.

²⁹Luzbetak 73.

³⁰Luzbetak 68.

the hands of misinformed outsiders, accommodation also often tends to be "shallow, affecting only the surface of culture".³¹ For the most part it consists of 'innovations' at the levels of cultural forms and functions, such as liturgical adaptation of music and other forms of artistic expression, the adoption of local costume, or perhaps the appropriation and Christianization of local rituals, festivals, and celebrations. Issues that conflict with European interpretations of the Gospel, such as marriage and family life, Church structure, gender roles and relations, rites of initiation, issues of ritual purity or cleanliness, are often not candidates for accommodation. Rather, they are banned outright. Thus true and significant cultural change, which Robert Schreiter says is the ultimate goal of missionary activity--"if the culture does not change, the Gospel has not been preached!"³²--rarely takes place. Instead we find the likes of Joyce Cary's converts who have simply replaced one oracle and one blood-thirsty deity for another.

Beginnings: "Dead Men's Path".

That the conflict between European Christianity and traditional religious beliefs and practices has long been important to Achebe is evidenced by one of his earliest stories, "Dead Men's Path", which was published untitled by The University Herald at Ibadan in 1953.³³ Briefly, the story relates an incident early in the career of Michael Obi, a "young and energetic man" who had been sent by the Mission authorities to run the "unprogressive" Ndume Central School in January of 1949.³³ He has a passion for "'modern methods'" (71) and is eager to show the older members of the staff and community "'how a school should be run'"

³¹Luzbetak 68.

³²Robert J. Schreiter, The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 71.

³³Achebe, "Dead Men's Path," 1953, Girls at War and Other Stories (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1973) 70. Hereafter all citations are given parenthetically in the text.

(72). Shortly into his tenure Obi discovers the existence of a seldom-used footpath cutting directly across the school grounds, right through his carefully cultivated hedges and flower garden. The path connects the village shrine with the traditional burial ground and is believed by the local people to be used by their departing relatives and as well as by the ancestors returning to visit. Despite the reasonableness of the plea put forward by the priest of Ani to allow continued access to the path, Obi fences it off with barbed wire. When a young woman dies in childbirth two days later the local people then raze not only the fence and gardens but one of the school buildings as well, leaving Obi's European superiors to view him as a misguided zealot whose enthusiasm is flaming a "tribal-war situation" between the village and school (74).

Robert Wren suggests that in this story Achebe gives his first hints of "maturity".³⁴ While Wren maintains that the story "is not fully realized because the characterizations are too weak," the story nevertheless succeeds because Achebe refuses to "editorialize".³⁵ That is, he shows a great deal of restraint in characterization. His sympathies are in fact with the old priest who declines to get into an argument with Obi; yet each character is drawn with sympathetic respect for their position. Are the villagers primitive savages blinded by superstition for connecting the death of the young woman with the closing of the path? Is Obi both an unreasonable zealot and an arrogant modern sophisticate for dismissing the traditionalist beliefs as something to "laugh at" (73)? Achebe does not really take sides. Rather, all the characters are allowed to appear reasonable, acting out their choices in accordance with their beliefs.

If this story shows signs of artistic maturity, in

³⁴Wren, Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980) 15.

³⁵Wren, Achebe's World 15.

its thematic concerns it also foreshadows, as Lyn Innes has suggested, Achebe's "later works and preoccupations."³⁶ It is of particular interest for our present study because it raises in nascent form the issues surrounding those religio-cultural conflicts precipitated by Christian missionary activity among the Africans. For one, Michael Obi's name, his education, his religion, his aesthetic taste in gardening and landscaping, and his preference for "modern" ways all anticipate Achebe's awareness of and interest in the sort of colonial culture in which he himself grew up and that produces those thoroughly assimilated Africans who populate his later stories and novels. In his arrogance and intolerance for traditional pagan practices--and for those older staff members who tolerate or accommodate such practices--Obi also anticipates the even more arrogant Reverend James Smith of Things Fall Apart, and in doing so he also anticipates Achebe's deeper religious interests. The unnamed priest of Ani, as well, in his level-headed reasoning and attempts to attain compromise and mutual respect for the two religions living side-by-side prefigures Akunna, one of Umuofia's respected leaders who engages in profound and thoughtful religious dialogue with Smith's more open-minded and flexible predecessor, Mr. Brown. Finally, the brief glimpse of the "white Supervisor" and his perception of Obi as an incompetent zealot in need of moderating supervision anticipate both Achebe's similarly paternalistic and condescending colonial officials who are in Nigeria to facilitate the 'pacification' of the primitive savages. Thus in this simple, five-page story we see in nascent form the concerns--religious and secular--that Achebe would explore in greater depth in his novels.

³⁶C. L. Innes, Chinua Achebe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 10.

Missionary Ethnocentrism and Accommodation: Things Fall Apart

Achebe's first novel, Things Fall Apart, appeared in 1958 and has enjoyed so much critical and commercial success over the years that its author has gradually come to be considered, in Simon Gikandi's words, "the man who invented African literature".³⁷ While Gikandi's intentional hyperbole humorously acknowledges Achebe's commercial success it also pays tribute to his artistic achievement, particularly in this deceptively simple story. Set in Igboland at the end of the nineteenth century and focusing on the character Okonkwo, the novel revisits and dramatizes the initial encounter between the forces of British colonial expansion and the Igbo people, as well as the tragic consequences for the Igbo people that encounter implied. Particularly over the first two-thirds of the narrative, as Lyn Innes notes, the novel focuses on two things: "the portrayal of Okonkwo and his psychology, and the portrayal of the social, political and religious life of Umuofia" prior to the arrival of the first Europeans.³⁸ The portrait of the community Achebe offers is an insider's view of a living and thriving culture. For Western readers accustomed to contemporary novels of "self-consciousness and introspection", David Carroll says, the impact of this detail "is considerable",³⁹ for it at times seems that the society itself comes alive almost as another character. There are richly detailed scenes of community celebration and feasting; of mutual support and cooperation for occasions of joy, such as weddings, and sorrow, such as funerals; of ritual communication with the spirits of the ancestors and appeals for their judgment and justice in communal disputes; and of the uniquely republican nature of

³⁷Simon Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Literature," Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Classics in Context (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996) ix.

³⁸Innes, Chinua Achebe 22-3.

³⁹David Carroll, Chinua Achebe, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) 30.

communal governance, all of which together belie the frequent colonialist representations of Africans as frenetic savages living in constant fear of a hostile and violent world haunted by malicious spirits.

If his portraits of village life contradict those colonialist images, however, Achebe certainly does not romanticize or idealize pre-colonial life. It is well-known that Achebe was inspired, at least in part, to attempt writing the novel in reaction to the critical acclaim given Joyce Cary's Mr. Johnson, which he saw as "a most superficial picture of--not only of the country, but even of the Nigerian character".⁴⁰ His purpose, he has said, was to re-establish the dignity of African life that had been denigrated by colonial praxis by looking at traditional society "from the inside".⁴¹ In doing this, however, Achebe constantly seeks to avoid idealizing the past, since doing so would, as Abdul JanMohamed put it, undermine his integrity as a writer and "defeat the attempt to restore the dignity and value of the past by depriving it of credibility".⁴² Thus the Igbo community he presents is one that already has its own credible system of values independent of European interference. These values achieve a balance between the importance of individual achievement and the primacy of the community, between materialism and spirituality, though as Innes has pointed out, it is at times "an uneasy" balance.⁴³ Just as there is vibrancy and warmth in the life of the community, there is also what Achebe has called a "cruel side" to traditional life and

⁴⁰Lewis Nkosi, Interview with Chinua Achebe, August 1962, African Writers Talking, 4. Also see Lewis Nkosi and Wole Soyinka, "Conversation with Chinua Achebe," 1963, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 13; Tony Hall, "I Had to Write on the Chaos I Foresaw" 1967, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 25; Jeyifo, 113; Charles H. Rowell, "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1989, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 183; Achebe, Home and Exile 20-26, 37-40 and elsewhere.

⁴¹Nkosi 4.

⁴²Abdul R. JanMohamed, Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) 154.

⁴³Innes, Chinua Achebe 25.

practices that at times denigrates, marginalizes, and even destroys innocent individuals.⁴⁴ This cruelty is typified in the tragic story of Ikemefuna, which is introduced at the close of the first chapter. It is also suggested in the beliefs about the birth of twins and the way such 'abominations' are disposed of, as well as in the treatment afforded the outcast osu and other marginalized individuals. And it is in the combination of these weaknesses, to which Christianity offers an appealing alternative, coupled with society's stubborn refusal to acknowledge or face them that Achebe sees the root of Umuofia's tragedy.

In addition to the rich sociological and anthropological detail, the novel also pays close attention to Okonkwo, to his personal history, to his system of values, and to the role these play in his personal tragedy. His admiration of strength, the importance he places on achievement and success, his preference for violence and confrontation over compromise, his rigidity and inflexibility that makes the acceptance of change nearly impossible together serve to make him a type that JanMohamed has said "depicts the internal tensions of the entire society."⁴⁵ And it is these internal tensions--highlighted, intensified and finally exasperated by the arrival of the missionaries and the colonial government--that are largely responsible for Umuofia's collapse.

The novel divides unevenly into three parts. Part One, which constitutes some sixty percent of the narrative, supplies much of the detail regarding Igbo society before the arrival of the first Europeans. Part Two covers the seven-year period of Okonkwo's exile to Mbanta among his mother's people following his accidental killing of a clansman, ironically during a funeral ritual for the victim's father. In this section the arrival of the

⁴⁴Nkosi and Soyinka 12.

⁴⁵JanMohamed 163.

missionaries, first in Mbanta and then in Umuofia, is described in close detail. Also related is the story of the conversion of Okonkwo's son, Nwoye. The climactic Part Three then focuses on Okonkwo's return to Umuofia after his period of exile has expired. During his absence both the missionaries and the colonial government have arrived and established themselves in the village, affecting changes in the traditional communal life and order that appall and disgust Okonkwo. It is his resistance to these changes that rapidly leads to his destruction.

Okonkwo's character has already been discussed extensively by others. Important for our present concern is that he is a man obsessed with a near-fanatical need to succeed. Brought up in a society that values strength and individual achievement by a father who was according to that society's standards a failure, Okonkwo is driven largely by fear of repeating his father's failure. Consequently he hates and looks down on everything reminiscent of his father, particularly "gentleness" and "idleness".⁴⁶ For instance, he dislikes the breaks of leisure that the seasonal festivals tend to impose on him, preferring instead to get back to his farm work (TFA 27). He is impatient with his eldest son, Nwoye, whom he perceives as lazy (TFA 10) and womanish (TFA 46). He fears showing affection (TFA 20). He is, as well, impatient with men less successful than himself (TFA 19). He even regards his maternal kinsmen as "womanly" because they will not take 'manly' action to drive the Christian converts from their midst (TFA 113). Ultimately it is this fear of appearing weak that goads Okonkwo into participating in the sacrificial killing of Ikemefuna (TFA 43), despite Ezeudu's warnings to have no hand in it (TFA 40). It is, as well, this same valorizing of manliness that comes between him and his gentle son, Nwoye, until it drives the boy from

⁴⁶Achebe, Things Fall Apart 10. Further citations are given parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as TFA.

home and village into the arms of the Christian missionaries (TFA 107-8). It instills in Okonkwo a rigidity and inflexibility that makes compromise and acceptance of change, even desirable change, impossible.

Most critical readers agree that the tragic story of Ikemefuna is central to Achebe's thematic purposes. Tim Bascom likens Ikemefuna to "an archetypal Christ-figure, an innocent sacrificed as an atonement for crimes that are not his own."⁴⁷ If he is a Christ-figure, however, he is an imperfect one, for his 'sacrifice' is not an expiation that brings redemption for either Okonkwo or Igbo society. It is, rather, symptomatic of the cruelty and inherent weakness in both Okonkwo and traditional society that will eventually bring both down. Lyn Innes, on the other hand, sees Ikemefuna as an idealization of Igbo society in whom masculine and feminine attributes are successfully integrated.⁴⁸ Consequently his destruction by the tribe is "a realistic dramatisation of the clan's inability to maintain a harmonious balance between male and female principles".⁴⁹ Both Bascom and Innes agree that Ikemefuna's victimization by Igbo society, linked directly in Nwoye's mind with the victimization of twins abandoned to die in the evil forest (TFA 43), is the pivotal act of the novel which, as Innes has said, "finally alienates Nwoye from the clan and Okonkwo and leads him to seek a more humane community among the Christians."⁵⁰ Moreover, this alienation of Nwoye and all of the other marginalized like him--the efulefu or failures who must bear society's scorn, the mother of twins who must first suffer through pregnancy and the pangs of childbirth then suffer again as the fruit

⁴⁷Tim Bascom, "The Black African and the 'White Man's God' in Things Fall Apart: Cultural Repression or Liberation?" Commonwealth 11.1 (1988): 71.

⁴⁸Innes, Chinua Achebe 29. As she points out, Ikemefuna is both a skillful hunter and talented musician (TFA 20); through his example he encourages in Nwoye the sort of masculine attributes Okonkwo desires in his son (TFA 37); yet he is also gentle enough to be sympathetic to little Obiageli when she breaks her water pot (TFA 31).

⁴⁹Innes, Chinua Achebe 29.

⁵⁰Innes, Chinua Achebe 29.

of her womb is abandoned to the evil forest, the outcast osu who are forced to live on the fringes of a society in which they can never participate but from which they can never escape--leads to neither a natural purging from traditional society of these cruel elements nor to the evolution of a more humane society through the acculturation of Christian values. Rather it leads eventually to the total collapse of that society.

Bascom raises the question of whether it is Christianity itself that is responsible for this collapse. Innes hints that it may be. She notes, for example, that the text stresses the fact that it is a "'callow'" Nwoye who is attracted to Christianity and takes the name of Isaac at baptism, failing to recognize the parallels between the Old Testament story and the tragedy of Ikemefuna. She sees in this irony a reminder of and commentary on "aspects of Christianity of which . . . Nwoye is unaware",⁵¹ suggesting other parallel instances of institutional cruelty in biblical Christianity. Certainly Nwoye does not fully understand Christianity when he embraces it. His initial attraction to the religion has nothing to do with its doctrines, which he did not understand anyway. It is, rather, the emotional appeal, "the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow."

The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul--the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth. (TFA 104)

⁵¹Innes, Chinua Achebe 176, n6.

The text clearly suggests that the new religion has something to offer, something obviously lacking in traditional society. Its appeal is initially to the marginalized and the sensitive like Nwoye. Occasionally it also appeals to other people of standing in the community, such as Ogbuefi Ugonna, a "worthy man . . . who had taken two titles" (TFA 123). Achebe maintains a neutral stand on why such a "worthy man" would join the new faith. Reference is made to the trade benefits that accompanied the arrival of the white man, but there is also the suggestion of "a growing feeling that there might be something in" the new religion after all (TFA 126). Indeed, Achebe's own family history, which has significantly influenced his portrayal of Christianity, would indicate that genuine faith was at least as frequent a factor in facilitating conversion as was anticipation of advantages to be gained in the new colonial society. Further, particularly under the leadership of Mr. Brown and Mr. Kiaga, there is nothing overtly confrontational about the new faith. Rather, both Brown and Kiaga are eager to cultivate and maintain peaceful relations with the non-Christian majority, treading "softly" on the faith of the clan, cultivating friendships with its "great men", and acting frequently to restrain the more zealous members of their community from provoking its wrath (TFA 126). Since these first missionaries primarily seek co-existence; since they are more or less respectful of the clan and its ways, challenging only its cruel practices; and since they cultivate good will with the leaders of the clan I am inclined to agree with Bascom when he states "it is not the white man's religion that has resulted in this cultural collapse. It is their ethnocentrism."⁵² Achebe posits nothing in the nature of the Gospel message itself that precipitates Umuofia's collapse. Rather, it is the assumptions and attitudes of the missionaries towards the

⁵²Bascom 73.

indigenous culture--Smith's in particular--combined with the support and growing prestige of the new colonial society, which denigrate and undermine it, gradually fragmenting a once unified society.

Brown and his successor, Smith, are representative of two of Luzbetak "orientations" of mission models. By orientation Luzbetak does not necessarily mean clearly defined policies. Rather, he means the attitudes, assumptions, and systems of motivation underlying and guiding the work of evangelization. Such models, he says, are "exteriorized in the priorities, strategies, and approaches of those engaged in mission."⁵³ Brown, the first European missionary to settle in Umuofia, is indicative of what Luzbetak describes as the accommodational orientation while Smith, his successor, is clearly an example of mission that is ethnocentric in nature. Both are sincere in their beliefs and whole-heartedly committed to the evangelizing mission. Both are equally convinced of the righteousness of their aims and their methods. And both, willingly or not, contribute to undermining the cohesion and authority of traditional Igbo society.

Brown and Kiaga, the first missionaries to establish themselves in Mbanta and Umuofia respectively, are representative of the missionary strategy of accommodation with local culture and customs. Presumably they are the white missionary and his interpreter whose arrival together with five other African companions caused a minor and short-lived sensation among the people of Mbanta. The six Africans in the group are apparently strangers to this part of Igboland, a fact consistent with CMS missionary strategies of the time.⁵⁴ The interpreter, for instance, is

⁵³Luzbetak, 64.

⁵⁴One of the consequences of the ill-fated Niger Expedition of 1841 was the recognition of the need for indigenous missionary agents--meaning native-born Africans--whose immune systems could tolerate the West African environment. Many of these agents were consequently drawn from among converts in the community of freed slaves and their descendents, who had been settled in and around Freetown in Sierra

said to be an Igbo man, though "his dialect was different and harsh to the ears of Mbanta", while another member of the group though African does not speak Igbo, indicating that he comes from different ethnic origins (TFA 102). The interpreter's linguistic shortcomings, epitomized by his ridiculous use of a word to indicate "myself" which to the people of Mbanta means "my buttocks", provides a source of amusement for the local people. It also provides a derogatory weapon when the missionaries attack and dismiss the local gods as mere "pieces of wood and stone" and preach seemingly contradictory and incomprehensible doctrines such as that of the Trinity, which leave many of the local people thinking the missionaries "mad" (TFA 102-4). Finally a further indication that these African missionaries may be 'Sierra Leonians', Yorubas, or other coastal Africans is suggested by their initial desire to meet with "the king of the village" not long after their arrival in Mbanta (TFA 105), which Joseph McLaren sees as indicating general unfamiliarity with the republican nature of Igbo society as opposed to the more hierarchical social structures found throughout Yorubaland where missionary activity had already been going on for many years.⁵⁵ Taken together, these seemingly minor details add up to suggest the potential for cultural misunderstanding.

Once they have established themselves in Umuofia and Mbanta respectively, Brown and Kiaga preach an egalitarian Gospel. While they are generally respectful of local traditions and practices, in their Church they welcome the outcasts of society. Their congregation consists initially of the efulefu or "excrement of the clan"; as the priestess Chielo describes them (TFA 101); and other marginalized

Leone. Among the freed slaves were people from all West African ethnic groups, who often preserved their traditional language even as they assimilated many European ways. See Adrian Hastings, The Church in Africa 1450-1950 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 338-93.

⁵⁵Joseph McLaren, "Missionaries and Converts: Religion and Colonial Intrusion in Things Fall Apart," The Literary Griot 10.2 (Fall 1998): 52-3.

members of society, such as the woman heavy with child whose history of bearing twins has made her unwelcome in the home of her husband (TFA 107) and the outcast osu with whom the free-born are strictly forbidden by taboo from having anything to do (TFA 111-2). They also rescue abandoned twins from the evil forest, though as the text indicates are careful to avoid the sort of conflict that bringing these children into the village would inevitably cause (TFA 110).

While they are generally respectful of local traditions and practices there is still ambivalence in the attitudes of these missionaries towards certain local practices. At times they seem to make efforts to accommodate local customs and practices, particularly in their liturgical life. The text notes, for example, that the sacrament of Holy Communion has been rendered in Igbo as the "Holy Feast" to better fit the understanding of the indigenous people and that Ugonna, the converted man of title even brings his drinking-horn along to a Communion service as a signification of the social importance of the occasion (TFA 123). Both details, small though they may be, are indicative of a need perceived by the missionaries to express aspects of Christian practice and doctrine in cultural terms appropriate to their proselytes. Yet in the same paragraph it is noted that Ugonna has also "cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away" upon joining the Christian community (TFA 123). Presumably this gesture is one that would have come from the urgings of the missionaries, and if it is something encouraged--or perhaps required--, then it is an odd gesture. The system of titles by itself is not necessarily inconsistent with the content of the Gospel. It does not, for example, contradict the egalitarian nature of the Gospel message. All denominations of Christianity are to some extent hierarchical, from the episcopal structure of Orthodoxy and Roman and Anglo-Catholicism to the largely democratic congregational

churches. Even the hierarchical structure of the master-slave relationship is not necessarily inconsistent with the Gospel, as Paul's letter to Philemon demonstrates.⁵⁶ As long as due respect is afforded to the person as an individual, standing within a social hierarchy is immaterial. Therefore missionary opposition to the system of titles, which Ugonna's gesture implies, is indicative of one of those small instances of interference in a cultural matter of greater significance to the stability of society than the missionaries are able to appreciate.

Accommodations in the form of incorporating specific cultural artifacts into liturgical practice (i.e. the drinking-horn) are meaningful gestures but nevertheless penetrate only the first and second levels of culture, the levels of form and function. However, failure to accommodate the title system, a cultural artifact seemingly rooted in the psychology of the society, inevitably upsets the cohesiveness of that society. It is a failure, on the part of the missionaries, arising less out of malevolence than ignorance. As outsiders they are unable to appreciate or comprehend the importance of certain practices and therefore not really competent to judge whether or not such practices are consistent with the Gospel message. The result, as Obierika laments, is tantamount to putting "a knife on the things that held us together" (TFA 125), which contributes inevitably to the collapse of traditional society.

Another example of the failure of missionary-imposed accommodation as opposed to internally cultivated contextualization is found in Brown's attempts to 'translate' the European Christian concept of God into terms associated with the Igbo pantheon. Although the term

⁵⁶This is not to suggest that Christianity sanctions slavery. Indeed, Paul's letter clearly indicates that freeing Onesimus would be the proper course of action for Philemon to follow as a Christian. Rather, while Paul suggests that conversion per se does not require the slave-owner to free his slaves, it does impose an obligation to treat the slave as a brother in Christ.

'translation' is used today to refer to approaches to contextualization,⁵⁷ Luzbetak notes that traditionally translation is a form of accommodation.⁵⁸ Ideally, translational approaches to mission seek to re-express the Gospel message through the language and cultural practices of the target culture. As David Bosch has shown, the early dissemination of the Gospel from its Jewish origins to the Greeks, Thracians, Egyptians, and Romans, and in the post-apostolic churches to the even more diverse Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Maronite cultural milieus are all good examples of the same Gospel message finding its own form of expression in various cultural circumstances to which it was carried.⁵⁹ However, from the post-Constantine Church through to the latter twentieth century, translation as a form of accommodation has too often been imposed from the outside by people who were often not conscious of the culturally-conditioned nature of their assumptions about God and who failed frequently to appreciate the different understandings of seemingly similar beliefs that their potential proselytes held.

In the novel, for example, Brown's attempts to appropriate Akunna's understanding of Chukwu from the Igbo pantheon in order to explain the Christian concept of God result in utter failure. He latches on to the Igbo concept of Chukwu as the "'one Supreme god who made heaven and earth'" (TFA 126) and attempts to equate the Christian God with this deity. Innes has suggested that the scene in part

⁵⁷Lamin Sanneh devotes an entire book to the subject (Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989]), contending that Christianity "from its origins, identified itself with the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew, and from that position came to exert a dual force in its historical development. One was the resolve to relativize its Judaic roots, . . . [t]he other was to destigmatize Gentile culture and adopt that culture as a natural extension of the life of the new religion" (1). Also, Robert Schreier (Constructing Local Theologies [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985] 6) and Stephen Bevans (Models of Contextual Theology [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992] 30) both cite translational models as the most common form of contextual theology today.

⁵⁸Luzbetak 179.

⁵⁹David Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991) 448.

reveals the arrogance of the European missionaries, who "will never dream that they have anything to learn from Africans--who may be studied but never imitated."⁶⁰ While I agree that the European is unconscious of cultural conditioning behind his concept of God, I think Innes overstates the degree of arrogance. Rather, like Neil Ten Kortenaar, I find that what is most remarkable about the scene given the differences in their beliefs "is how they can discuss and learn from each other at all, as they clearly do".⁶¹ Their mutual respect and toleration, as contrasted with the fanaticism of Smith and Okonkwo, represent mutual learning even while there remains misunderstanding. Because I believe there is in fact learning taking place I feel Innes's earlier comments elsewhere are closer to the truth, namely that Brown's appropriation of Chukwu represents "both his sincere attempt to communicate and his failure to do so."⁶² In appropriating the name of the Igbo deity Brown borrows only "the formal and denotative qualities of that term" while putting aside or rejecting the "connotations" which for Akunna are "an intrinsic part of the significance of Chukwu".⁶³ What the passage suggests is the "difficulty of bridging the gap between two cultures merely by translating the vocabulary of one into that of the other."⁶⁴ It indicates the missionary's failure, due to his own cultural bias, to recognize the truth of the Gospel message--what the early Church Fathers called the logoi spermatikoi or germ of Jesus's message⁶⁵--already present and active in Igbo culture. What is necessary for the process of

⁶⁰Innes, Chinua Achebe 22.

⁶¹Neil Ten Kortenaar, "How the Centre is Made to Hold in Things Fall Apart," Postcolonial Literatures: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott, ed. Michael Parker and Roger Starkey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 32.

⁶²Innes, "Language, Poetry and Doctrine in Things Fall Apart," Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, ed. C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978) 122.

⁶³Innes, "Language" 122.

⁶⁴Innes, "Language" 122.

⁶⁵Quoted in Luzbetak 73.

evangelization to succeed is not to wrap the European notion of God in Igbo terms but rather to allow the Gospel to find its own expression in the Igbo context. Otherwise Brown and Akunna wind up talking past each other.

While Brown and Kiaga represent missionary attempts to accommodate indigenous cultures, Smith is a straightforward example of ethnocentric paternalism bordering on racism. In applying this label I do not intend to imply in him or in his evangelical mission any sinister intentions. In fact Smith is quite sincere in his beliefs regarding the need of the Africans for redemption. Rather, in line with Luzbetak's understanding of mission orientations I am pointing to the nature of the attitudes, assumptions, and priorities that inform, define, and direct his missionary activities. Ethnocentrism, as Luzbetak points out, is a tendency "to regard the ways and values of one's own society as the normal, right, proper, and certainly the best way of thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing things",⁶⁶ and in the present context, of understanding and communicating with God. In its more extreme forms it can become a sort of xenophobia leading to inexcusable religious and cultural imperialism. Insofar as Smith is convinced of the debased and evil nature of Igbo culture he is just such a religious and cultural imperialist. From the moment Smith is introduced into the narrative we are told that he "saw things as black and white. And black was evil" (TFA 130). For him the world is a "battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal combat with the sons of darkness" (TFA 130). He believes that all truth, all goodness and justice--in other words all revelation--are to be found only in Christianity, and anything that deviates from his version of Christianity is the work of "the prophets of Baal", whom he is determined to slay (TFA 130). He literally finds almost nothing redeeming about traditional Igbo society and he will brook nothing that

⁶⁶Luzbetak 65.

smells of "compromise and accommodation" with what he considers paganism (TFA 130), which is precisely how he views the policies of his predecessor.⁶⁷

Significantly, as Smith appears in the narrative to replace the ailing Brown, the African evangelist Kiaga also disappears from the story. Smith's rigorous condemnation of Brown and his methods and the simultaneous disappearance of Kiaga echoes a crisis in the Nigerian mission in the 1880s and early 1890s,⁶⁸ which saw African leadership in the Church gradually undermined and eventually purged from the hierarchy by a younger generation of educated, puritanical Europeans who on the one hand resented African control of the Church and on the other were appalled by what they saw as an alarming lack of doctrinal discipline among the African missionaries. Among other things this new generation opposed activities aimed at fostering "material scientific progress" for Africans, insisting that it compromised doctrinal purity and only encouraged Africans to mimic the worst characteristics of European civilization.⁶⁹ They were often suspicious of a proselyte's reasons for conversion, fearing that the material advantages to be gained in colonial society, such as via the sort of European education the mission schools were

⁶⁷His attitude towards accommodation is also reminiscent of Gustav Warneck, the late-nineteenth-century German Protestant missiologist, who dismissed it as "whitewashed paganism" (quoted in Luzbetak 68).

⁶⁸See E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966) 205-238; also J. F. A. Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) 233-74. The move towards employing Africans as agents of missionary activity led to the ordination of Samuel Ajayi Crowthers, a freed slave who was a member of the 1841 Niger Expedition, first as an Anglican priest in 1843 and subsequently as the first Anglican bishop of West Africa in 1864. For much of the remainder of the nineteenth century Bishop Crowthers and other Africans--albeit mostly assimilated Africans--were at the forefront of Anglican/CMS missionary activity in West Africa. However, changes in the political and economic order, along with medical advances that made the environment more tolerable for Europeans who were willing to challenge 'the white man's grave', resulted ultimately in a subordination of native African influence to European domination in the missions.

⁶⁹Ajayi 251.

offering or through other connection with the missions, were often a greater factor in the conversion process than was sincerity of faith. They insisted more than their predecessors on doctrinal purity, which is the underlying logic behind Smith's insistence on the "importance of fewness" in his Church membership: "Narrow is the way and few the number. To fill the Lord's holy temple with an idolatrous crowd clamouring for signs was a folly of everlasting consequence. Our Lord used the whip only once in His Life--to drive the crowd away from His church" (TFA 130).

This new generation also often harbored racist ideas, seeing African missionaries--often descendents of freed slaves resettled in Sierra Leone--as being of inferior stock. They represented "the worst species of the African races", those whose ancestors had been sold into slavery by their own people precisely because they were "the scum" of their societies.⁷⁰ This mediocre level of their genetic breeding, so went the logic, consequently left them largely incompetent for positions of leadership. As we have already noted, the text implies in several ways that Kiaga and his fellow African missionaries are possibly 'Sierra Leonian' descendents of the freed slaves, namely through the odd dialect of Igbo that they speak and their seeming unfamiliarity with the republican nature of Igbo structures of governance. Further, his association with Brown and other accommodationists would have made him a target of any such purge.

Smith's self-righteousness and emphasis on doctrinal purity at times also amounts to cruelty, not much different from the cruelty that Achebe points to in Igbo culture. For one, it sometimes leads him to denigrate individuals for the sake of maintaining discipline. In one incident, for instance, Smith is said to be "filled with wrath" and suspends a young female member of the congregation for

⁷⁰Ayandele 216.

allowing her "heathen husband" to mutilate the corpse of their dead child, who had been declared an ogbanje, or child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother's womb to be born again (TFA 130). In his haste to put a stop to this work of the Devil he shows no compassion for the grieving mother who has already lost four children. His rigidity thus is no more Christian than Okonkwo's.

Tacitly and directly Smith also supports and approves of confrontations with local practices and beliefs that eventually undermine social cohesion. Over-zealous members of the community who had previously been restrained by Brown and Kiaga "now flourished in full favour" (TFA 131). A case in point is Enoch, whose 'killing' of an egwugwu spirit triggers the clash directly leading to the burning of the church, which precipitates Okonkwo's final destruction. The fuller scene shows on the one hand that despite the tensions between the two communities there is room for compromise and harmony. It also suggests that the arrogant intolerance of the Christians often makes compromise impossible. In the novel the festival of the earth goddess happens to fall on a Sunday, so the egwugwu masqueraders are out roaming the villages at a time when the Christians are gathered for worship. Because it is forbidden for a woman to come in contact with an egwugwu the Christian women are unable to return home from Church services. The egwugwu had already agreed to withdraw for a while so that the women could pass when Enoch chooses to boast and taunt them. The resulting confrontation, which one can only imagine would measure up to Smith's belief in "slaying the prophets of Baal" (TFA 130); results in the greatest possible affront to local beliefs--the unmasking of an egwugwu, which is tantamount to killing the spirit--and leads quickly to the destruction of the church building by the outraged community. The scene of that final confrontation further emphasizes the arrogance and intolerance of the missionaries. While the egwugwu are bent

on razing the church compound in reprisal for Enoch's sacrilege they are nevertheless prepared to allow the missionary to continue to live amongst them and "worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers" (TFA 134). Smith, however, is not of the same compromising spirit. His choice, instead, is continued confrontation.

It is this last incident that leads to the Okonkwo's personal destruction as well as the final collapse of Umuofian society. The text notes that not long after the destruction of the Church, Smith paid a visit to the District Commissioner and "they had a long discussion" (TFA 136), implying that the subsequent arrest and punishment of the leading men of Umuofia is largely at his behest. During the initial stages of the crisis, in fact, it is mentioned that Smith wanted to send for the DC and his court messengers, "but they had gone on tour the previous day" (TFA 132). Here the text is hinting at a closer relationship between missionary and colonial government that was largely unknown in the earlier days and other locations of the Nigerian mission. Missing from the relationship between missionary and administrator are the tensions that often characterized the relationship in other regions. This is due in part to the fact that, unlike elsewhere the arrival of the missionaries and the administration into Igboland were largely simultaneous.⁷¹ Since they had no pre-colonial relationship with traditional societies as they had elsewhere, the missionaries more often made distinctions between their role and that of the colonial administrators. Though they frequently remained critical of the administrators, they were also more frequently agreeable to supporting the functions of the colonial government in the belief that "it was doing a lot to improve and elevate the people".⁷²

⁷¹Ayandele 170-1.

⁷²Ayandele 171.

Brown embodies something of the earlier generation of missionary and its wariness of the colonial government. The text notes, for example, that he established a school and hospital in Umuofia, partly for the purpose of circumventing traditional beliefs in his efforts to proselytize. But his purpose in offering European-style literacy education was not simply to enable people to read the Bible. Rather, he recognized the urgency of raising up a generation of literate people who would be able fulfill the clerical needs of the colonial government and courts, empowering them to retain at least a semblance of local control over their own affairs lest "strangers would come from other places to rule them" (TFA 128). Smith, on the other hand, is more willing and prepared to enlist the support of the colonial government to fulfill his own ends.

The destruction of Okonkwo in the end of the novel and the simultaneous collapse of traditional society then is connected directly with missionary policy. His inability to recognize his own weakness, to be flexible, and to adapt reflects a similar inflexibility in traditional society that prohibits it from likewise recognizing its own deficiencies and assimilating those positive values that Christianity has to offer. But the fault lies not exclusively with traditional society. For the missionaries, too, because of their own ethnocentrism fail to recognize the 'germ of Jesus's message' already active in traditional society and instead seek to impose their own culturally-determined interpretation of the Gospel. The relationship between Smith's ethnocentrism and the denigration of traditional practices on the one hand and the eventual undermining of the cohesion of traditional society is fairly obvious. His furious and continued attacks against elements of traditional society that he finds inconsistent with the Gospel, backed up at significant moments by the colonial organs of power, results in the humiliation of traditional society, gradually undermining its validity and

authority among the people. Ironically Brown and the benevolent intentions of his accommodational approach to mission in the end are less confrontational but nevertheless just as fatal for traditional society as is Smith's straightforward ethnocentrism. For by usurping the authority of the local community to contextualize the Gospel message themselves, by imposing from outside the culture his own understanding of that message he inadvertently undermines the psychological integrity of the culture as a whole, weakening the bonds that hold it together and ultimately precipitating its collapse.

Chapter Seven

Chinua Achebe (2)

Arrow of God: Achebe's Failure of Nerve

As Achebe's Arrow of God moves towards resolution of the final crisis which sees the people of Umuaro desert Ezeulu, their chief priest, and his cult¹ of Ulu for the Christian god, the narrator notes that Moses Unachukwu, leading member of the Christian convert community, "had come into full favour with Goodcountry",² the local catechist. Earlier the two had been locked in a bitter disagreement over Christian affronts to local beliefs. Goodcountry had advocated challenging and denigrating the local religion at every opportunity, while Unachukwu urged respect for traditional culture and religion as also being a legitimate deposit of God's revelation. What seems early in the novel to be a serious ideological clash over methods of evangelization and over the more fundamental question of what is and is not consistent with the message of the Christian Gospel is reduced in these closing chapters to little more than an internal power struggle, with the former antagonists in fact on the same ideological side. This is unfortunate, for in choosing to reduce the Goodcountry-Unachukwu conflict to this level Achebe passes up a perfect opportunity not only to critique the ethnocentrism of past missionary efforts for the ways in which they denigrated indigenous cultures, but also to explore what forms a truly contextualized African Christianity might take.

Achebe's third novel, Arrow of God appeared in 1964. It forms the second part of a trilogy with Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease that focuses on the experiences of several generations, from shortly before the arrival of

¹I am using the word cult here without its contemporary pejorative nuances, to simply designate a particular religion characterized by a distinct system of belief, worship, and ritual.

²Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God (London: Heinemann, 1964) 270. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

the missionaries and colonial government in Igboland towards the end of the nineteenth century to the immediate post-independence period of the 1960s.³ Set in the 1920s, this story focuses on Ezeulu, Chief Priest of Ulu, the principal deity of the six villages of Umuaro. The missionaries and colonial administration have arrived and established themselves in neighboring Okperi, though their presence has for the most part had little direct impact on the daily life of Umuaro. As spiritual leader of Umuaro Ezeulu's primary duty is to perform the rituals of his god. This includes watching for the rise of the new moon that signals the changes of the seasons, which he marks by eating one of the twelve sacred yams that represent each new moon. His duties also include announcing the dates for the major festivals that mark the planting and harvest seasons, and performing the rituals of those festivals. Imprisonment by the District Officer for "[r]efusing to cooperate with the Administration" (218) by not accepting appointment as a warrant chief causes him to miss announcing two new moons. His stubborn refusals to deviate from the ritual cycle of eating only one sacred yam each month--stirred partly by his anger arising out of a dispute with the local community--delays announcement of the New Yam Feast, precipitating a crisis that could lead to famine for years to come and that ultimately drives many members of the community to abandon Ulu and seek the blessing of the new Christian god for their harvest. His position in the community undermined, Ezeulu eventually disintegrates into madness as Christianity usurps the central role of his cult in society. The final sentence of the novel then notes that "[t]hereafter, any yam that was harvested in the man's fields was harvested in the name of the son", (287), a testimony intended by the author to simultaneously indicate the extent to which Christianity would overpower

³"An Interview with Chinua Achebe," trans. Judith E. McDowell, ed. 1962, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997), 8.

traditional religion and the degree to which traditional life would be inverted by colonial domination.⁴

This novel is indeed a rich text that brings together a multiplicity of interrelated themes and dramatic interests. At its broadest it is a celebration of traditional religion that meets the challenge of answering a Joseph Conrad or Joyce Cary by demonstrating that African religious rites and rituals are not simply "an orgy or a bloodbath, but a duty responsibly performed for the glory of the gods and the alleviation of the tribe's estate."⁵ Focusing on Ezeulu, Achebe explores how religious beliefs and practices function to bring security and adhesion to the community and how they interlink the individual and the community. His detailed description of the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves, for example, depicts not a frenzied mass of hysterically violent savages indulging in orgiastic rituals, but a human community coming together to approach God in the manner and form through which He has revealed Himself to them, seeking both forgiveness for their individual and communal transgressions and blessings for themselves individually and communally. Viewed in its entirety the ritual is in ways poignantly reminiscent of the Christian rituals of penitence that punctuate the Palm Sunday and Holy Week festivities. Similarly his descriptions of the simpler daily rituals such as the sharing of kola nut are not mysterious rituals of witchery but expressions of fellowship and gratitude perhaps as solemn as any Eucharistic celebration. The manner in which he describes these rituals and festivals clearly demonstrates they are neither fetish nor juju but, as Lyn Innes has said, represent "a metaphysic, constructed and questioned by Igbo intellectuals and leaders, a system of beliefs fashioned to respond to and balance the demands of

⁴Michel Fabre, "Chinua Achebe on Arrow of God," 1973, Conversations with Chinua Achebe 50-1.

⁵M. M. Mahood, "Idol of the Den: Achebe's Arrow of God," Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, ed. C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1978) 180.

individual and communal well-being and to acknowledge the limits of human knowledge and power."⁶ As a system of religious belief and practice it is perhaps an even greater integral part of Igbo culture and serves a more vital and unifying role than does Christianity in its modern European context.

At the same time that he celebrates the vital role of traditional religion in society Achebe also examines the relationship between religion and political power, which in the context and structure of Igbo society David Carroll says are "inseparable".⁷ A major function of religion in society is to bring it security and stability. By its nature therefore religious authority is vested with tremendous power. As situations change, society's needs likewise evolve. What was once a threat to stability or security may cease to threaten, while new sources of danger may suddenly appear that precipitate challenges to the established power and serve as an impetus for change. Because situations are in flux traditional roles and traditional centers of power likewise shift and new rivalries develop.

This is the manner in which religion is portrayed in this novel. The arrival of the Europeans precipitates a challenge to the established order, which in turn initiates a shift in power. As the shifts occur, however, Achebe maintains a degree of authorial neutrality, allowing the complexities and contradictions of the situation to shade the decisions of the characters rather than overtly siding with either. The reader is therefore left to wonder, for example, if Ezeulu is simply an honest priest striving to faithfully fulfill the duties of his office? Or is he seeking to jealously guard his power and fend off challenges from his priestly and political rivals? Similarly, are Nwaka and Ezidemili seeking to undermine

⁶C. L. Innes, Chinua Achebe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 83.

⁷David Carroll, Chinua Achebe 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980) 94.

Ezeulu's position only to enhance their own power? Or are they correct in accusing the priest, as Emmanuel Obiechina has suggested, of harboring authoritarian intentions that conflict with the republican nature of Igbo society?⁸ It is these tensions, rivalries, and temptations, which the possession and exercise of such power can spawn, that the novel explores and dramatizes.

In addition to these major themes that focus on intracommunal power politics, Achebe also draws attention to the domestic politics of Ezeulu's multi-generational polygamous family. Unlike Things Fall Apart, which deliberately sought to reassert the dignity of traditional life while maintaining a credible honesty that avoided romanticizing, in this novel he is more willing to explore the tensions and rivalries of the traditional family structure. For example, whereas the earlier novel stressed the overall domestic harmony and cooperation of Okonkwo's three wives and their respective children, in this novel Achebe pays more attention to the petty rivalries between senior and junior wife as well as between their children as they jockey for favor or advantage with the father. Then there are the conflicts and misunderstandings between father and at times jealous grown-up sons, and the tensions arising with in-laws over marital discord between their respective children.

Clearly, as Obiechina has pointed out, not all of the conflicts and tensions of the novel are a result of the culture-contact between European and African,⁹ but all are in some way or another aggravated by it. The conflict between Ezeulu and Nwaka, for example, is on one level an internal power struggle occasioned by a land dispute with neighboring Okperi. That conflict in turn is intensified by Ezeulu's cooperation with the colonial authority that leads to the dispute being settled in Okperi's favor. Similarly,

⁸Emmanuel Obiechina, "The Human Dimension of History in Arrow of God," Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe 174.

⁹Obiechina 171.

the rivalry between Ezeulu and Ezidemili for primacy in the religious life of Umuaro is also an internal power struggle. That struggle too is exacerbated by the outrage committed against a python, sacred to Ezidemili's god, by Ezeulu's mission-educated son who seeks to curry favor with the catechist. Then there is the matter of Edogo's defection to the side of his father's opponents in the community, which for the most part is caused by jealousy over what he sees as Ezeulu's attempt to manipulate succession to the chief priesthood to the favored son Nwafo. Ironically, Ezeulu's sending Oduche to the mission school is interpreted by Edogo as a maneuver in this conspiracy. Oduche's attendance at the school, as well, is perceived by the boy's mother as making him a "sacrifice to the white man" (56), adding resentment to an already tense marriage relationship. In one way or another, the European presence at least indirectly contributes to exacerbating the internal tensions and conflicts between the Chief Priest and his community, between father and sons, and between husband and wife.

Looking at the various major and minor themes of the novel the common thread that seems to tie them all together is the idea of 'change', and particularly change that affects the nature of power relationships. There are of course the dramatic changes of political, cultural, and religious significance that are foreshadowed by the arrival of the Europeans. There are as well the changes that have already taken place in Umuaro's situation which had originally given rise to the cult of Ulu and now challenges its relevance. Even many of the domestic rivalries, tensions, and crises are the result of changes in the family structure and the nature of the relationships: sons arrive at the age of maturity and social responsibility, themselves becoming husbands and fathers; daughters become wives of other men's sons and mothers of other men's children and grandchildren; a senior wife passes through

menopause and out of her fertile years, resulting in the unwilling ceding of her sexual status within the marital relationship to the junior wife. Just as not all of the tensions of the novel are caused by the arrival of the Europeans, so too not all of the changes--for better or worse--are related to their arrival, though the most significant changes are either directly or indirectly influenced by it. Particularly since the internal tensions and crises of Umuaro are religious in nature, it is the presence of the missionaries more than the colonial administrators that has immediate significant implications for the resolution of Umuaro's internal conflict. In the end it is the missionaries rather than the colonial administrators who are, as Carroll put it, "in direct competition with the priests and tribal deities for the loyalty of the people".¹⁰ Their presence contributes indirectly to inflaming the power struggle between Ezeulu and the alliance of Nwaka and Ezidemili, since the attendance of Ezeulu's son Oduche in the white man's school provides Ezeulu's rivals with further reason to question his intentions. Their presence also contributes directly to the resolution of the harvest crisis by offering an alternative to the cult of Ulu when Ezeulu's stubborn adherence to ritual, for questionable reasons, threatens to lead to famine. It is in part through the missionaries, therefore, that Achebe dramatizes the character, dynamics, and nature of change brought about by intercultural contact in the form of the encounter between Christianity and traditional beliefs, and in particular in the context of the colonial situation where the power relationship is unequal and the influence for the most part unidirectional.

To the extent that the missionaries in this novel have been discussed by literary critics, like the missionaries of Things Fall Apart they have generally been approached as representing a binary character in European attitudes

¹⁰Carroll 105.

towards African cultures. Their competing evangelization orientations have been discussed as polar opposites which mirror the competing attitudes of the colonial administration vis-à-vis a colonial policy of direct versus indirect rule. David Carroll, for instance, sees parallels between the political concerns of the administrators and the religious concerns of the missionaries in terms of the debate between direct and indirect rule. Captain Winterbottom, the district officer, like Ezeulu is a strong-minded authoritarian who is charged with the responsibility of implementing a colonial policy of indirect rule, of which he strongly disapproves. For him it is too unstable, too flexible, and too unpredictable. It is, in other words, too reductive of his status and power. In the context of the mission community, Carroll says, the focus is displaced but "the theme is the same: By what means are power and influence best exerted?"¹¹ There are, he continues, two alternatives. One is "the direct imposition of alien values which ignores the beliefs of the community;" while the other is "persuasion through negotiation with existing values." The first alternative is based on a belief in "the absoluteness of power, truth, and civilisation", and its opposite on the belief in "the relativity of these abstractions which are only realised through particular relationships. One is unilateral in its mode, the other dialectical."¹² Colonial rule and evangelization, then, display "the same tension between alternative modes of action."¹³

Although his focus is more directly on the dynamics of evangelization, Benedict Chiaka Njoku similarly sees the missionaries as representing a polarized split in approaches to evangelization. For him Goodcountry's is a "militant" evangelism,¹⁴ representing a Christianity of

¹¹Carroll 108.

¹²Carroll 108.

¹³Carroll 108.

¹⁴Benedict Chiaka Njoku, The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe: A Critical Study (New York: Peter Lang, 1984) 156.

"ethnocentrism and cultural bias" which will accept no attempts at reconciliation or accommodation with paganism.¹⁵ It is a religion of absolute truth vested in an absolute authority, of which he is the custodian and intermediary. Unachukwu, on the other hand, represents a Christianity of "peace" and "submission", not "violence" and "vandalism".¹⁶ His approach to evangelization, Njoku says, "calls for negotiation and persuasion rather than authoritarianism and force; it calls for change of heart rather than violent intrusion."¹⁷ Whereas Goodcountry's version of Christianity is "'unilateral,' authoritarian, dictatorial, and coercive", Unachukwu's is "persuasive and 'dialectical'".¹⁸

I am in general agreement with these assessments of Achebe's portrayal of the respective missionaries insofar as they reflect some of the outstanding differences between missionary activity that is ethnocentric in its orientation versus that which seeks accommodation with local culture. Clearly Goodcountry, like Smith in Things Fall Apart, is the sort of ethnocentric authoritarian that Njoku makes him out to be, while Unachukwu together with Brown and Kiaga before him is more open-minded and respectful of tradition. However, I am not convinced of the binary nature of the relationship between the two. When we look beneath the glaring differences that their public attitudes towards local religion project we see that rather than polar opposites, at their core the two have more in common than it at first seems. While Unachukwu (like Brown and Kiaga) may be more tolerant of local beliefs and practices and seeks to avoid conflict, he nevertheless shares with Goodcountry the same convictions regarding the 'superiority' of European Christianity and its monopoly on truth.

¹⁵Njoku 159.

¹⁶Njoku 157.

¹⁷Njoku 157.

¹⁸Njoku 159.

Although Achebe's missionaries in both novels are central to his thematic concerns, it is difficult to speak of them as characters. Their appearances are too brief to allow them to be roundly developed. Therefore they are better approached as types. Catechist John Jaja Goodcountry, as his name indicates,¹⁹ is representative of the thoroughly assimilated coastal African. At the same time he is representative of the ethnocentric missionary who views traditional African culture and religion with contempt. Goodcountry is not an Igbo. Rather he is from the Niger Delta region, "which had been in contact with Europe and the world for hundreds of years" (267).²⁰ Because of their location these Delta Africans were among the first to come in contact with the new flood of evangelical missionaries who arrived partly in response to the abolition movement in England in the late eighteenth century and in the aftermath of the ill-fated Niger Expedition of 1841. This newer missionary enterprise was inspired as much by the social gospel²¹ as it was by dreams of evangelization, and consequently their activities, in addition to preaching the Gospel, also included promotion of trade and the introduction of Western-style education. J. F. A. Ajayi suggests that though there was no great rush to join the Churches at the middle of the nineteenth century, there was enthusiasm among these coastal communities for aspects of Western learning, available in

¹⁹The character's name is in itself actually something of an irony. The Anglo names obviously suggest suppression of African identity before a more powerful European force. Yet the surviving African middle name, Jaja, seems to be a reference to Jaja, king of the Delta city-state of Opopo, who welcomed and encouraged Europeanization but was attached to indigenous religious traditions to the point of opposing the evangelization activities of the missionaries. See E. A. Ayandele, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966) 71-115.

²⁰See Ayandele 3. Catholic missionaries from Portugal had been active in the area from the fifteenth century, though their efforts did not make much headway and were eventually abandoned. Until the middle of the nineteenth century trade contacts, first in "sylvan products" and later in slaves, were the major form of contact between Europe and the coastal city-states.

²¹See David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) 283, 321-2.

the mission schools, that would facilitate attainment of material opportunities which accompanied expansion of British political, military, and economic power in the region, and this in turn led to the development of "a Western-educated and Christian middle class"--as Ajayi's sub-title suggests, a new elite--largely assimilated into a newly emerging, Europeanized colonial culture.²²

Goodcountry is a product of this colonial culture, and is extremely proud of his breeding. A second- or perhaps third-generation Christian, he boasts that his forebears had "fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana" (56). He even claims kinship to Joshua Hart (56), an actual nineteenth century Christian martyr at Bonny whose story was well known among Christians of the Delta region.²³ Being a product of the Delta colonial culture, he is also highly educated, to the degree that he speaks "the white man's language as if it was his own" (56).²⁴ In his own mind, at least, this sets him above the likes of his main rival in Umuaro, Unachukwu, whose command of English--though a source of prestige among his fellow Umuaroians--is in fact a pidgin that produces such syntactically and lexically malformed utterances as "Dat man wan axe master qeshon" (102). He tends to look down with smug disdain on such Igbo late-comers as "half-educated and half-converted" Christians (267).

²²J. F. A. Ajayi Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) xiii.

²³See Adrian Hastings The Church in Africa 1450-1950 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 334-5. Achebe's reference is to Joshua Hart, a Yoruba convert of the CMS who was killed at Bonny in late 1874 for his refusal to take part in a feast that included "'things sacrificed to the gods'" (335). His brutal death made him an inspiration for generations of confirmation candidates at Bonny, who reportedly used to pray "'Give us the firmness of Joshua'" (335).

²⁴See Ayandele 283-304; also Ajayi 140ff. According to Ajayi typically mission education in the mid- to latter-nineteenth century was conducted in English, though religious instruction was almost always done in the vernacular. Consequently, the further one's educational level advanced the greater the fluency in English the African inevitably achieved. Ayandele also points out that although the missions were not enthusiastic about engaging in higher education for Africans (288), popular demand for English education made it almost a necessity (292).

His Europeanized cultural background at times also becomes a barrier to understanding and communication between him and the people he purports to convert. He may speak their language, but as the text suggests, because he is culturally and socially isolated from the general community he is often unaware of what or why certain things are happening. He fails to understand, for instance, that the growth of his school is due in large measure to the realization by the local people of the benefits to be gained from knowing something of what "the white man knew" (269). The clearest example of communication hampered by the cultural gap is perhaps seen in his attacks on the cult of the sacred python. The text notes that from the time of his arrival in Umuaro Goodcountry

was not prepared to compromise with the heathen over such things as sacred animals. Within weeks of his sojourn in Umuaro he was ready for a little war against the royal python in the same spirit as his own people had fought and conquered the sacred iguana. (267)

In the first place it seems rather contradictory that the missionaries should attack with such vigor animal imagery in the indigenous religion when animal imagery similarly holds a significant position in Christian religious expression--one need only think of references to Jesus as the Pascal Lamb of God, the significance in the early Greek church of the fish as an acronym for the "Jesus Christ, God, Man, Savior", or the Biblical description of the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. More to the point, though, is the meanings he attaches to the python. While I do not necessarily agree with Brian Last when he says that Goodcountry is ignorant of the python's religious significance within traditional culture, it is obvious that

he imposes his own Western associations,²⁵ which include Satan and the primordial fall, in contrast to the sacred status which Robert Wren notes the python has held in Igbo culture since "time immemorial."²⁶ In doing so he does fail, as have many missionaries, to fully appreciate the depth of integration of the python within the psychology of the culture. It is the type of failure which can have tragic consequence not only for the success of the mission, but more importantly for the vitality of the culture itself.

This sort of arrogant missionary ethnocentrism also has an impact on the attitudes of the converts toward their traditional way of life. In the text this is exhibited through some of the changes seen in Oduche as a Christian convert. The most obvious is the outrage he commits against the sacred python, attempting to suffocate it in a wooden box so as to win the approval of the catechist (52-61). There are, however, smaller details referring to his daily behavior which are suggestive of more subtle changes in his outlook arising from the influence of the missionaries. These changes, in turn, are more culturally based than they actually have to do with the Gospel message. For example, there are the changes in Oduche's sense of modesty. Instead of the traditional "thin strip of cloth between the legs" typical for boys of his age and position, now he "always wore a loincloth of towelling material" (120) and at times a "white singlet" as well (51), suggesting that the traditional attire is somehow inconsistent with Christian notions of modesty. Then there is the final ceremony marking the wedding of his half-brother Obika, which Oduche refuses to participate in "so as not to offend the Catechist who preached against sacrifices" (145). His

²⁵Brian W. Last, "Literary Reactions to Colonialism: A Comparative Study of Joyce Cary, Chinua Achebe and John Updike," World Literature Written in English 22.2 (1983): 165.

²⁶Robert Wren, Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents, 1980) 78.

refusal to participate is ironic because just several pages earlier the text suggests that traditional religion promotes mores regarding pre- and extramarital sexual relations that strongly resemble Christian teaching. The issue of polygamy itself aside,²⁷ the novel hints that in fact Christianity and traditional Igbo practices both agree that "what was right was right" in terms of sexual relations, namely that marriage is its only proper context (142). The fact that both share a similar notion of sexual morality and the sanctity of marriage seems less relevant to the catechist than the form in which these morals are sanctioned, sanctified, and celebrated by the community.

If Goodcountry and his religion are ethnocentric, they are also authoritarian, patronizing, and paternalistic. Luzbetak notes that mission projects with an ethnocentric orientation at their most benevolent are paternalist.²⁸ Not only do they claim authority for their truth, they tend to look down on the receiving church as immature and incompetent in terms of ability to contextualize the Gospel message. This is the same sort of attitude that characterized much of the colonial ideology of the twentieth century. Among more idealistic Europeans the point of the colonial project was understood as one of preparing Africans to assume responsibility for themselves in the contemporary world, and the purpose of the colonial authority was to exercise this responsibility until such time as the Africans were deemed fit to take charge of themselves. The underlying assumption, of course, was that it was the European colonizer who was best equipped to determine if and when the African was prepared to take on that responsibility. Colonialist spokespersons such as Joyce Cary and Elspeth Huxley in their non-fictional

²⁷The text does not go into the question of whether polygamy-- long a sticking point for missionary activity--is in fact inconsistent with the Gospel. While the traditional churches have steadily maintained monogamy as the only Christian form of marriage, a strong case can be made for a Christian context for polygamous marriage.

²⁸Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 65.

continually refer to the duty of the European to assume responsibility for Africans while leading them, teaching them and otherwise preparing them for the day in the yet unforeseen future when they will be learned and mature enough in the ways of the modern world to manage their own affairs. Missionaries similarly often felt it their duty to assume responsibility for the African Church until such time as the new converts were sufficiently instructed in the faith to be prepared to lead themselves. Like their secular counterparts they often established local church councils made up of elders of the community, but because they did not trust the 'maturity' of their converts they retained for themselves final authority over the community as a whole and over religious discipline.

Goodcountry is a good example of this sort of missionary. Characteristically, he is dismissive of the local community's qualification to govern itself or to contextualize its own understanding of the Gospel message. He is mistrustful of local Christian leaders such as Unachukwu, whom he calls "half-educated and half-converted", considering them a potential threat that might "mislead a whole congregation when the pastor or catechist was weak" (267). In his confrontation with Unachukwu over the sacred python as well, he is patronizing and dismissive. Rather than answering the latter's use of traditional myth to suggest there is no compelling need from the standpoint of faith to confront the cult of the python, Goodcountry simply dismisses Unachukwu out of hand as "not fit to be heard in the house of God" (59), assuming that the veracity and falsity of their respective traditions is obvious for all to see. He similarly refuses to permit Unachukwu an opportunity to refute Oduche's rather feeble appeal to a scriptural text, instead further accusing him of preaching "heathen filth" (60).

Luzbetak and Aylward Shorter both suggest that the proper agent of contextualization in the mission church is

the local community of believers guided by the Holy Spirit. It is the mission of the local believers, Luzbetak says, "to permeate their own community and as instruments of the Holy Spirit to take part in transforming it into a community of other-Christians",²⁹ while Shorter similarly says that it is the responsibility of the members of the local community "to make their own choices and their own selections, and to become the agents of their own structural change."³⁰ The role of the "universal Church" represented by the missionary is in Luzbetak's words simply "to share its own experience, light, and judgment", to be a "consultant" who surrenders "genuine trust in the Holy Spirit and the local Christian community".³¹ Goodcountry, however, does not view the situation thus. People like Unachukwu, rather than being agents of the Holy Spirit are instead a "local stumbling-block" in his personal war against paganism (267). Further, just as Goodcountry is authoritarian and paternalistic in his treatment of the local community, he is treated similarly by the white church hierarchy. While he gives high priority to challenging the cult of the python, the white diocesan bishop does not "approve of such excess of zeal" (268), partly because such confrontation elsewhere had resulted in his receiving a rebuke from the Lieutenant Governor and an appeal to "apply the reins on his boys" (268).³² That the bishop in turn would respond by sending Goodcountry a "firm letter" (268) against overzealousness while also communicating to the priest of Idemili his sincere prayers that his people would one day "turn away from the worship of snakes and idols to the true religion" (269) is indicative of the patronizing attitude with which he views

²⁹Luzbetak 71.

³⁰Aylward Shorter, Toward a Theology of Inculturation (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988) 55.

³¹Luzbetak 70; my emphasis.

³²The use of the diminutive 'boys' in reference to native priests and catechists is itself another example of the way in which the Europeans viewed their native agents. Here, though, it is used by the colonial official rather than the bishop.

both. To the white bishop Goodcountry's 'enthusiasm' is indicative of the same excess of emotionalism we find in Cary's 'uncivilized' converts, which is suggestive of a still irrational faith not all that different from the irrational superstition he presumes Ezidemili's cult to be. Both fall short of civilized and rational European religion and need the European to teach them the proper way to commune with God.

Although we can agree with Carroll's and Njoku's assessments of Goodcountry as representative of a Christian mission that is unilateral, authoritarian, and ethnocentric, Moses Unachukwu is not, as they propose, representative of a Christian mission that is either accommodational or contextualizing in its approach to indigenous culture. Carroll and Njoku both seem to base their assessments primarily on the character's appeal to traditional myth in his arguments against Goodcountry's efforts to incite confrontation with the cult of the python. Certainly, like Brown and Kiaga before him, Unachukwu takes a more tolerant and nonconfrontational approach to intracommunal relations. He reasons, literally and figuratively, that the python has never "blocked [anyone's] way as he came to church" (60). The assertion acknowledges a tendency for religious toleration that has generally characterized traditional Igbo society,³³ a tendency which has been suggested as at least contributing

³³Don C. Ohadike, "Igbo Culture and History," Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Classics in Context Ser. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996) xliii. Also see Achebe's comments in J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1985, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 137. In addition, in Home and Exile (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; 11-13) Achebe relates a piece of local lore, the point of which is the traditional reluctance of Igbo villages "to foist its religious beliefs and practices on a neighbor" (12). Elsewhere ("Named for Victoria, Queen of England," 1973, Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays [New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1989] 32) he notes that when the missionaries first arrived in Ogidi, his ancestral home, they were welcomed into the home of his father's uncle and permitted for a time to operate from his compound. However, after a few days they were asked to leave, not because of the doctrines they espoused, but because their singing "was too sad to come from a man's house. My neighbors might think it was my funeral dirge."

in part to the collapse of traditional society.³⁴ At the same time it communicates a warning against provoking unnecessary confrontation. Further, his use of traditional myth; which the narrator calls strange for a convert (58),³⁵ is not actually indicative of an emerging dialectic between Christianity and traditional religion that might characterize a process of contextualization. Like other European myths and folktales which often contain reference to non-Christian gods, this particular myth is neither hostile to the Christian Gospel nor in conflict with it. Rather, it is a moral tale, in all probability similar to the folktales Achebe reports his devoutly Christian mother telling him as a child.³⁶ The lesson of the python concerning the preservation of communal unity and the dangers of needless confrontation are in themselves wholly consistent with the Gospel message. As a moral tale it is what Luzbetak has said missionaries with an eye to accommodation would probably see as one of those neutral and naturally good elements in non-Christian ways of life and were often willing to exploit for their evangelization purposes.³⁷ Unachukwu's appeal to the story's familiarity with his audience for the purpose of delivering the same moral message against unnecessary provocations in some ways resembles Brown's efforts in Things Fall Apart to use Chukwu as a starting point to engage in religious dialogue with Akunna.³⁸ However, the fact that he as a native of Umuaro is more familiar with the myths of his people does

³⁴See Carroll 52.

³⁵While the use of such traditional stories might in fact be deemed "strange" for a convert, already in 1915 several mission scholars were writing about the 'revelatory' nature of traditional myths and also their usefulness for missionary efforts. M. Werner, for instance, criticized those missionaries eager to suppress such 'folklore', saying that "unless we believe that the same God who had educated and is educating us--in spite of and through our own mistakes and waywardness--has been indifferent to the fate of even His lowliest and most backward children, we shall be less eager than our fathers to rush in with the pruning knife." See M. Werner, "The Value of Folklore to Missionaries," International Review of Missions, 4 (1915): 628.

³⁶Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 37-8.

³⁷Luzbetak. 67ff.

³⁸See Achebe, Things Fall Apart 126-7.

not necessarily make his use of these myths legitimate examples of a Christianity in the process of contextualizing itself. That is because the motivation underlying Unachukwu's conversion to Christianity places the nature of his faith in doubt.

Unachukwu is described as "the first and most famous convert in Umuaro" (57). This question is, what has he been converted to; or, more correctly, what has he been converted by? Lyn Innes suggests that he is drawn to Christianity not by the truth of the Gospel message nor "the glory or the richness of European culture" behind it, but rather by "the devastating power" of the British,³⁹ which he personally witnessed in the massacre of Abame while serving as a carrier. It was an experience, he said, which taught him "the white man was not a thing of fun" (57). Like Ezeulu he too recognized that "there was no escape" from the awesome power of the Europeans (105) and so chose to "sojourn" among the Europeans for more than ten years at the Onitsha mission in order to learn more about this power and to make it his own (57).

Converts like Unachukwu were not uncommon. During the initial period of contact, particularly with the peoples of the interior regions, Ajayi points out that there was "no rush to join the Churches".⁴⁰ Rather, missionaries had to demonstrate their superiority, usually through their education, and they often had to reinforce their arguments with the power of European technology. Gradually, the text suggests, as European power and authority consolidated, people began to realize that "the best way to deal with the white man was to have a few people, like Moses Unachukwu around who knew what the white man knew" (269). As a result more and more people sent their children to the mission school, just as Ezeulu had sent his son Oduche to the school to be his "eye" there (55) so he too might acquire "the white man's wisdom" (51). Ajayi suggests that in

³⁹Innes 69.

⁴⁰Ajayi xiii.

traditional African societies religion is not a personal matter, but an "affair of the community . . . intimately bound up with its way of life".⁴¹ Religion, in other words, for characters like Unachukwu, is not something that can be compartmentalized and isolated from other aspects of life. Rather, everything is intimately tied together as part of an integral whole. Oduche as well understands the new religion not as an isolated set of personal beliefs but as one integrated part of a whole. It is yet one more aspect of the white man's learning, the acquisition of which would make him "a great man in Umuaro" (56). Therefore for Unachukwu, and for Ezeulu as well, the white man's religion is one integral part of his power, which cannot be separated from the rest. As he tells his fellow Africans who have been conscripted for the road-building project "The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road--they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a machet, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone" (105). So if the African wants to share the white man's power he must accept not only the white man's education and technology but his culture and his god as well. Even the baptismal name he takes--Moses--is indicative of the role he envisions for himself as the messenger of God and the instrument of God's power who will lead the people into the white man's promised land.

Since it is the power of the British colonizers by and to which he is converted, and since it is a messianic role he envisions for himself in the diffusion of that power, Unachukwu can hardly be seen as representing an emerging 'dialectic' between European and African cultures. Rather, like Goodcountry he too has been assimilated by the colonial culture. His response to native culture, too, which he likens to a "darkness" that the white man will "drive away" (105), is similarly condescending though not

⁴¹Ajayi 1.

as confrontational as his rival. The conflict between them, then, is reducible not to a fundamental difference in faith, or even to a fundamental difference in orientation. It is, rather, as Achebe suggests in the ending of the novel, a power struggle between the two for influence over the local community of converts. It was Goodcountry's purpose "to establish his leadership from the very beginning" that necessitated publicly humiliating Unachukwu (267-268). It was, similarly, Unachukwu's equal determination not to be shunted aside that drove him to carry the fight as far as the bishop (268-9). However, when the opportunity arises, thanks to Ezeulu's own power struggle with Nwake and Ezidemili, to extend the influence of the mission over the non-Christian community, Goodcountry and Unachukwu team up to offer the desperate villagers an alternative to the cult of Ulu and increase their membership (270).

It is this twist that for me is a letdown in the novel. Undoubtedly issues of power and prestige were frequently at least partially behind conversions. In some instances they were the primary, if not the sole, reason. There were, however, many other converts, such as Achebe's own father, who were attracted to the Gospel message itself. By turning the confrontation between Goodcountry and Unachukwu into an internal power struggle Achebe opts to take the easy path, which for the dramatic possibilities of the novel is unfortunate.

Achebe has said that in this novel chief among the things he wanted to stress was "the continuity of life . . . tradition."⁴² Without being specific he has at the same time acknowledged that "certain things" may be lacking, which were the consequence of not doing things "as well as I should have done them."⁴³ I believe this handling of the Goodcountry-Unachukwu conflict is a case in point. Achebe's interest in religion is well known. He has at

⁴²Fabre 51.

⁴³Fabre 51.

different times talked about his fascination with traditional beliefs and practices,⁴⁴ about the relevance of these things to traditional and contemporary life,⁴⁵ about the "revelation" that came to him when he realized that these things were not necessarily inconsistent with the Gospel,⁴⁶ and about his parents' attempts to inculturate certain of these practices with their Christian beliefs.⁴⁷ Yet, after setting Unachukwu in a position to explore possibilities for contextualization in a manner similar to his own parents, he then quickly reduces the conflict to a power struggle between two strong egos.

What sets this conflict apart from the main power struggle in the novel--that between Ezeulu and the alliance of Nwaka and Ezidemili--is Achebe's failure to maintain a similar degree of authorial neutrality. Because he does not allow himself to impose motives or to side with either in the main conflict it is never totally clear whether Ezeulu's or his rivals' actions are motivated by their respective sense of duty or are calculated to protect or enhance their positions. In the Goodcountry-Unachukwu struggle, however, Achebe is more willing to intervene in his portrayal of the characters' motivation. In the case of Goodcountry, he directly attributes the character's humiliation of Unachukwu to the former's will to establish his own authority. In the case of Unachukwu this intervention is even more intrusive. After having originally hinted through the character at the potential for at least an accommodation between Christianity and traditional culture, Achebe first undermines Unachukwu's credibility by rooting his conversion in fear and awe of European 'superiority', and then exposes him as a vengeful sneak who stoops to forging threatening letters to the

⁴⁴Achebe, "Named for Victoria" 35.

⁴⁵Kalu Ogbaa "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," 1980, Conversations with Chinua Achebe, 69.

⁴⁶Wren, "Those Magical Years" 104.

⁴⁷Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Chinua Achebe: A Biography (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 6; Achebe, Home and Exile 11.

bishop in order to undermine his rival's authority and reestablish his own prominence in the community. The result of this sort of intervention is that the motives of these characters become far more transparent than those of the other rivals. And in doing this Achebe lets slip a rich opportunity to explore issues about the relationship between religion and culture, about the cultural inappropriateness of aspects of mission Christianity in the African context, and about the possible forms a contextualized Christianity might take.

Achebe's personal background, his interest in religion and culture, his powers of observation, and his artistic talent make him perhaps one of the best-situated and best-equipped writers to explore the interplay between religious ideas. The richness with which he portrays traditional practices clearly demonstrates this potential, and in his initial glimpses of Unachukwu he hints at his awareness of these sensitive and vital issues. That he chooses in the end to instead pursue the theme of power politics to the exclusion of this religious concern, I feel, is an unfortunate choice for the potential of the novel.

Chapter Eight

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1):

Mission Christianity and Cultural Imperialism in The River Between and Weep Not, Child

Introduction

In 1970 James Ngugi, as he was then known, opened his address to the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa by declaring he was "not a man of the Church"; in fact he was "not even a Christian."¹ While this was not Ngugi's first public acknowledgment of his parting with the Christian faith,² it did inaugurate what would become a career-long, scathing critique of Christianity and its role in Western colonial and neocolonial domination of African political, economic, and cultural life. What had previously appeared in his writing as an uneasy tension between missionary Christianity and traditional African culture now metamorphosed into a sustained attack on Eurocentric Christianity. In this speech he accused the Christian Church of being a "religious ally" of colonialism.³ In his subsequent writing he expanded and deepened his vitriolic criticism, numbering missionaries among the "members of the religious, intellectual and spiritual armies of imperialism,"⁴ and accusing them of promoting "white racist lies"⁵ which were "meant to lead us . . . to paths of self-doubt and self-hatred and to indecisive postures before our enemies."⁶ While the tone

¹Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann, 1972) 31. Immediately after the address an irate member of the audience challenged Ngugi, pointing out the contradiction implied by his name. Soon after, he dropped the name James in favor of the traditional Gikuyu, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. See Ime Ikiddeh, "Foreword," Ngugi, Homecoming, xi.

²Alan Marcuson, Mike Gonzalez, and Dave Williams, "James Ngugi Interviewed by Fellow Students at Leeds University," Cultural Events in Africa 31 (June 1967): ii.

³Ngugi, Homecoming 31.

⁴Ngugi, Writers in Politics: Essays (London: Heinemann, 1981) 11-12.

⁵Ngugi, Writers 14.

⁶Ngugi, Writers 37.

and focus of the indictment have shifted from time to time, the charge has remained consistent through the years: the Church was "part and parcel of cultural imperialism."⁷ Nor has his indictment of Christianity ended with the formal process of decolonization. Rather, he has also implicated missionaries--"the holy race of Simpsons, Arthurs, Beechers, Carey Francises, Leakeys"--in the neocolonial project, calling them the "educational mentor[s]" of a new generation of African oppressors who have "learnt the value of religion in its call for love, peace, unity and nonviolence between oppressor and the oppressed."⁸

In his fiction and drama, as in his essays and speeches, Ngugi has been concerned primarily with issues of culture. His art is a celebration and promotion of African languages and cultures, which have been marginalized and threatened by colonialism. He writes about African characters in specifically African situations, depicting African ways of life, celebrating African rituals and customs, and, since his 1978 detention at least, promoting the use of African languages as well. At the same time his art has also dramatized and critiqued the systematic marginalization and attempted suppression of African culture by the European colonizers and their neocolonial heirs. The cultural contest between the colonizer and the colonized, between the neocolonial elite and the African peasantry and proletariat, the political and economic struggle between imperialism and traditional culture for the soul of the masses, has been at the heart of his novels, stories and plays. Just as in his non-fiction he has criticized missionary Christianity for its role in colonialism, in his fiction missionaries and missionary Christianity function as metonyms for European culture and for Western cultural imperialism and neocolonialism.

⁷Onuora Ossie Enekwe, "Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o," Okike: An African Journal of New Writing 35 (February 1997): 107.

⁸Ngugi, Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1983) 19.

From the earliest stories of his youthful 'Christian' period, through the novels of the euphoric post-independence days, to the disillusionment with neocolonialism in the novels and plays marked by his later commitment to Marxism, the critique of Western, missionary Christianity as an instrument of colonial and neocolonial domination has been one constant in his writing. In early stories like "The Village Priest," "A Meeting in the Dark," or "The Black Bird,"⁹ Ngugi demonstrates a keen awareness of the close link between the Christianity that the missionaries had brought to Africa and the European culture from which these missionaries had come. He also recognizes the cultural and political consequences for the African that acceptance of this new faith implies. The cautious enthusiasm for Christianity in the earliest versions of "The Village Priest," however, gives way in The River Between to a more nuanced and strained endorsement of a contextualized Christianity, then to an increasingly disillusioned critique of mission Christianity in Weep Not, Child and the original version of A Grain of Wheat, and later in Petals of Blood, the revised A Grain of Wheat, and the Gikuyu language novels Devil on the Cross and Matigari to a repudiation of Christianity altogether as a tool of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Ngugi's Background

Despite his public statements, Ngugi has not always been hostile to Christianity or to the institutional Church. He was born into a traditional Gikuyu peasant family on 5 January 1938, in the village of Kaniriithu, near Limuru in the Kiambu District, some 12 miles northeast of Nairobi.¹⁰ By his own account his father was an ahoi, or

⁹In the "Preface" to Secret Lives Ngugi acknowledged that all three stories were written during his student days at Makerere (ix). While "The Village Priest" and "A Meeting in the Dark" were first published then, "The Black Bird" was not published until 1969.

¹⁰David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings 2nd ed. (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 3; G.

dispossessed peasant squatter/farmer on one of the few African-owned estates in Gikuyuland,¹¹ with four wives and "about" 28 children.¹² Ngugi was the fifth son of the third wife.¹³ His first formal contact with Christianity came when he started school at the Kamaandura mission in 1947, after which he transferred to the Maanguu school, run by the Gikuyu Independent and Karing'a Schools Association.¹⁴ These latter schools, he said, "belonged to people who had rebelled against missionary influence, so they wanted the kind of education that belonged to the people."¹⁵ In 1954, at the age of 16 and approximately two years after the beginning of the 'Mau Mau' revolt, Ngugi entered the elite missionary-run Alliance High School in Kikuyu, upon which Alliance alumna Micere Githae-Mugo suggests the fictional Siriana High School of his novels is modeled.¹⁶ Here he studied under headmaster Carey Francis, the renowned missionary and educator whom Githae-Mugo also suggests was the model for the headmaster in Weep Not, Child.¹⁷

During this period of his life Ngugi claims to have been "deeply Christian," getting up regularly "to go to church at five o'clock in the morning."¹⁸ If he was Christian, however, in later years he claims that his acceptance of Christianity was not totally uncritical. Rather, in a comment reflecting rather surprising missiological sophistication, he said that he was primarily "concerned with trying to remove the central Christian doctrine from the dress of Western culture, and seeing how

D. Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi (London: Heinemann, 1980) 1.

¹¹That is, owned outright in the European sense under colonial law, as opposed to traditional mbari rights under the Gikuyu githaka land tenure system.

¹²Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, 1986 (London: James Currey, 1997) 10; Cook and Okenimkpe 3.

¹³Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams i.

¹⁴Ngugi, Decolonising 11; Cook and Okenimkpe 3; Killam 1.

¹⁵Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams i.

¹⁶Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa in the Fiction of Achebe, Margaret Lawrence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978) 134.

¹⁷Githae-Mugo 134-135.

¹⁸Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii.

this might be grafted onto the central beliefs of our people."¹⁹ This was a concern that would dominate The River Between, his first novel.

From Alliance he moved on to Makerere University College in Kampala in 1959,²⁰ where he read English literature²¹ and also began his writing career, contributing short stories and dramas to Penpoint, the university's literary magazine, Kenya Weekly News, Transition, and the South African publication, The New African.²² He also ventured into journalism, between May of 1961 and August of 1964 writing approximately 80 pieces for the Nairobi newspapers.²³ During this time Ngugi claims he "gave up the Christian faith. . . . It just gradually lost its appeal to me as I began to see what it stood for."²⁴ What he had begun to see the faith--or more correctly, the missionaries' version of it--standing for was European cultural imperialism. In a 1963 article, for example, Carol Sicherman says he "[a]ccuses Christian missionaries of introducing conflict and creating 'a people without spiritual roots'", and "notes identification of missionaries with colonialism and their refusal to protest inequalities."²⁵ Yet even if he had personally given up practising Christianity and was becoming critical of the missionaries, there was still ambivalence in his attitude towards the Church. In an article that appeared some 18 months earlier he was still giving western Christianity his endorsement as "the best challenge to Communism or any form

¹⁹Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii.

²⁰Killam v.

²¹Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii.

²²Bernth Lindfors, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Early Journalism," World Literature Written in English 20.1 (Spring, 1981): 23; Killam 2.

²³Lindfors 24.

²⁴Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii.

²⁵Sicherman, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources 1957-1987 (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1989) 13; describing Ngugi, "I Say Kenya's Missionaries Failed Badly," Sunday Nation 6 Jan. 1963: 5. Several of Ngugi's early articles are unavailable to me. I am therefore indebted to Sicherman's annotations and quotations, as well as to the descriptions and quotations provided by Lindfors, cited in n22 above.

of totalitarianism."²⁶ This was before his study at Leeds, where he came into contact with the revolutionary writings of intellectuals like Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Frantz Fanon, and C. L. R. James and subsequently reoriented his political thinking. Following his stay at Leeds, the fiction he produced began to take an increasingly hostile view of religion in general and mission Christianity in particular.

His experience at Leeds (1964-67) proved to be a turning point in Ngugi's intellectual and political development. The contradictions and ambivalence towards Christianity and mission education in his writing gradually lessened as his exposure to revolutionary politics and ideology deepened. Fanon's ideas on nation-building, anti-colonial resistance, and the formation of national culture --which were already nascent in his earlier writing²⁷--; Marxist socio-economic theories of capitalism, imperialism, and class struggle; and Lenin's views on the relationship between capitalism and imperialism increasingly came to the forefront of Ngugi's thought. Gradually he became more critical of mission Christianity and particularly mission education. And, as his ideological and intellectual sophistication deepened, he began to see missionaries as "agents of European imperialism"²⁸ and the Christian Gospel

²⁶Ngugi, "African Culture: The Mistake That Kenyatta Made," Sunday Post 6 Aug. 1961: 10.

²⁷An article in the Sunday Nation, 27 May 1962 ("Can the Educated African Meet the Challenge?" 31; described and quoted in Sicherman, Bibliography 9) discusses the cultural conflicts experienced by educated Africans caught between "Western" and "'tribal'" ways, and calls for building "a national ideal that will embrace all". Similarly, in two other articles ("Let's See More School Integration" Sunday Nation, 8 July 1962: 25, and "How Do You Kill These Tribal Feelings?" Sunday Nation, 5 July 1964: 6, described in Sicherman, Bibliography 10 and 17 respectively) he criticized tribalism as an obstacle to nation-building. In still two other articles ("Don't Forget Our Destination", Sunday Nation, 10 Feb. 1963: 12+ and "More Is Needed From Educated Africans", Sunday Nation, 7 June 1964: 9, described in Sicherman, Bibliography 14 and 18 respectively) he called for the decolonization of African education. Finally, in "Mau Mau, Violence and Culture", (1963; Homecoming 26-30) he anticipates Fanon's thought--which he would later encounter at Leeds--on violence in the process of national liberation.

²⁸Ngugi, Homecoming 32.

as an implement "designed to weaken African people in the face of imperialist exploitation and oppression."²⁹

Marx, Lenin, Fanon and James have helped frame Ngugi's views ideologically and have provided him with an alternative to the Christian liberal humanism that marks his earliest writing. They have, as well, provided him with a vocabulary and rhetoric with which to articulate his positions. And while in his later writing Ngugi's critique of mission Christianity may take on the vitriolic tones of revolutionary politics, his caution and doubts about its impact on indigenous culture, on movements of anti-colonial resistance, and on the construction of a national culture are already nascent in his early fiction.

Beginnings: "The Village Priest"

"The Village Priest" in its original form³⁰ is a good starting point from which to examine Ngugi's developing attitude towards Christianity. It offers glimpses of the young writer's earliest creative considerations of the conflict between mission Christianity and local culture. It also points to a number of missiological issues arising out of the missionary effort. The story focuses on characters--Joshua and Reverend Livingstone--and a setting--Makuyu--to which Ngugi would return in The River Between. Briefly, it records a momentary crisis of faith for Joshua, a convert and leader of a small Christian community at Makuyu. The story begins in medias res: Makuyu is in the midst of a drought which has already caused hunger and is threatening to destroy what is left of the crop; Joshua has failed to bring rain through his intercessory prayers; now, on the

²⁹Enekwe 108.

³⁰The story was originally published in Kenya Weekly News, and then in Penpoint. It was subsequently revised and reprinted in David Cook's 1965 collection, entitled Origins East Africa: A Makerere Anthology, and then finally in Ngugi's 1975 collection, Secret Lives and Other Stories. Each version was slightly revised. The revisions to the Secret Lives version significantly alter the character of the missionary and the nature of the relationship between missionary and convert, placing this version and its view of mission Christianity ideologically among his later works. See Cook and Okenimkpe 159.

afternoon following the rainmaker's sacrifice of a goat, the skies have blackened and the rain is fast approaching--against Joshua's urgent prayers that God not allow the rainmaker to triumph in this contest between them. As the story moves forward, Joshua begins to have doubts about the omnipotence of the Christian God and the propriety of an African abandoning the traditions of his ancestors for the ways of the white man. Shaken by his failure to either produce rain or prevent the rainmaker's success, Joshua goes one morning to the sacred tree in order to "make peace with his tribal god."³¹ Discovered there and taunted by his rival, Joshua returns home in shame but with renewed faith in the Christian God, where he finds Livingstone has come to visit him. Agonizingly he confesses his lapse of faith, anticipating a harsh rebuke from the missionary. What he gets instead is sympathetic support. The story then closes with the two men involved in a conversation about "the problems of Makuyu now that the rain had come and the menacing drought was over" ("VP" 65).

On the surface the story narrates a momentary crisis of faith. The underlying deep structure, however, dramatizes the contest between traditional life and European culture for Africa's soul. Here Ngugi employs Christianity and Livingstone as metaphors for European colonial and cultural intervention into African life. As he explores his theme, Ngugi raises or otherwise alludes to a variety of cultural, religious, and political issues that continually reappear throughout his fiction. The tensions between Joshua and the rainmaker, for one, point to the tensions between mission Christianity and traditional culture. The contest between the two likewise raises the question of what constitutes the essential elements of Christian faith versus its culturally determined forms of expression. Then, the character of Joshua himself raises

³¹Ngugi, "The Village Priest," rpt. in Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology, ed. David Cook (London: Heinemann, 1965) 62. Further references will be given in the text, cited as "VP".

the question of motivation for conversion: is conversion prompted by a genuine acceptance of the Christian faith, or by the opportunities for power, self-aggrandizement, and material gain? In the relationship between Joshua and Livingstone, as well, Ngugi touches on the question of the respective roles of the missionary and the indigene in the process of inculturating a genuinely African faith. The Joshua-Livingstone relationship also raises the question of the place of the missionary in the leadership of the local church community, as well as the implications that holds for the corresponding structures of political power. Joshua's name, in addition, points to the question of the colonial, cultural, psychological, and political implications of naming practices as seen in the custom of giving and receiving 'Christian' (i.e. European) names. Finally, through little touches, like the reference to Joshua's house with its non-traditional design and corrugated roof, Ngugi introduces such issues as the cultural and practical (in)appropriateness of missionary-introduced innovations in such areas as artifact production.³² Each of these issues anticipates those major issues that would dominate Ngugi's later novels. In doing so, though, the story differs even from the novels that immediately follow it in the degree of its overall endorsement of Christianity, missionaries, and the missionary effort. The paternalism of Livingstone in The River Between--and the patronizing condescension and triumphalism of missionaries and converts in the later novels--is lacking in this story, replaced instead by a sense of fraternity and egalitarianism. Similarly, the defense of traditional cultural practices and systems of education that characterizes the later novels is here

³²I say '(in)appropriate' because when the description is repeated in The River Between (1965, Oxford: Heinemann, 1994, 28) the narrator adds that "[t]he tin roof was already decaying and let in rain freely, so on top of the roof could be seen little scraps of sacking that covered the very bad parts", suggesting the 'superior' innovation brought by the missionaries may in fact be unsuited to the Kenyan climate.

preempted by an endorsement of Christianity as a civilizing remedy to what the young Ngugi described in a high school essay as a culture of "superstition and witchcraft".³³

Community, Christianity, Colonialism: The River Between

Not long after finishing the original version of "The Village Priest" Ngugi began working on the first draft of The River Between.³⁴ The novel incorporates material from the story while making rather striking changes to it. In the story Joshua is the protagonist and receives more or less sympathetic treatment, while in the novel he (together with Livingstone) is transformed into one of young Waiyaki's several antagonists. The role of the rainmaker, in turn, is reinvented and apportioned among several characters: Chege, Waiyaki's traditionalist father; Kabonyi, the apostate Christian-turned-traditionalist and other main antagonist; and the Kiama, or traditional council of elders. The setting, as well, is changed from some indistinct time early in the period of colonization before the region had been "seriously affected by the coming of the white missionaries, farmers and administrators" ("VP" 60), to the very specific period of the so-called 'circumcision crisis' of 1929-30 and the years immediately following. Finally, what began in the original story as an unspecific reflection on the implications for Gikuyu cultural and communal life of the arrival of Christianity is transformed into the first installment of what John Hawley describes as Ngugi's career-long examination of the historic "struggle of the common people of Kenya to come to terms with the effects on

³³Quoted in Sicherman, "Ngugi's British Education," Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Texts and Contexts, ed. Charles Cantalupo (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995) 35.

³⁴Dennis Duerden, Interview with James Ngugi, January 1964, African Writers Talking, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1972) 122.

their culture"--and on their society, I would add--"of colonialism and the neocolonialism that followed."³⁵

Briefly, the novel describes the tensions between the people of Makuyu and Kameno, two ridges along either side of the River Honia. The ridges have yet to experience the arrival of European settlers, but Christianity has arrived and gained many adherents in Makuyu, while the people of Kameno adhere strictly to the traditions, including circumcision, which the missionaries vigorously oppose. The traditional tensions are exacerbated when Muthoni, Joshua's youngest daughter, dies as the result of the circumcision she desires in order to be "a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe"³⁶ but her father abhors as an "unforgivable sin" (RB 31). Between the rival factions stands Waiyaki. He is the son of Chege, a respected elder of Kameno and descendent of the seer Mugo wa Kibiro who had prophesied both the coming of the white man and the eventual rise of a messiah who would restore the people to their lands. True to the legacy of his ancestors, Waiyaki is loyal to the rituals and traditions of his people. However, he is also a recipient of the white man's education at the Siriana Mission School, to which his father had sent him so that he might learn "the wisdom of the white man" (RB 21) and eventually use it "to chase away the settlers and the missionaries" (RB 87). This contact with Europeans instills in him a respect and appreciation for aspects of their culture, particularly education, and turns him into a champion of that same type of education as a means of bridging the divisions among his people and equipping them to resist social and cultural domination. For some among the traditionalist factions of the clan, however, this sort of intimacy with foreign elements raises

³⁵John C. Hawley, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o," Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook, ed. Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998) 321.

³⁶Ngugi, The River Between 44. Further references will be given in the text, cited as RB.

suspicious about his loyalty to the tribe and his fitness to lead.

In this novel Ngugi makes use of the 1929 crisis as a background against which to raise and examine a wide range of issues of religious and missiological as well as cultural and political significance, many of which had been initially touched upon in "The Village Priest". Historically, the crisis was in part a popular revolt against missionary and European arrogance regarding Gikuyu cultural practices--in this instance, circumcision rites--that were considered essential parts of Gikuyu culture.³⁷ It was also the catalyst behind the establishment of the Kenya Independent School Association (KISA),³⁸ the Kikuyu Karing'a Educational Association (KKEA), and the independent churches with which they were associated. Although circumcision was the specific issue that touched off the crisis, it was in fact only the last of many long-festering resentments and disaffections. Other issues included increased European settlement and the resulting

³⁷The crisis was triggered when the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) under J. W. Arthur imposed a requirement that all members renounce circumcision rites, especially clitoridectomy, under pain of church discipline, which included the exclusion of children from the mission schools. The ensuing revolt, coordinated by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), initially decimated CSM membership and emptied CSM schools.

Clitoridectomy was opposed by all of the churches on moral, cultural, and medical grounds. The evangelicals were strongest in their opposition. Because the CSM was the most unbending, theirs were the most seriously affected missions. Other evangelical organizations, such as the Gospel Mission Society (GMS) and the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), followed the CSM lead and were similarly affected. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) generally took a more flexible position, and apart from the mission at Kabete, which was headed by the evangelical Harry Leakey who supported Arthur's position, CMS missions were mostly unaffected. Roman Catholic missions, meanwhile, left the issue alone, considering it strictly a cultural matter, and were consequently neither involved in the initial controversy nor affected by the backlash. See F. B. Welbourn, East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches (London: SCM Press, 1961) 135-143; Carl G. Rosberg Jr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) 106-125; Robert W. Strayer, "The CMS and Female Circumcision," The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa: Anglicans and Africans in Colonial Kenya, 1875-1935 (London: Heinemann, 1978) 136-155; Robert L. Tignor, The Colonial Transformation of Kenya (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 235-254.

³⁸Rosberg and Nottingham alternately identify KISA as the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (125) and the Kenya Independent Schools Association (126).

land alienations,³⁹ the rapid disruption of traditional life and morality caused by sudden changes in economic life and the accompanying trend towards urbanization,⁴⁰ and missionary control of an educational system that was increasingly perceived as designed to keep Africans at the bottom of the social and economic order.⁴¹ Just as these issues fueled the resentments which finally exploded into the 1929 revolt, so too are they just beneath the surface of Ngugi's novel, motivating his characters and shaping and directing the dramatic tensions.

Others have already commented on Ngugi's use of this episode from Kenya's colonial history and the issue that ignited it. Approaching it from an activist-feminist perspective, Tobe Levin describes Gikuyu resistance to abolition of the circumcision rites, both historically and in the novel, as "an oppositional gesture against colonialism",⁴² and sees in Ngugi's use of the issue an overall criticism of the impact of imperialism on the condition of women in the third world. Patrick Williams, meanwhile, has discussed the novel in terms of constructing the local community and the implications of this project "for the later and larger anti-colonial and post-colonial projects of constructing the national community."⁴³ More recently Simon Gikandi has concentrated on the role of the "trope of prophecy and conversion"⁴⁴ in the politics of constructing a postcolonial national identity that seeks to synthesize the narratives of tradition and colonial modernity.

³⁹Strayer 136ff; Rosberg and Nottingham 121.

⁴⁰Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa (London: James Currey, 1992) 385ff.

⁴¹Rosberg and Nottingham 127ff.; A. J. Temu, British Protestant Missions (London: Longman, 1972) 150ff.

⁴²Tobe Levin, "Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult: An Activist's View of Female Circumcision in Ngugi's The River Between," Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1986) 210.

⁴³Patrick Williams, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 30.

⁴⁴Simon Gikandi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 49.

Such observations I feel are indicative of a tendency among contemporary critics to read Ngugi's earlier novels in light of the revolutionary politics he would later embrace.⁴⁵ Such deconstructive readings may be theoretically satisfying, clarifying at times ambivalences that arise in the texts. Often, though, they tend to look past what were for the author very real issues. Levin, for example, is correct in pointing out that the novel is in no way an endorsement of clitoridectomy, though this is a conclusion she arrives at only deconstructively.⁴⁶ Rather, she says Ngugi uses enthusiasm for preserving the rite as a dramatic gesture of resistance to the very real cultural colonialism of which missionary Christianity is a part. However, Levin's assertions about the misogynistic nature of Christianity, Christian sexual immaturity and hypocrisy, and the organic connection between Church and imperialism are unexamined propositions, indicative of a strong anti-Christian/anti-religious bias, which results at times in suspicious statements⁴⁷ and leads her to ignore the very

⁴⁵G. D. Killam, for example, in his Introduction prefaced even the chapters on the early novels with quotations from Fanon.

⁴⁶Apparently Levin has undertaken no investigation of Ngugi's background or publicly expressed opinions. Aside from references to the text in question she cites no other primary sources, nor does she refer to other studies of the novel.

⁴⁷For example, while correctly attributing missionary opposition in part to a European sense of sexual propriety, Levin adds "instead of opposing mutilation in order to preserve the wellspring of pleasure, the church takes the repressive puritan stand of forbidding any mention of sexuality" (212). The difficulty is that this assertion is, first, a questionable oversimplification of the teachings about sexuality expressed in the New Testament, and moreover inconsistent with the documentary evidence regarding the 1929 crisis. The 1931 CSM "Memorandum" on Kikuyu circumcision rites describes the "unnecessary" destruction of the female capacity to achieve sexual gratification as "indefensible," and enumerates this as one of its five objections to the rite. (See "Memorandum Prepared By the Kikuyu Mission Council On Female Circumcision," 1 December, 1931, Appendix 1, ii. CSM Archive Acc 7548/D64, National Library of Scotland.) The "Memorandum" (1) also notes that in 1929 the CSM officially adopted the term "Sexual Mutilation of Women" as their designation for clitoridectomy, a term that had been unofficially used by the organization for at least several years before that. Levin also calls into question Christian intellectual maturity on the grounds that the Church teaches the "ridiculous" doctrine of the virgin birth (214-15).

real religious issues with which Ngugi professed he was concerned.⁴⁸

Williams⁴⁹ and Gikandi,⁵⁰ on the other hand, are more conscious of Ngugi's early commitment to what Gikandi called "Christian conversion and enlightenment", which gave rise to ambivalence in his early works regarding the aspirations and direction of cultural nationalism. Both come closer to addressing the religious issues with their observations about competing visions in the project of constructing the community. The nationalist project and the missionary enterprise ultimately share a similar objective, namely the construction at both the local and national levels of a community with a shared identity--in religious terms, a Church. The novel in fact presents three competing visions of the community: Joshua/Livingstone's Europeanized Christian community that rejects all African traditions as inferior, unenlightened, and even savage; Chege/Kabonyi's purist community that rejects all foreign influence as polluting; and the reconciliatory 'syncretic' community Waiyaki wishes to construct from the best of both sources. The difficulty with this sort of nationalist reading practice is that it tends to adopt too exclusively Fredric Jameson's controversial "sweeping hypothesis" about all third-world literatures being "national allegories"⁵¹, especially when the incidents involved lend themselves so readily to an allegoric reading, as does the present novel. Such readings tend to ignore the missiological issues raised at the religious level by circumcision and the missionary reaction to it, which also have implications at the metonymic level for the project of constructing the national community and for the underlying socio-political issues that further fueled the crisis. This, at times, can

⁴⁸See, for example, Ngugi's comments in Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii; cited in n18 above.

⁴⁹p. Williams 9.

⁵⁰Gikandi, Ngugi 47.

⁵¹Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Social Text, 15 (1986): 69.

be theoretically problematic and unsatisfying. For as Williams notes, Waiyaki's reconciling mission is most laudable, logical, and even desirable; yet it fails for "no obvious reason."⁵² However, when the novel is considered also at the religious level with the missiological issues also in mind--the failure of mission Christianity to become a truly contextualized African Christianity, the stifling interference of European missionaries in that process, the real and imagined identification of mission Christianity and missionaries with the colonizing power--then Waiyaki's failure, and Ngugi's eventual disillusionment with Christianity, become easier to account for on a theoretical level.

If ignoring the religious issues does account in part for the theoretical difficulties of the novel, Ngugi compounds them with his historiography. Obviously, he is not writing a history of the circumcision controversy. Rather, he is using this significant episode in modern Gikuyu history as a background against which to explore the early stages in the development of Gikuyu nationalism. However, in appropriating the crisis Ngugi makes significant changes to the historic facts that are ultimately responsible for much of the theoretical difficulties. The most significant of these is the way the community divides over the issue. In Ngugi's version the rival communities divide more or less along Christian and non-Christian lines: on the one side is Joshua and his fellow converts with Livingstone and the white missionaries behind them, while on the other is the traditionalist Kiama egged on by Kabonyi. Kabonyi is initially introduced into the narrative as the leader of a breakaway Christian group, but his Christianity is almost incidental: the break comes suddenly, it seems to arise mostly out of his jealousy over Joshua's position of power within the Christian community, and once it occurs there are no further traces of a

⁵²p. Williams, 42.

Christian identity in the character. He is instead completely identified with the traditionalists. However, the events leading up to the 1929 crisis were largely an internal matter of the Churches. Even after the KCA injected itself, drawing in elements of the non-Christian community, it still remained largely an internal church matter. When the rupture finally did occur it resulted not only in the independent school movements represented in the novel, but also in closely associated independent churches. Yet, as James Ogude points out, the novel contains not one reference to any independent church movement, or even a single independent Christian community.⁵³ All accounts of this period invariably note that the independent schools and the independent churches went hand-in-hand.⁵⁴ Even Huxley's Red Strangers, which makes use of the same background, correctly establishes the link. These schools and their churches were serious about their Christian beliefs and eager to maintain their Christian identity, even the more self-consciously secular KKEA, in whose schools the young Ngugi was partly educated and which are alluded to in his text. On one level, the whole episode can be understood as a contest between the missionaries (with their supporters) and one part of the African Christian community for control of the local church. The missiological issues raised by this struggle parallel many similar political issues raised by the whole colonial project. The question of the distinction between the Gospel message and its culturally determined forms of expression is simply one more aspect of the overall issue of what constitutes 'civilization' in an era of colonial modernity. The respective roles of the missionary and the indigene in the process of interpreting and inculturating the Gospel parallel the political contest between African and European concerning their roles in constructing the forms of such a

⁵³James Ogude, Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation (London: Pluto Press, 1999) 19.

⁵⁴For a full account see Welbourn 77-104 and 144-161; also Rosberg and Nottingham 126ff.

society; and the issue of the place of the missionary in the leadership of the local church mirrors the problems created by the authoritarian role of the European in colonial society. By disconnecting the independent school movement from the independent churches Ngugi changes the nature and focus of the conflict, which makes the reasons for the continued tensions between the groups less clear and, consequently, Waiyaki's failure more difficult to account for. However, if we consider the missiological issues raised by Livingstone and Joshua as parallels for Waiyaki's conflict with the traditionalists the reasons for his failure become more obvious.

In the novel it is Muthoni's desire to be circumcised, against her father's wishes and in contravention of the teachings of the missionaries, that sets the events in motion. Historians, social scientists, and critics alike have discussed the centrality of circumcision rites to Gikuyu communal life.⁵⁵ In Facing Mount Kenya Jomo Kenyatta described them as "the most important custom among the Gikuyu", conferring the status of adulthood in the community.⁵⁶ An uncircumcised individual had no standing in the community whatsoever, becoming essentially a social outcast. Uncircumcised males could not hold property, marry, or even have sexual relations. The unexcised woman was deemed a child and could not be considered for marriage, which for a Gikuyu woman was potentially catastrophic. It is these understandings of the deeply psychological significance of the rites that inform Ngugi's representation of the controversy and are expressed through Waiyaki and the traditionalist characters.

Just as Achebe does not romanticize traditional Igbo culture, neither does Ngugi romanticize circumcision--Muthoni's death clearly demonstrates the cruelty and danger of the rite. He does, however, place it in its proper

⁵⁵See, for example, Rosberg and Nottingham 112ff; Berman and Lonsdale 388-395; Tignor 240.

⁵⁶Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Kikuyu, 1938 (London: Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1974) 133.

context: he emphasizes its value as a test of "courage" and the communal celebration of the brave "new generation" its successful completion confirms; he stresses the "religious bond" with the earth formed by the spilling of blood and the sense of being "of the tribe" it creates for the initiate; he acknowledges the pain and suffering of the initiates, but adds that it is all "part of their education" (RB 45-47). Practically quoting Kenyatta, Chege calls it "the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life," and goes on to ask rhetorically "Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl?" (RB 37-38). For Muthoni it is that essential step in the process of becoming "a woman" (RB 26), while for Waiyaki it "kept people together, bound the tribe" (RB 68). At issue are not the rites themselves, which Ngugi personally thought were "brutal" and should be abandoned.⁵⁷ In another passage echoing Kenyatta, Waiyaki argues that physical circumcision was immaterial: what mattered was "what it did inside a person" (RB 142).⁵⁸ This was a tradition that had been passed down from time immemorial, which conferred status within the tribe and created a sense of belonging. It was something, Waiyaki argues, that "could not be swept away overnight. That way lay disintegration" (RB 141). Rather, the issue is the patronizing and paternalistic attitude of the missionaries who assume theirs is the only legitimate understanding of the Gospel, and for whom these rites are simply "barbarous" and an impediment to salvation (RB 56). It is a double-edged question of what is and is not consistent with the Gospel, and whose place it is to make that determination.

Livingstone is the only European introduced at any length. With 25 years service at Siriana, he is the typical 'career' Protestant missionary of his era, and is something of a cross between Achebe's accommodation-minded Brown and

⁵⁷Ngugi, "Let Us Be Careful About What We Take from the Past," Sunday Nation 5 Aug. 1962: 31; quoted in Sichernan 11.

⁵⁸Compare with Kenyatta 133.

the ethnocentric Smith in Things Fall Apart. Like both, he is strong in his convictions, devoted to his work, and genuine in his concern for the people. With time he has acquired "tolerably good" knowledge of their language (RB 55). Like Brown, as a young man he also made efforts to learn their customs in order to facilitate the process of indigenization, though Ngugi adds a suggestion of condescension in noting the young Livingstone's self-congratulatory sense of enlightenment for pursuing such a policy (RB 56). His reliance on native catechists like Joshua, too, is consistent with standard missionary practices of his day. However, like Smith he is also patronizing, paternalistic, and ethnocentric. Muthoni's death triggers an outburst that reveals his disgust with the Gikuyus' "blind customs" (RB 55), of which circumcision is only one.⁵⁹ Concerning the circumcision rituals in particular, he is not only "thoroughly nauseated" by what he knows of them, but has come to the conclusion that such practices had to be rooted out "if there was to be any hope of salvation for these people" (RB 56). Ngugi makes it clear that the mutilating aspect of the rite is one of the major reasons for the character's objections to it, as it was for Arthur and his colleagues in the early part of the century.⁶⁰ But he also makes it clear that Livingstone's objections are equally, if not more deeply, rooted in his British (and probably late Victorian) sense of sexual modesty,⁶¹ which he assumes perfectly reflects the Gospel teaching on sexual morality. As a young missionary Livingstone's objections began not with the mutilations, but with the songs and dances that precede them and make up part of the sexual education of the initiates. These "horrified" him and convinced him that these people were

⁵⁹The same scene also refers to abandoning corpses and matters of health and hygiene, both referred to in Berman and Lonsdale (377ff).

⁶⁰See the CSM "Memorandum," cited above; also Rosberg and Nottingham 115.

⁶¹Michael Rice, "The River Between--A Discussion," Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ed. G. D. Killam (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984) 128.

"immoral through and through" (RB 56). Initially, considering himself an "enlightened" man of "moderation", he was willing to condescend to the traditions by advocating "gradual methods" of eradicating them (RB 56). Later, when it became apparent that his policy of "letting things happen gradually had not had the hoped-for results" he took the responsibility out of native hands and "began to preach against the custom vigorously" (RB 56). Finally, with Muthoni's death he concludes that circumcision must be "fought by all means" (RB 56), which included excluding from church membership anyone "found connected in any way with circumcision rites" (RB 59). It also included exclusion from the mission schools "the children of darkness, whose parents had not renounced the whole concept of circumcision" (RB 67). The entire scene emphasizes that every step of the way it is Livingstone who is directing policy and making decisions; it is Livingstone who is deciding what does and does not constitute Christian, and therefore civilized, behavior. He has given Africans their chance to bring themselves out of darkness, but they failed to live up to his expectations. Now he is going to make the necessary decisions for them. The consequences of this sort of patronizing, paternalism, and ethnocentrism for the project of evangelization are evidenced in Joshua and his version of Christianity. It produces a class of immature and dependent Christians, alienated from their extended community, professing a faith out of touch with their lived experience, and which they neither fully understand nor are capable of fully integrating.

As in Achebe's novels, here too Christianity's appeal, at least initially, is to the marginalized who are attracted by the opportunities it offers for acceptance, prestige and power, advantage in the encroaching colonial society, and occasionally, genuine faith. Joshua is apparently one of these marginalized. As a young man he "ran from the hills" for unexplained reasons, then "feared"

the retribution of his people for living "with the white man" at the mission, where he found "sanctuary" (RB 29). However he is distinguished from Achebe's sensitive Nwoye, for whom Christianity provided an alternative to the cruelties of traditional society. Rather, he is more like Unachukwu, who also sojourned among the Europeans and was eventually converted. For both Joshua and Unachukwu, however, it is not conversion in the sense of Schreiter,⁶² which produces a 'new man.' Rather, it is conversion rooted in fear of a power greater than the one that drove them from their people in the first place; namely fear and awe of "the white man's power and magic", which both took as signs of divine election (RB 29).⁶³ The converted Joshua may claim to be a "new creature" (RB 30), but he is not. More properly he is Fanon's colonized man,⁶⁴ convinced of the Europeans' superiority, and loathing and denying everything African about himself, from the customs and practices of his people, to the type of house he lives in, and even the name he goes by. Like Unachukwu, he also becomes the Europeans' most outspoken proponent, serving as Livingstone's right hand in carrying out the "main work" of proselytizing in the hills (RB 28), and preaching submission to the wisdom and power of the colonial government as a Christian "duty" (RB 31-32).

The nature of the religion Joshua constructs for himself has already been discussed at length elsewhere. Simply put, it is a narrowly legalistic faith, more focused on "the wrathful God of the Old Testament than the spirit of forgiveness that pervades the Gospels".⁶⁵ It is also "divorced" from people's daily lives, amounting to "an abstract ideal" that in the end is "harsh and

⁶²That is, a metanoia, or turning one's mind around. See Robert J. Schreiter, The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 71.

⁶³Compare with Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God (London: Heinemann, 1964) 105.

⁶⁴Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1961, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967) 169ff.

⁶⁵Rice 127.

sterile[,] . . . a religion which separates and causes pain".⁶⁶ While I am not in complete agreement with Gikandi's position that it amounts to little more than "a compilation of Christian clichés", I do agree that Joshua's vehemence and uncompromising position ends up "alienating" more people than it convinces.⁶⁷ I also think that Joshua, despite his vehemence, does not really understand this new faith. Rather, as the narrator indicates, for him it is a parroted religion, one that is "learnt and accepted" (RB 34). There are ample indications for this throughout the text. First, Joshua never questions the truth of what he is told by the missionaries. For instance, the mystery of the Virgin Birth--to the uninitiated one of the most incomprehensible doctrines, yet one of the first he learns --raises no doubts or questions in his mind; rather it leads him to recognize the "ignorance of his people" (RB 29). Then there is polygamy, which he personally did not see as "intrinsically" wrong, and seems to be biblically sanctioned (in the Old Testament, at least): this is rejected solely on the grounds that the missionary said it was a sin, and so "a sin it had to be", since he was not prepared to question "what he knew to be God-inspired assertions of the white man" (RB 99). As a preacher, too, he is famous for his knowledge of the Bible, Waiyaki noting how easily he "mixes his own words with quotations from this Book of God" (RB 85). Yet there are times it is clear he does not really understand all the implications of the texts he uses. For instance, in a sermon condemning Christian compromise with Gikuyu tradition he cites for support a passage from the Gospel of John,⁶⁸ which ironically can be read as suggesting just the opposite (RB 85). Each of these instances is indicative of an uncritical

⁶⁶Lloyd Williams, "Religion and Life in James Ngugi's The River Between," Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o 150, 151, 156 respectively.

⁶⁷Gikandi, Ngugi 53.

⁶⁸John 14.2: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (RB 85).

and uninformed acceptance of Christianity, prompted more by his awe of the white man's power than by a true metanoia.

The entire circumcision controversy, as well, is a result of this same uncritical acceptance of European Christianity. He and the other 'loyal' Christians believe and teach that circumcision is "wrong and sinful" because the missionaries had said so, which implies for them that Jesus had also said so (RB 25). He ignores the fact that Jesus, Paul, and all of the apostles were themselves circumcised, or that the scriptures are actually silent on the subject of clitoridectomy.⁶⁹ In other words, Joshua assumes as doctrine what for the missionaries is actually a culturally defined moral position. And herein lies the problem: clitoridectomy may be--and in fact probably is--inconsistent with the Gospel. Insofar as the rite is connected with male suppression and control of female sexuality, and with the degradation, exploitation, and oppression of women in general, it contravenes the Gospel message. However, if evangelization is in fact a process of inculturating the Gospel message, then it is not the place of the foreign missionary to make that determination. Responsibility for discerning what is and is not consistent with the Gospel lies with the members of the indigenous church, who are the primary agents of inculturation.⁷⁰ The role of the foreign missionary is that of a facilitator, who shares his or her own experience, insight, and judgment, and at times challenges the local church community, but does not decide or dictate. Yet this is the authority that Livingstone usurps and Joshua concedes, but which the leaders of the independent church movement would not. Joshua's uncritical capitulation to the assertions of the missionaries and their efforts to redefine the essence of Gikuyu identity associates him with the colonizers and puts

⁶⁹Rice 129.

⁷⁰Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 70-72.

him in direct conflict with the local community, to whom he becomes a traitor and an agent of colonial expansion.

Joshua's unconditional embrace of mission Christianity parallels Waiyaki's similar embrace of Western education, and the failure of his brand of Christianity to unite the divided community similarly parallels Waiyaki's failure. The education Waiyaki promotes, like Joshua's Christianity, is unrelated to the everyday lived experience of the people; in fact it seems to deny the collective wisdom of the tribe. Unlike Kabonyi, who questions (albeit for dubious reasons) the superiority of this new education to the traditional education that had been nurtured and tested through the experience of the forefathers over the ages (RB 95), Waiyaki simply accepts that it will "create order and bring light in the dark" (RB 72), that it is "life" (RB 98) and an "instrument of enlightenment and advance" (RB 119), just as Joshua accepts the assertions of the missionaries. In a time of crisis, when action is demanded, it offers no relief from expanding European settlement, land alienation, and colonial tax burdens that were creating a situation of de facto forced labor. If anything, because it is non-political in the way Waiyaki's--and Ngugi's⁷¹--mentor believed it should be (RB 65), it is increasingly seen as a diversionary tactic to forestall popular resistance to colonial domination, just as Joshua is seen as a lackey for the white missionary, whose religion was intended to "quieten the people" and facilitate European land grabbing (RB 147). Although his rigorous defense of traditions make him appear the champion of cultural nationalism, in his uncritical enthusiasm for Western education Waiyaki has in fact unwittingly embraced the language and culture of colonialism. And like Joshua's message of salvation,

⁷¹L. B. Greaves says that Carey Francis, Ngugi's mentor at Alliance, was skeptical about politics, which he saw as self-centered grumbling, and considered it largely inconsistent with Christian principles. See Greaves, Carey Francis of Kenya (London: Rex Collings, 1969) 90.

because it appears to facilitate colonial domination it only alienates potential converts.

The text raises the closely interrelated issues of colonial education and Christian mission. In doing so it anticipates Weep Not, Child. However, by disconnecting Waiyaki's Marioshoni school from the independent church movement Ngugi weakens the link between these two interests.⁷² In the next novel the link is more firmly maintained. Consequently, the role of mission education in developing, sustaining, and extending the colonial discourse, which is hinted at here, moves to the thematic forefront.

Colonialism and Mission Education: Weep Not, Child

Colonial education has long been a subject of interest to Ngugi. For the Gikuyu people, he said, learning had always been associated with "advancement" and with "political" and "economic freedom";⁷³ it was "the tool with which you can attain the white man's wisdom", and with it "all the benefits of the white man's world."⁷⁴ In addition to being at the thematic heart of his first two novels, Bernth Lindfors notes, education is also "a topic Ngugi returned to often" in his early journalism.⁷⁵ In these articles, Lindfors says, he advocated adult education, urged racial integration and improved teacher pay, agitated for curriculum changes to make education more relevant to Africa, and most significantly, "complained about the divisiveness that mission education introduced into African communities."⁷⁶ This last concern, in particular, is important. For just as the young Ngugi recognized the importance of education for improving the material quality

⁷²Though he does not completely sever the link. The text notes, for example, that Siriana remains the only source of qualified teachers (RB 109).

⁷³Aminu Abdullah, Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o in October 1964, in African Writers Talking 126.

⁷⁴Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams ii.

⁷⁵Lindfors 28.

⁷⁶Lindfors 28.

of life in contemporary Kenya, he also exhibited a deepening awareness of the potential political and cultural consequences of an education designed, coordinated, and administered by Europeans and Europeanized Africans.

In his early writing, fiction and non-fiction alike, there is ambivalence and contradiction in Ngugi's attitude towards mission education. In one of his first articles he noted with regret that "[f]or an African to be 'educated' is actually to be removed from the world of his tribe" and immersed in a colonial culture "alien to him because it has no deep historical roots in him."⁷⁷ Yet, in the same article he also expressed a deep appreciation for the Christianity he saw as the foundation of European culture, believing that its emphasis on "the equality and dignity of each individual" offered a possible solution to the "dilemma" of the "disillusioned" African suspended between "the old way of life" and "the western way of life". Elsewhere he criticized missionaries for introducing conflict among Africans and creating "'a people without spiritual roots'",⁷⁸ but also praised Alliance High School as the only secondary school in Kenya that brought together students of different ethnic groups.⁷⁹

As he matured intellectually and politically, particularly after his study at Leeds, the contradictions and ambivalence gradually lessened, and he became more critical of the content and objectives of missionary-controlled education. Ultimately he began to see it not only as a form of cultural imperialism, but also as a powerful instrument in the exercise of colonial control. Only a few years after endorsing Christianity as "the best challenge to Communism or any form of totalitarianism",⁸⁰ he arrived at the conclusion that missionary schools had

⁷⁷Ngugi, "African Culture: The Mistake that Kenyatta Made." Sunday Post, 6 August 1961: 10.

⁷⁸Ngugi, "Kenya's Missionaries," quoted in Sicherman, Bibliography, 13.

⁷⁹Ngugi, "School Integration," described in Sicherman, Bibliography, 10.

⁸⁰Ngugi, "African Culture" 10.

been "the forerunners of colonialism . . . [sic] the John the Baptists preparing the way for Christ--the Colonial Administration."⁸¹ Although at this point he still denied the purpose of mission education was to "brainwash" Africans,⁸² this too would change. Gradually he began to see missionaries as "agents of European imperialism"⁸³ and the Gospel as their most effective weapon.⁸⁴ Educated Christians in particular, he said, "were being groomed" as a buffer between the white rulers and "the harsh realities under which the African peasants and workers lived."⁸⁵ Mission education gradually became the cause of all contemporary Africa's problems, from tribal divisions⁸⁶ to failed African nationalism⁸⁷ to neocolonialism.⁸⁸ Revolutionary politics have helped frame Ngugi's views ideologically and have provided him with an alternative to the Christian liberal humanism that marks his earliest writing. They have also provided him with a vocabulary and rhetoric with which to articulate his positions. And while in his later writing Ngugi's critique of Christianity and mission education may take on the vitriolic tones of Marxist ideology, his caution and doubts about the impact of such education (formal and informal) on movements of anti-colonial resistance and the construction of a national culture are already nascent in Weep Not, Child.

In this novel Ngugi makes use of another significant episode from modern Gikuyu history for his setting--the 'Mau Mau' revolt, during which he came of age. Like its predecessor, Weep Not, Child focuses on the experiences of a youthful, idealistic and very naive protagonist, Njoroge, like Ngugi a schoolboy coming of age during the Emergency,

⁸¹Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams i.

⁸²Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams i.

⁸³Ngugi, Homecoming 32.

⁸⁴Ngugi, Writers 37.

⁸⁵Ngugi, Homecoming 49.

⁸⁶Ngugi, Homecoming xvii.

⁸⁷Ngugi, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (London: Heinemann, 1981) 90.

⁸⁸Ngugi, Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms (London: James Currey, 1993) 51.

who shares with Waiyaki both a passion for the white man's education and a naive, messianic vision of himself. The cultural conflict of the earlier novel is overshadowed here by the more deadly armed confrontation between the European settlers and their native clients on the one side, and the dispossessed peasantry on the other. Where Huxley's A Thing to Love focused on the settlers' side of the tragedy, here Ngugi explores the effects of the war on the African,⁸⁹ recording events that illustrate that destructive impact. Families like Njoroge's are uprooted from their homes;⁹⁰ mothers-wives-children of suspected rebels arrested (WNC 81). There are rumors of 'Mau Mau' savagery (WNC 72), and fathers pitted against sons in support of and opposition to the revolt (WNC 74). Innocent people like the jovial barber are murdered in the night as suspected 'Mau Mau' (WNC 85-86). Pacifist Christians are likewise brutally killed by the security forces (WNC 101), and acts of torture--including threats and actual instances of castration--dramatized (WNC 118).

What sets this novel off from the earlier work is the very noticeable beginning of a change in Ngugi's perception of Christianity. In The River Between he was critical of the cavalier, paternalistic, and patronizing high-handedness of missionaries regarding Gikuyu culture. Still, like the Independent Church movement of the 1930s, he did not reject the religious or moral message of Christianity. Rather, that novel is an appeal for a contextualized Christianity. In Weep Not, Child, however, this same Christian message is depicted more negatively, like an opiate administered by the missionaries to pacify the Africans and weaken resistance to the colonial power.

While most African theologians today would not agree with Ngugi's assertions regarding the consciousness or deliberateness of the Church's role in the expansion of

⁸⁹Duerden, Interview with James Ngugi 121.

⁹⁰Ngugi, Weep Not, Child, 1964 (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987) 68. All references are to this edition and will be given in the text, cited at WNC.

colonialism, many would agree that the Christianity preached by missionaries did have negative consequences for colonized peoples. Jean-Marc Ela, for one, maintains that the God of missionary preaching was "distant" and "foreign" to the history of the colonized peoples.⁹¹ The missionary image of God was not the living, vital God of Exodus, a God of deliverance and liberation who intervenes in history and enters into a personal relationship with his people.⁹² Rather, agreeing with Fanon, Ela suggests the God preached by the missionaries "commanded adaptation and submission to the existing order of things."⁹³ It was an otherworldly God, a metaphysical idea distant and unrelated to anything that happens in the daily life of the colonized. Heavenly salvation was the focus of its message, implicitly teaching detachment from worldly concerns. Missionary collusion with the colonial project, Ela maintains, came through the failure to point out that in the Bible salvation and liberation are at once present and future, an object of hope but with an immediacy.

Lamin Sanneh, for another, suggests that missionaries, especially in the British missions where the evangelical Protestant influence was strongest, played a greater (if unintended) role in the development of nationalist, anti-colonial resistance than they are given credit for.⁹⁴ While acknowledging missionary failure on a wide scale, largely in the form of triumphalism and paternalism, Sanneh maintains that missionary enthusiasm for vernacular fluency, scripture translation, and literacy education were directly responsible for making available to Africans on a wide scale "the revolutionary message of the Bible concerning the impartiality of God towards all peoples and

⁹¹Jean-Marc Ela, "A Black African Perspective: An African Reading of Exodus," Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, New ed., ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995) 245.

⁹²Ela 245-46.

⁹³Ela 246.

⁹⁴Lamin Sanneh, Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Process: The African Dimension (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 75.

races and then inveighed against residual obstacles created by continued colonial rule and the doctrine of white racial supremacy".⁹⁵ Catholic and Protestant missionary organizations alike stressed vernacular fluency and promoted literacy education. For evangelical Protestants in particular, for whom personal scripture study was an imperative, this was a priority. While they initially gave priority to translating the Gospels, they were just as enthusiastic about making available the whole of scripture.⁹⁶ The combination of literacy and scripture availability "allowed [Africans] to relate Christianity to the whole system of life",⁹⁷ with its potentially liberating implications, and many (though obviously not all) "saw and welcomed" these effects.⁹⁸

When we turn to the novel, the glimpses Ngugi gives of the schools seem to correspond with schools for Kenya's African population in the 1940s and 1950s, and reflect what he would have encountered at the mission-run Kamaandura School.⁹⁹ The staff members are African Christians, some with only elementary levels of teacher training. Lucia, Njoroge's first teacher, is a daughter of Jacobo, the Christian landowner on whose property Njoroge's family farm as squatters. She is not that much older nor much more highly educated than her charges. While Njoroge is attracted to her, he is also fearful of her because she responds to student misbehavior or poor performance with severe beatings (WNC 14, 47), and relies on "anger and threats" in order to encourage students to make progress in their lessons (WNC 46). She is quite a contrast to the more

⁹⁵Sanneh 75.

⁹⁶Sanneh (155) points out that the "Ibuka ria Ngai" holy book of the Watu wa Mngu movement, founded in 1929, was nothing other than a Gikuyu translation of the Bible, prepared by missionaries.

⁹⁷Sanneh 76.

⁹⁸Sanneh 77. Sanneh suggests that resistance to scripture translation and native literacy programs was greater in the French and Portuguese-speaking colonies, where the difference in approach to colonial rule (direct rule as opposed to "indirect") resulted in greater fear of the development of nationalist sentiments, and also to the predominance of Roman Catholicism, which placed a lower priority on individual scripture study.

⁹⁹Ngugi, Detained 73.

jovial "Teacher" Isaac, or Isaka, as he is known. He is also a Christian, though "not a good Christian" because "he drank and smoked and went about with women" (WNC 33), all taboos to the morally strict evangelicals of the CSM missions with which Ngugi would have been most familiar. As a teacher, though, he is loved because he coaxes the children through their early reading lessons with silliness and fun (WNC 33-35). While it is these African Christian teachers who have daily contact with the children, it is still the European missionaries who supervise and control the content of the education, deciding the curriculum and periodically inspecting the schools. In this case that missionary is the daughter of Mr. Howlands, the settler who now owns Njoroge's traditional family lands (WNC 46-48).

Aside from the reading and English lesson dramatized in the novel--the latter "the criterion of a man's learning" in colonial education (WNC 44)--, no other direct mention is made of the curriculum. However, its religious orientation can be discerned through the influence schooling seems to have on Njoroge's intellectual and spiritual development. Although he is from a traditional polygamous family--and therefore not Christian--Njoroge formulates his prayers in the name of "Jesus Christ, our Lord" (WNC 44). At school the Bible is his "favourite book" and his favorite stories are about David, with whom he identifies, the book of Job, which "attracted him though it often gave rise to a painful stirring in his heart", and the New Testament stories of "the young Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount" (WNC 49). These preferences are significant. David, for one, is the youthful romantic hero figure Njoroge naively fancies himself to be: the chosen and favored of God, submissive to the Lord, cultured and refined, learned, brave, the one whose cause is righteous. More significant is the story of Job, the righteous sufferer. A masterpiece of the wisdom movement, this cycle of poems examines the problem of suffering and misfortune.

In the course of the dialogue, Job challenges God to justify Himself and is ultimately rebuked into submissive silence for presuming to question God's wisdom. These two Old Testament references together allude to a certain fatalistic resignation; they teach acceptance of the present and hope for the future relying on the righteousness of God. David, in turn, prefigures Jesus, the new David, and his message of love and pacifism transmitted through the Sermon on the Mount. Together they typify the faith Njoroge's education has nurtured. It is a faith in the Bible and in an educated life, incorporating belief in "the righteousness of God", the existence of equity and justice, reward for good behavior and punishment for bad (WNC 49). Above all, it stresses acceptance of the present and reliance on the will of God.

As in The River Between, foreign missionaries make few direct appearances in this novel. Here that comes rather late, in the brief scenes of Njoroge's stay at Siriana High School. Siriana, says Micere Githae-Mugo, resembles hers and Ngugi's alma mater, the elite Alliance High School, and its headmaster resembles the Alliance headmaster, Carey Francis.¹⁰⁰ The world of Siriana is a microcosm of colonial society: at the top is the European missionary, supported by a staff of Europeans and Africans, with a student body made up exclusively of Africans from various ethnic groups, all being educated with the white man's education under the white man's direction. It is an idyllic world of privilege, "an abode of peace in a turbulent country" (WNC 108), where ethnic and racial harmony prevails.¹⁰¹ The education it offers replicates an English public school, emphasizing physical training, Christianity, and English. The white missionary teachers are friendly and try to help Njoroge "in his Christian progress" (WNC 108). The students are

¹⁰⁰Githae-Mugo 134-135.

¹⁰¹Ngugi's description in fact resembles the manner in which Carey Francis described Alliance during the Emergency. See E. Carey Francis, "Kenya's Problems as Seen by a School Master in Kikuyu Country," African Affairs 54.216 (1955): 192.

multiethnic--"Nandi, Luo, Wakamba, and Giriama"--and, says the narrator, live the type of 'intertribal' harmony colonialism was supposed to impose (WNC 108). The violence of the Emergency is something that exists beyond the boundaries of the school, but only just beyond, as Njoroge will discover. If it is an idyllic world, however, it is also pointedly a segregated one as the narrator quickly points out. Siriana is an 'African' school. Whereas the staff may consist of Africans and Europeans, the student body is made up entirely of African boys.¹⁰² European and Asian children have their own separate schools, and contact between the races is mostly limited to 'gentlemanly' contests on the athletic field.

This idyllic colonial world is presided over by a white headmaster whose thinking is framed by both Christian ideology and colonial discourse. As a Christian he is fair, "severe with everyone, black and white alike" (WNC 115). He is quick to praise but also quick to punish what he thinks "evil", his purpose being "to bring out the good qualities in all" (WNC 115). However, the colonialist side of him is convinced "the best, the really excellent could only come from the white man", and so he encourages his "boys" to embrace and imitate European civilization as "the only hope of mankind and especially of the black races" (WNC 115). He is also distrustful of politics, particularly "black politicians" who oppose or question colonialism's "civilizing mission" (WNC 115), and up to this point seems very much modeled on Carey Francis.¹⁰³

However in a departure from his real-life model Ngugi implicates the headmaster as an impotent bystander lending tacit support to the brutal methods of the security forces.

¹⁰²Alliance was not desegregated until 1968, five years after independence, when Ewan Scott, the son of a CSM missionary couple, was registered as student no. 2404. See J. Stephen Smith, The History of Alliance High School (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1973) 263.

¹⁰³For two good biographies of Carey Francis see B. E. Kipkorir, "Carey Francis at the Alliance High School, Kikuyu 1940-62," Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980) 112-159; and Greaves, cited in n71 above.

When the police come to take Njoroge in for questioning about the murder of Jacobo, the headmaster simply gives the youth a pious pep talk about how "'Christ is there at the door, knocking, waiting to be admitted'", and expressing hope that Njoroge will "'not disappoint us'" as he lets the police take the lad away, all the time sounding "as if he would cry" (WNC 116). In contrast, the real Carey Francis was outspokenly critical of the security forces, especially when matters concerned his students.¹⁰⁴ The historic license Ngugi takes in The River Between makes Waiyaki's failure difficult to understand. However, this makeover of the headmaster into an impotent bystander effectively highlights Ngugi's evolving view of the Christian in the colonial setting. Unlike his later novels, in which he demonizes Christians and missionaries as willing collaborators of colonial and neocolonial oppression, here Ngugi still portrays them as benevolent figures "without prejudice and malice."¹⁰⁵ However, the values their liberal Christianity promotes--love your enemy, turn the other cheek, submit to temporal authority--do not communicate the liberating message Ela¹⁰⁶ and other theologians of liberation have seen in the scriptures, nor do they inspire the sort of passive resistance to which the Gospel inspired Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Rather, they lead to emasculation, passivity, and impotence--and not just for the African colonial subject. In fact, the Kenyan Church did speak out to publicly expose and condemn atrocities by the security forces,¹⁰⁷ but were likewise ineffectual. They

¹⁰⁴Kipkorir 147-155. See especially Kipkorir's (149) account of Francis's response to an incident of police harassment involving two Alliance students.

Francis recognized 'Mau Mau' was a "resistance movement" (Francis, 190). Though he doubted the legitimacy of many Gikuyu complaints, he understood the Gikuyu believed they were true.

¹⁰⁵Gikandi, Ngugi 252.

¹⁰⁶Ela 244-254; n90 above.

¹⁰⁷See "Responsibility for Mau Mau," Times 4 Dec. 1953: 8; "Kenya Government Criticized," Times 10 Jan. 1955: 4; "Charges by Kenya Church Leaders," Times 4 Feb. 1955: 7; Francis 193.

There were, as well, ample churchmen who supported or otherwise excused government tactics. See "Collective Punishment in Kenya Defended," Times 27 Nov. 1952, 5 (quoting the Archbishop of York);

did raise consciousness in Britain of government hypocrisy. But these protests did little to alleviate colonial injustice, nor were they intended to encourage or support even passive African resistance. Instead, Church influence among Africans was primarily disarming and pacifying.

Where Ngugi's representations of formal mission education stress its pacifying effect, his representation of the Revival movement also reflects the nationalist critique of Christianity as depoliticizing. Historically, the Revival was an indigenous, non-schismatic response to the conflict between traditional culture and mission Christianity. It began in Rwanda in 1929¹⁰⁸ and made its way to Kenya about 1937.¹⁰⁹ It was a premillenarian, Pentecostal movement whose numbers swelled especially during the Emergency. The Revival was characterized by a singular rejection of all worldly affairs, which F. B. Welbourn says made it a target of both the forest fighters, "because they would not yield to its anti-Christian persuasion", and the security forces, "because they would not resist this persuasion with force."¹¹⁰ In Huxley's novel it is the 'conspiracy' that brutalizes the Revivalists; here it is the security forces.

To the Christians in the novel, particularly the Revivalists, the violence of 'Mau Mau' and the government response to it are seen not as the result of colonial oppression, exploitation, and injustice. Rather, it is internalized and rationalized as the just fruits of their own failings, a "calamity" that had befallen the Gikuyu "because people had disobeyed the Creator, the Giver of Life" (WNC 89). Liberation from this "plague" can only be had when the people "turn to God" and "go on [their] knees

Walter Carey, Crisis in Kenya: Christian Common Sense on Mau Mau and the Colour Bar (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1953). (Carey was a retired Anglican bishop from South Africa); Frank Bouverie, "Mau Maus and Christians," Modern Churchman 44 (1954): 86-90.

¹⁰⁸Welbourn 9.

¹⁰⁹N. Langford-Smith, "Revival in East Africa," International Review of Missions, 43 (1954): 78.

¹¹⁰Welbourn 10.

and behold the animal [i.e. the Lamb of God] hung on the tree yonder" (WNC 89).

Isaka is Ngugi's primary representative of Revival Christianity. He is introduced early in the narrative as the popular 'Teacher' Isaka, who was "not a good Christian" (WNC 33). By the time of the Emergency, however, Isaka has been transformed from a jovial and worldly individual into a Revivalist preacher. In his first appearance as a preacher the 'reborn' Isaka reads to his congregation an extended passage from the Gospel of Matthew¹¹¹ in which Jesus warns against being led astray by false prophets (WNC 90). G. D. Killam suggests that the passage offers an ironic reflection on how missionaries, "in collusion with other European forces", have been "instrumental in perpetrating the divide-and-rule policy against which the passage preaches."¹¹² Killam's observation rings true in part. For one, because of the agreement among Protestant missions to respect 'spheres of influence', Christian sectarianism at times (unintentionally) exacerbated already existing ethnic divisions among the African people. Not only were there divisions along the lines of Protestant versus Catholic, but also Presbyterian versus Anglican versus Methodist versus Congregationalist, which at times were conterminous with ethnic lines. Bible translation and mission education at the elementary/village level, as well, stressed vernacular translation and vernacular literacy over use of a lingua franca, which Ngugi has suggested resulted in deliberate reinforcement of tribal rivalries.¹¹³ The irony of Killam's observation, though, is that while colonialists such as Howlands in the novel did intend to deliberately set Africans "fighting among themselves" (WNC 77), the Revival tended to transcend tribal and even racial barriers, bringing together peoples from rival, even

¹¹¹Matt. 24.4-34.

¹¹²Killam 50-51: 300-31.

¹¹³Ngugi, Decolonising 66-69.

warring, groups.¹¹⁴ And while it may not have had much of an impact in Catholic mission areas, it often transcended Protestant sectarianism.

Revivalists were no allies of the forest fighters, but neither were they allies of the security forces. The moral code and asceticism at its roots tended to divert the attention of its adherents away from the social and economic injustice of the colonial society. It also filled them with abhorrence for the cultural agenda of the forest fighters and for the violence of both sides to the conflict. In the novel, Isaka's response to the accusation of being a member of 'Mau Mau' represents the typical Revivalist response to pressure to oath--"Jesus had saved him and he could not exchange Jesus with Mau Mau" (WNC 101)¹¹⁵--and to siding with the security forces as spies and informers. The Revival also transcended tribal identity. John Taylor characterized it as a "fellowship" which superceded all the "solidarities of family and clan."¹¹⁶ Gatherings brought together Gikuyu, Jalu, and Masai as "brothers, made one by the blood of Christ."¹¹⁷ Thus, while Protestant sectarianism and the Protestant-Catholic divide may have contributed to tribal divisions that ultimately facilitated colonial control, the Revival was one aspect of Christianity that helped unite at least anti-'Mau Mau' Africans across tribal divisions. As a unifying force for anti-colonial resistance, however, it was irrelevant. And this is how it is presented in the novel as well.

The novel concludes with Njoroge's "faith" in ruins (WNC 134). His father is dead, his brothers in prison for killing a white man, his family devastated and dependent, and he contemplating suicide. Njoroge's loss of faith reflects Ngugi's own loss of the cautious enthusiasm he had

¹¹⁴Langford-Smith 80.

¹¹⁵E. M. Wiseman (Kikuyu Martyrs [London: Highway Press, 1958] 38, 40, 45, and elsewhere) and K. N. Phillips (From Mau Mau to Christ [NP: Stirling Tract Enterprises, 1958] 20) quote a number of victims as refusing to oath in a similar fashion.

¹¹⁶Quoted in Welbourn 9.

¹¹⁷Langford-Smith 80.

for a contextualized Christianity that had echoed through The River Between. That faith collapsed in a realization that the appearance of moral superiority it presented was illusory. The teachers and missionaries he had encountered over the years may have been sincere, but the religion they taught was turning out to be a weapon in the hands of unscrupulous and hypocritical colonial oppressors. Whereas in her novel Huxley saw Christianity as the way out of the violence and injustice and the hope for a future 'multiracial' Kenyan society, Ngugi saw the opposite. Instead of empowering, it was emasculating; instead of liberating, it was colonizing. This novel still falls short of the outright condemnation of Christianity as a willing partner in the colonial and neocolonial project that dominates his later thought. It does demonstrate, however, a keen awareness of the power of religion as a weapon of pacification within the context of a colonial discourse. In this it anticipates the direction his representations of the Church would take.

Chapter Nine

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2)

Revolution and Reaction: Christianity and Mission in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood

Introduction:

By the mid 1960s Ngugi was at an important crossroads in his career. With two novels and several short stories already published and another major work in progress he was quickly becoming an established writer. He was also engaged in graduate studies at Leeds, where he was discovering revolutionary writers and thinkers, Fanon in particular, who would provide him with an ideological framework for his developing political thought, which would in turn have serious implications for his aesthetic priorities. Artistically, Ngugi acknowledged that he was very much under the influence of European writers, specifically citing D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad as two that most impressed upon him what novels should do. Lawrence, he said, taught him about empathizing with the characters and situations he was creating, about "entering into the soul" not only of the individual characters, but of the people as a whole and of their entire environment.¹ With Conrad, in turn, he said he was impressed by "the way he questions things, requestions things like action, the morality of action".² For Ngugi the individual was the subject of the novel, and its main interest lay in a thorough examination of characters in all of their complexity, exploring the situations in which they find themselves and examining why they choose to act in certain ways. Although he would later

¹Dennis Duerden, Interview with James Ngugi, January 1964, African Writers Talking, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (London: Heinemann, 1972) 123.

²Duerden 124.

dismiss this as a "bourgeois" preoccupation,³ at this point in his career Ngugi tended to view the novel as essentially relating the writer's personal encounter with the lived experiences of individuals, somewhat akin to an act of "confession where the writer is almost confessing his own private reactions to various individuals, to various problems".⁴ This was the form his first two novels took, his interest being primarily in Waiyaki, Njoroge, Joshua, Muthoni, and the lesser characters like Nyambura, Kabonyi, Livingstone, Jacobo, and Howlands. The political nature and aspect of the situations and the relationships he was exploring in these early works, though present and strongly felt, was of only secondary interest to the moral probing.

This is not to imply that Ngugi was ignorant of the political nature of these relationships and situations. His polemical writing from this same period clearly testifies to his keen interest in and perceptive understanding of the politics of colonialism and resistance. Nor was he of the opinion that politics had no place in art. However, there was a tension in his understanding of what should be the role of the writer in politics and society. On the one hand he believed writers needed to be "committed" to the situations and people about whom they are writing; yet on the other he also believed that the writer, and in particular the African writer, needed "to stand a little bit detached" and see the human problem "in its proper perspective."⁵ While he maintained the writer is not a mere spectator or observer, he insisted that he or she must not allow personal "involvement in [a] particular social situation to impinge on his judgment or on his creative

³Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (London: James Currey, 1986) 65.

⁴Aminu Abdullahi, Interview with James Ngugi, October 1964, African Writers Talking 128.

⁵Abdullahi 128. This and the next quote.

activities." Aesthetically, he was being pulled in two directions at once. Firmly rooted in a tradition that produced Lawrence and Conrad, he maintained a deep interest in individuals and in what motivates them to make particular choices. At the same time, under the influence of Marx, Fanon, and other revolutionaries he was also beginning to see the novel as a writer's attempt to "come to terms with . . . his people's history."⁶ He began seeing his characters less as unique individuals and more as types in the sense of George Lukács.⁷ That is, he sought to merge in his characters the particularity of individual experience with the complexity of the social, economic, and political tides and currents of their particular historic moment in heightened form so as to transform the experiences of these characters into representative experiences of their class. Further, he began to see the role of the writer particularly in a postcolonial society as one of being aligned with "the struggle of the African masses" and "articulating the feelings behind this struggle."⁸ This tension between competing priorities is probably best illustrated in Ngugi's treatment of Christianity and his Christian characters. For as his Marxist sophistication and commitment matured he began to analyze both in more political terms: increasingly Christianity is seen as one of Louis Althusser's ideological state apparatuses (ISA)⁹ and Christian converts as class traitors and enemies.

⁶Ngugi, Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics (London: Heinemann, 1972) 39.

⁷George Lukács, Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others, trans. Edith Bone, London: Hillway, 1950, 6.

⁸Ngugi, Homecoming 50.

⁹See Louis Althusser, "Selected Texts," Ideology, ed. Terry Eagleton (London: Longman, 1994) 89-92.

Christianity, Resistance, and Collaboration: A Grain of Wheat

A Grain of Wheat is a pivotal text in Ngugi's career. In terms of artistic development it marks his arrival at maturity. His skillful blending of multiple narrative voices and points of view, his method of characterization, his manipulation of a complex chronological scheme that shifts back and forth between a fragile present and those past events which have given birth to this present, and his use of literary sources--secular and sacred alike--are all indicative of a level of artistic sophistication vis-à-vis the form of the novel which exceeds the achievement of his earlier works. Written during his graduate studies at Leeds, it also marks a crossroads in the development of Ngugi's political thought that would have serious implications for his understanding of the role of art and the artist in society and politics. As he explores in this novel the dynamics and implications of new political positions there are indications in the text of an underlying tension between the writer's artistic concerns and his developing ideological priorities--tensions resolved much to the artistic detriment of the novel in the revisions for its 1986 republication. While I mostly agree with Angela Smith that the original version largely "avoids didacticism and moral judgment",¹⁰ there are nevertheless indications already in this text of a deepening disillusionment with what David Maughan-Brown describes as "(Christian) liberal humanism . . . and a (secular) 'liberationist' humanism"¹¹ as Ngugi moves towards the eventual embracing of both a Marxist materialist political

¹⁰Angela Smith, East African Writing in English (London: Macmillan, 1989) 43.

¹¹David Maughan-Brown, Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya (London: Zed Books, 1985) 231.

position and an aesthetic of commitment in his later fiction that, at its best, experiments in blending formalistic elements of traditional and 'socialist' realism with elements of folk literature, and at its worst approaches becoming what Terry Eagleton would term a product of the ideological demands of "'vulgar Marxist' criticism".¹² This disillusionment is most evident in his portrayal of the Christian characters. While Ngugi succeeds in the original version at maintaining a degree of authorial distance to a greater extent than Achebe does in Arrow of God, there are nevertheless clear hints that the author has less sympathy with these characters than the others. And it is precisely in his handling of these characters that Ngugi makes the most serious revisions to the 1986 edition, which align it closer to his later fiction in which he indicts and caricatures Christianity as an instrument of neocolonial capitalist exploitation.

The novel is set in 1963, in the aftermath of the 'Mau Mau' revolt, as Kenya is poised at the eve of independence. Not long after its release Ngugi said his primary interest here was in the community at the frontlines of Kenya's struggle for independence, the peasants and village people whose daily lives were caught up in the upheaval.¹³ It is not a simple, homogenous community. Rather, its members fall into various groups: there are those in awe of the white man's power who saw no point in opposing it; those who took the 'Mau Mau' oaths and supported the struggle, some fighting to the end and others eventually compromised by individual failings; and those uncommitted, or 'neutrals' who tried (unsuccessfully) to remain on the

¹²Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (London: Methuen and Co., 1976) 17.

¹³Alan Marcuson, Mike Gonzalez, and Dave Williams, "James Ngugi Interviewed by Fellow Students at Leeds University," Cultural Events in Africa 31 (June 1967): v.

sidelines. Consequently there is no single character that is the center of focus. Rather the novel introduces a "forest" of characters¹⁴ whose lives have all been touched in some way and intertwined by the dead revolutionary fighter, Kihika, a Moses/Christ figure loosely based on the real-life Dedan Kimathi. The story covers the four-day period leading up to independence while incorporating numerous extended flashbacks (for lack of a better term) to events of the Emergency and before. Although the novel deals with these events, it is not so much about them as it uses them as a catalyst in order to create individual character types through which to explore the historic experience of the community of ordinary Kenyans. Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Karanja, Kihika, Thompson, and all the minor characters are frail human types whose existences have been touched and upset by colonialism and the anti-colonial struggle. Each has been forced by their frailty to make choices--as much political as they are moral--between loyalty and betrayal that consequently haunt them: Mugo chooses to betray Kihika to the security forces rather than be involved against his will in the struggle against colonialism, which leads to the latter's death; there is the betrayal of marriage fidelity during his detention by Gikonyo's wife Mumbi and also, under different circumstances, by Thompson's wife Margery; Gikonyo in turn betrays the batuni oath and his fellow detainees; Koinandu betrays his employer, Dr. Lynd, to terrorist intimidation; the villagers of Thabai are betrayed by Karanja, who accepts appointment by the colonial authorities during the Emergency as a village head; the revolt is betrayed and condemned by Church leaders such as Rev. Jackson Kigundu

¹⁴Charles E. Nnolim, "Structure and Theme in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's A Grain of Wheat," Critical Perspective on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ed. G. D. Killam (Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984) 218.

who preach solidarity with the colonizers; and the people collectively are also betrayed at the dawn of independence by the neocolonial elite who manipulate their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the peasantry. Most, in the end, are haunted by the consequences of their choices and must in some way be held accountable, even if only to themselves. Indeed, the text seems to suggest throughout, as General R does to Mugo when leading the latter to his execution, no one "will ever escape from his own actions."¹⁵ Eventually some price must be paid.

The complexity of the task Ngugi set out for himself necessitated going beyond the linear plot chronology and focus on a single central character that characterized his earlier novels. The solution he required he found in Conrad. Although he would later criticize what he saw as Conrad's "ambivalence" towards imperialism, he nevertheless discovered in Conrad's manipulation of novelistic form the potentially "tantalising effect" of multiple narrative voices and shifting perspectives in time and space for "shed[ding] new light" on events by "supplying more information, more evidence, or by relating other episodes that preceded or followed the event under the spotlight."¹⁶ Nostromo in particular he singled out on several occasions for its remarkable use of form to reveal and examine the entire complexity of situations.¹⁷ This, he felt, was what a novel should do, and these same techniques he employed in the present novel to achieve a similar effect. All

¹⁵James Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, 1967 (London: Heinemann Educational, 1968) 270, hereafter cited in the text as GW; and Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1986) 238, hereafter cited in the text as GWR. Where any divergence between the two is of an insignificant nature (such as in matters of capitalization, punctuation, or minor lexical variation) the quotation is given in the form and conventions of the original.

¹⁶Ngugi, Decolonising 76.

¹⁷Ngugi, Decolonizing 76; Writers in Politics: Essays (London: Heinemann Educational, 1981) 76; Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms (Oxford: James Currey, 1993) 6.

contribute to making Ngugi's fiction realistic (and modernist as well). However, for my primary interest in his critique of Christianity it is the impact these techniques have on Ngugi's characterization, particularly of his Christians, that will have particular relevance to my discussion, both here and later for Petals of Blood.

As he explores the intricately intertwined themes of liberation and betrayal and their implications for the community, Ngugi draws heavily from the Bible and Christology. The title is derived simultaneously from Pauline (I Cor. 15:36-7) and Johannine (John 12:24) sources in the New Testament and is an obvious reference to the Biblical call to transcend the egocentric self in order to facilitate the birth of an idealized society of altruistic individuals. In addition to the Old and New Testament quotations at the heads of several chapters, the text contains numerous allusions to biblical stories and texts: Moses and the Exodus, Abraham and Isaac, Ruth, Esther, the messianic mission of Christ, the agony in Gethsemane, and many of the sayings and teachings of Christ. Others have discussed to varying degrees the significance of the Bible for Ngugi,¹⁸ and all concur with Killam when he says that the Exodus story about the plight of the Israelites in Egypt is Ngugi's basic analogy for the situation of the colonized.¹⁹ Micere Githae-Mugo in particular focuses on the liberational aspect of Ngugi's use of scripture. She notes that "Kihika's entire revolutionary mission is drawn from the Bible, as if to demonstrate that the book used as

¹⁸See Killam 60ff; A. Smith 61ff; Patrick Williams, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 60ff; Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978) 181ff; David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings, 2nd ed. (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 81ff.

¹⁹Killam 60.

a tool for the conquest, 'pacification' and colonization of Africa can be turned into a tool for her liberation."²⁰ Kihika studies the book thoroughly, "before rejecting the colonialist's version of it and drawing fresh meaning from it." His use of the Bible echoes the position of such African theologians of liberation as Jean-Marc Ela,²¹ the verses he underlines stressing the here and now of everyday life, not those verses that ask people to suffer silently on earth in anticipation of a future reward in heaven. This, Githae-Mugo says, is indicative of Ngugi's endorsement of a religion that "cares for the whole man and not just his soul."²² The enthusiasm for Christian ethics evident in Ngugi's earlier stories still lingers here but is tempered and shaped by a recently discovered revolutionary politics of liberation, marking the hesitant first steps of a transition towards the ideological positions underlying Petals of Blood, in which "the Christian religion will be seen as a mask for a powerful and biased form of power politics, itself a vested interest whose missionaries and evangelists prey upon society."²³

In his use of scriptural sources and in his characterization Ngugi draws a clear distinction between the liberational message of Christianity and the scriptures on the one hand and the church of the missionaries on the other. While Kihika points to the Gospel's potential as an instrument of liberation, the missionaries and the indigenous adherents of mission Christianity are positioned in close proximity to the colonial authority. If the

²⁰Githae-Mugo 181; this and the next quote.

²¹Jean-Marc Ela, "A Black African Perspective: An African Reading of Exodus," Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, New ed., ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 244-254.

²²Githae-Mugo 181. Cook and Okenimkpe (81) make a similar observation.

²³Cook and Okenimkpe 81.

earlier novels suggested an indirect link between Christian missionaries and colonialism, an uneasy alliance between missionaries and colonial authority, and a well-intentioned but nevertheless paternalistic attitude on the part of missionaries, this novel articulates a deepening perception of the missionaries as the advanced troops of colonial conquest, and their legacy--mission Christianity--as an instrument of colonial domination and an impediment to national liberation. Early in the novel, for example, the narrator (at this point articulating the viewpoint of the generalized "people") notes that it is popularly believed the origins of the resistance movement can "be traced to the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord" (GW 13, GWR 10). These early missionaries are further perceived as harboring sinister and hypocritical intentions, the narrator noting that the generalized first missionary's "tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching" (GW 13, GWR 10). Because they seemed sincere, they were made welcome among the people and given land "to erect a temporary shelter" (GW 13, GWR 10). However, the missionaries quickly made their presence "permanent", "imperceptibly acquir[ing] more land to meet the growing needs of [their] position", until before long they were followed by a "long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword" (GW 15, GWR 11-2). Kihika, the Moses/Christ figure, repeats this indictment in a political speech when he is reported to have said that it was the missionary who told the people to "shut our eyes" in prayer, and "[w]hen we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard" (GW 18, GWR 15). When the land had been taken and the colonial power installed, the missionaries then "went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in

heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his own on earth, our earth" (GW 18, GWR 15).

While the missionaries, who make no direct appearance in the narrative, are directly linked in this popular view with the colonizers, the converts to mission Christianity are presented as dupes of colonialism and as collaborators. One such character is Teacher Muniu, a mission-school-teacher-turned-Revivalist whom young Kihika had challenged, embarrassed, and provoked into violent disciplinary action by correctly disputing the teacher's statements about the unchristian nature of circumcision. Muniu's obvious ignorance of what the scriptures actually do and do not say expose him as an ignorant fool and stooge of the Europeans, while his intolerance for challenges to his authority and his resort to corporal punishment to soothe his bruised and embarrassed ego mark him as an egocentric hypocrite (GW 99-101, GWR 85-87). Because he is initially positioned as a lackey of the missionaries it is not surprising that at the time of the Emergency he is "reputed to be a police informer", for which reason he was "struck down . . . by the Mau Mau" (GW 99, GWR 85).

Muniu's single appearance allows him to be little more than a caricature. However, Rev. Jackson Kigondu, the CSM preacher-turned-Revivalist and most prominent of the adherents to mission Christianity, though similarly minor is nevertheless a more complex and sympathetically drawn character that is clearly a Lukácsian type. He is sketched with sufficient background detail, complexity, and internal contradiction to make him an easily identifiable individual. At the same time, as a Christian preacher whose public opposition to ('Mau Mau') oaths and violence leads eventually to a brutal death, he is an obvious representative of what E. M. Wiseman called the 'Kikuyu martyrs' who similarly paid with their lives for standing

by their apparently sincere religious convictions and whose stories were widely circulated at the time.²⁴

Kigondu is introduced into the narrative as a respected elder in the ridges of Rung'ei, "small and thin with a tight-skinned face and hollow eyes that seemed to carry years of wisdom", who is often invited by council of elders to participate in important deliberations (GW 97, GWR 83-84). He is also a rather jovial character, and respectful of traditional religion as he goes about the task of proselytizing. As a leading Christian he is positioned in close alignment with the Europeans. There is, for one, the European name--Jackson--by which he is commonly known, as well as his European manner of dress (GW 97, GWR 83-84). Then, at the outbreak of the Emergency he suddenly converts to Revivalism, which the narrator notes in an editorial comment had been "started by a white missionary in Ruanda" (GW 98, GWR 84). The narrator also adds suspicion to Kigondu's motives for conversion by further pointing out that the Revival was "the only organization allowed to flourish in Kenya by the government during the Emergency" and that "Jackson became the leader in the Rung'ei area" (GW 99, GWR 85). With his conversion the character claims to shun politics as something "dirty" (GW 98, GWR 84). Yet, it is later noted that Kigondu "had consistently preached against Mau Mau in churches and in public meetings convened by [District Officer] Tom Robson", calling on Christians "to fight side by side with the whiteman, their brother in Christ, to restore order and the rule of the spirit" (GW 250, GWR 220). This is a detail

²⁴See E. M. Wiseman, Kikuyu Martyrs (London: Highway Press, 1958). Anthony Lavers (The Kikuyu Who Fought Mau Mau [Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1955]) and T. F. C. Bewes ("The Work of the Christian Church Among the Kikuyu," International Affairs 29.3 [1953]: 325) also include stories of Christians killed for their refusal "to throw in their lot with the terrorists" (Lavers 14). Similarly, contemporary newspaper reports highlighted 'Mau Mau' violence against Africans.

that departs from what is generally recognized as the 'plague-on-both-your-houses' position most Revivalists took in distancing themselves from the events of the Emergency and consequently turns the character into a self-contradicting hypocrite.²⁵

Though Kigondu's positioning aligns him with the Europeans, Ngugi avoids being either judgmental or polemical in his original rendering of the character, as the scene of his killing by General R illustrates. In that scene the third-person narrator relates the incident essentially from R's point of view, in which Kigondu is guilty of an act of betrayal deserving the ultimate penalty (GW 250, GWR 220). However, rather than simply demonizing the character as a quisling, Ngugi positions the narrator one step back from completely siding with R, allowing him to suggest the sincerity of Kigondu's Christian principles by observing that he "never showed fear" and even "prayed for his enemies" as he was being hacked to death (GW 250). In other words, though Ngugi personally may despise characters like Kigondu as traitors to their people, he nevertheless makes a conscious effort to give them what Lukács described as an "independent life" that makes them more than stock figures.²⁶ Through Kigondu (and R) Ngugi seeks to explore the whole, complex human personality in all of its strengths and weaknesses, situated in a whole society with all of the contradictions and complexities of its historic moment rather than focusing two-dimensionally on particular aspects of their personalities. He does this, quite simply, by allowing the characters, through their actions and words, to articulate their own positions, and

²⁵See F. B. Welbourn, East African Rebels: A Study of Some Independent Churches (London: SCM Press, 1961) 10ff. Discussed in chapter 8, above.

²⁶Lukács 6.

in doing so dramatize the complex situation of the community in conflict rather than using the characters as mere ideological pawns.

It is precisely scenes like this, which dramatize 'Mau Mau' violence and place aspects of it in an irrational light while also lending legitimacy to 'reactionary' positions, that Maughan-Brown has vigorously criticized (wrongly, I believe) as indicative of an aesthetic ideology of "'balance'".²⁷ In making his case Maughan-Brown points specifically to two incidents in the original edition that he says contribute to this 'balance.' One is the rape of Dr. Lynd by Lt Koinandu (Koina in the revised version), and the other is the killing of Kigondo. Referring specifically to the rape, he argues that inclusion of the scene is "simply the logical extreme in providing 'the other point of view', where history becomes of no account", because there is to be no historic foundation for it.²⁸ The sole purpose it serves is to validate European fears of African savagery. Of the latter incident he says Kigondo's killing is presented as an act of irrational violence and hints that, had the family been home, they too would have been hacked to pieces. General R's subsequent guilty conscience suggests that even 'Mau Mau' leaders "are to be understood as devoid of any political cause which could possibly justify the taking of (individual) life."²⁹ Concurring with Michael Vaughan's observations,³⁰ Maughan-Brown adds that R's recurring dreams (nightmares, actually) suggest that R himself does not believe Kigondo's killing was justified, and that he is guilty of "murder," not of administering

²⁷Maughan-Brown 252.

²⁸Maughan-Brown 254.

²⁹Maughan-Brown 239.

³⁰Michael Vaughan, "African Fiction and Popular Struggle: The Case of A Grain of Wheat," English in Africa 8.2 (1981): 40-41.

"revolutionary justice."³¹ This is further emphasized by the violent nature of R's background and by such touches as the fact that he is given red eyes to stress his 'animality' and irrationality. In the end, the killing of Kigonde "is an act of deviancy by a putative parricide."³²

Throughout the novel it is obvious Ngugi is not "entirely on the side of the revolt", a position Shatto Gakwandi has suggested,³³ though he is sympathetic. His portrayal of Kihika as an abstract dogmatist, insensitive and largely uncomprehending of 'Mau Mau' violence, indicates that neither the forest fighters nor their cause have the author's unequivocal approval. Rather, Maughan-Brown argues, despite glimmers in the novel of an emerging commitment to revolutionary ideology, Ngugi is here still very much under the influence of the ideology of Christian liberal humanism, which abhors violence for any purpose and dominates his earlier work, and this in turn weakens his commitment to the revolutionary ideology of 'Mau Mau.'³⁴ What Maughan-Brown disapproves of in the relatively sympathetic hearing Ngugi gives to characters like Kigonde is an "aesthetic ideology that demands 'objectivity', the presentation of 'all' points of view."³⁵ This he says is not objectionable in itself, "until that imperative is linked to the complementary imperative that the writer be 'non-political.'" While I share his skepticism of an aesthetic that demands an author to be non-political, I disagree with his suspicions about presenting all points of view. In the first place, what Ngugi is pursuing here is

³¹Maughan-Brown 240.

³²Maughan-Brown 240.

³³Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, "Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat." Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ed. G. D. Killam (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1984) 231.

³⁴Though, interestingly, at the time of the novel's publication Ngugi took the view that violence was often the only voice the oppressed had (Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams iv).

³⁵Maughan-Brown 254; this and the next quote.

neither 'neutrality' nor 'balance.' Rather, in R and Kigonda he is creating Lukácsian types whose interrelated experiences bring heightened focus on the complexity of their shared historic moment. By placing them in conflict and allowing each to articulate their own positions, in all of their complexity and with all of their internal contradictions, they contribute to making the novel Bakhtin's "microcosm of heteroglossia" by giving representation all the social and ideological voices of its era that have any claim to significance in the historic drama.³⁶ Far from being 'non-political,' R and Kigonda epitomize what Williams calls the "diversity of languages and discourses which constitute the everyday reality of society."³⁷ Through this diversity--the 'independence' of character Lukács praises--the relative truth of the conflicting positions can be examined and exposed. This, Williams says, is precisely what Ngugi is attempting to do through the 'forest of characters': "to represent not only something of the diversity within the (national) community, but also the way in which the political struggle is instantiated in different discourses"--though in the final analysis Williams in fact concurs with Maughan-Brown about the need in a novel of this nature for priority to be given to the ideological demands.³⁸

It almost seems as if Ngugi heard Maughan-Brown's criticism, for the most extensive revisions made for the 1986 edition touch precisely on these two incidents of which he was most critical. Williams has already discussed at some length many of the revisions Ngugi made to the text, which he generally views as "'positive'" and offering

³⁶M. M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 411.

³⁷Williams 75; this and the next quote.

³⁸Williams 72.

"better representations of Africa in general, and Mau Mau in particular, than are provided by colonialist and neo-colonialist historiography."³⁹ The revisions include the updating of historic detail for accuracy,⁴⁰ and an ideological shift made by changing 'the Party' to 'the Movement' throughout the novel.⁴¹ As for the question of the rape, which in the revised version is transformed into the butchering of Lynd's dog, Williams admits that it is "perhaps not more than a straightforward attempt to make Koinandu (and hence Mau Mau) look better."⁴² Indeed, not only is the rape itself eliminated, Koinandu's accounts of his brushes and run-ins with the colonial social and economic order, his rhetoric, and his rationale for turning on Lynd are rewritten in such a way as to stress the social and economic injustice borne by Africans in the colonial situation while also elevating the personal motivation for his behavior from the level of self-gratifying hedonism (e.g. "'I want more money. I want a car like yours.'" [GW 242]) to a more justifiable level of moral outrage ("'I want more money. I want a decent house and enough food, just like you. I want a car like yours'" [GWR 213]). On the other hand, it may also be another revision for the sake of historic accuracy. For, like Maughan-Brown,⁴³ I too have been unable to find even a single allegation of the rape of a white woman by a 'Mau Mau' fighter during the period of the Emergency.

More problematic, I feel, are the revisions involving the killing of Kigondu, of which Williams makes no mention. In both versions the incident is related by a third-person

³⁹Williams 70.

⁴⁰The numbers killed in the 1920s Harry Thuku protests is corrected from 15 to 150 (GW 17, GWR 13).

⁴¹Williams (71) credits this to Ngugi's dissatisfaction with the "accommodationist" betrayal he saw in KANU.

⁴²Williams 71.

⁴³Maughan-Brown 243.

narrator. However, in the original the narrator assumes a 'neutral' stance, which Maughan-Brown mistakes for 'balance.' What makes this version of the scene problematic for Maughan-Brown is that in giving both Kigonda and R the sort of 'independent lives' that Lukács speaks of, in allowing the whole human person to be explored, Ngugi at least partially undermines R's integrity as a revolutionary. However, in the revised version the narration swings to the other extreme, wholly embracing the revolutionary point of view while demonizing Kigonda. In this version Kigonda had been warned three times, and R had even appealed to him "[i]n the name of Jesus, who stood against the Roman colonialists and their Pharisee homeguards, . . . to stop siding with British colonialism!" (GWR 220). These appeals only fell on deaf ears, as Kigonda became "more defiant" until inevitably he "had to be silenced" (GWR 220). Further, the "bloody face" of R's accuser that "mocked him" on the day of Uhuru (GW 250) in the rewritten version mocks him for a different reason: "We are still here. We whom you call traitors and collaborators will never die!" (GWR 220). And to emphasize the point, the comment is added that during the anti-colonial struggle Kigonda "was doing in the churches" to the African people the same thing that the King's African Rifles, the armed wing of colonialism, "had been doing on the battlefield" (GWR 220). Even earlier in the novel, when the killing is first reported, this shift in narrative point of view is evident. In the original version following Kigonda's death the people wonder "[w]ho would be struck down next by the Mau Mau" (GW 99); whereas in the revised edition the people wonder "[w]hich other traitors would be struck down next" (GWR 85). Also, in the original version the narrator says that the Revivalists "praised God and said that Jackson and Muniu, by their deaths, had only

followed in the footsteps of the Lord. What greater honours could befall a Christian?" (GW 99, GWR 85). However, the revised edition adds the narrator's comment that "the people prayed a different prayer: yes, let all the traitors be wiped out!" (GWR 85).

Maughan-Brown would no doubt approve of these revisions. Insofar as the rewriting of the rape incident brings the novel more closely in line with historic accuracy I too agree that it is a positive revision. (Still I remain skeptical and critical of the rhetoric articulated by the reinvented Koina, which serves only to justify and ennoble his actions.) However, the revisions to the killing of Kigondu are problematic in the other direction, for they contribute to turning the novel away from Bakhtin's 'microcosm of heteroglossia' and into mere propaganda by making author, narrator, and character (General R) largely indistinguishable. Those changes that transform R's feelings of guilt over a murder he cannot really justify into the articulation of a political and revolutionary rationale for the necessity of eliminating Kigondu (as an opponent of the anti-colonial struggle vis-à-vis a 'for-us-or-against-us' line of reasoning) may help to more accurately project the perception of the Revivalists by the forest fighters (but only at the risk of reducing a complex character to a stock figure, which is what happens in the present case), and thus is potentially an improvement that contributes to creating a 'microcosm of heteroglossia.' However, the revisions that do this while simultaneously demonizing Kigondu do not. Already the original version hints that the Christians, and particularly the Revivalists, were mere puppets and parrots of the colonial power, which is of questionable historic accuracy. Undoubtedly there were churchmen--indigenous and foreign as well--who were aligned with or otherwise apologists for the

colonial government.⁴⁴ Similarly there were forest fighters whose motives were baser and deeds more sadistic than either R or Koinandu.⁴⁵ However, by modeling his characters on either of these extremes Ngugi would fail to create realistic types. Yet this is precisely what he does in the revisions surrounding Kigondu, which results in a questionable representation of the Revivalists who distanced themselves from both sides of the conflict and were consequently victimized by both.⁴⁶ Such changes in this direction are already anticipated in Christian characters like Ezekiel Waweru and Rev. Jerrod Brown in Petals of Blood. These latter, however, at least are representative types from the standpoint of an aesthetic of socialist realism. Here, setting the character even deeper into the pocket of the colonial regime in both the popular and the historic view, as do such seemingly minor changes like describing Kigondu as "defiant" to General R's appeals "[i]n the name of Jesus" (GWR 220), may be a step towards the sort of ideological commitment Maughan-Brown values, but it does so at the cost of transforming a complicated and realistic character into a two-dimensional caricature that anticipates the satiric stock figures which populate his later 'populist' novels, Devil on the Cross and Matigari.

The only professed Christian character that receives a wholly sympathetic portrayal in the novel is Rev. Morris Kingori of the Kikuyu Greek Orthodox Church, one of "the many independent churches that had broken with the

⁴⁴The outspoken, retired South African bishop Walter Carey quickly comes to mind. However, the CMS felt compelled to repudiate his views. See Henry Swanzy, "Query Notes," African Affairs 52.207 (1953): 95.

⁴⁵See H. K. Wachanga, The Swords of Kirinyaga: The Fight for Land and Freedom, ed. Robert Whittier (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975) 44-45.

⁴⁶See Welbourn 10ff.

missionary establishment" (GW 246, GWR 217). Kingori makes only a cameo appearance near the end, to offer the invocation for Rung'ei's Uhuru celebration. As an 'independent' Christian rather than one of the Revivalists who remained within the established churches, he is one of Welbourn's "rebels"⁴⁷ and thus more clearly identified with the anti-colonial struggle. Being an independent and therefore outside the pale of 'approved' Churches, he too was a victim of colonial oppression who "went without a job for a long time" after the declaration of the Emergency and banning of these churches under Emergency legislation (GW 246, GWR 217). His version of Christianity synthesizes Judeo-Christian and Gikuyu mythology, as his convocation prayer shows by invoking the "God of Isaac and Jacob and Abraham, who also created Gikuyu and Mumbi" (GW 247, GWR 218). It is a minor detail that hints at wider attempts by the independents to synthesize Christianity with tradition, this specific instance pointing to an approach to evangelization that was beginning to recognize the integrated nature of a people's narratives and sacred myths to their worldview.⁴⁸ It points to the sort of contextualization of the Gospel Waiyaki sought in The River Between and Achebe also hinted at through Brown and again through Unachukwu; what Welbourn described as an attempt by the independent churches to create a religious space where the Gikuyu could "feel at home".⁴⁹

⁴⁷East African Rebels, cited in n25 above. While the Kikuyu Greek Orthodox Church is Ngugi's own creation, many of the independent churches received their apostolic orders from the African Orthodox Church, an independent church of African-American origin with roots in the Garvey Movement and ties to Greek Orthodoxy. Among these were the African Greek Orthodox Church, associated with the Kikuyu Karing'a Educational Association (KKEA) that ran the elementary school Ngugi attended, and the African Independent Pentecostal Church which was associated with the Kikuyu Independent School Association (KISA).

⁴⁸See for example M. Werner, "The Value of Folk-lore to Missionaries," International Review of Missions 4.16 (1915): 627-637.

⁴⁹Welbourn 213.

Angela Smith sees Kingori's presence at the Uhuru celebrations as one more reminder of the violent, confrontational, divided past that suspends a pall of apprehension over the festivities.⁵⁰ I disagree. Rather, I feel his role in the Uhuru celebration is intended to help legitimize the revolt, or at least its outcome, much in the same manner Maughan-Brown suggests Huxley uses Pat Foxley in A Thing to Love.⁵¹ This is particularly true in the original version of the novel, where Ngugi's ambivalence about the violence is inscribed in the complex and ambiguous motives of General R, Lt Koinandu and others. There were many, but certainly not all, among the independent churches who supported 'Mau Mau'. However, this does not mean they approved of its methods. Rather, as Welbourn points out, there were a large number of people "of deep Christian conviction" who believed the fighters "did the wrong thing for the right reason."⁵² Kingori's appeal to the whole of Israel's Patriarchal epoch, the enslavement in Egypt, the Passover deliverance, the desert experience and entrance into Canaan as analogies for the experience of colonization and liberation echoes Kihika's use of the Exodus story. It puts the violence in the sort of context that potentially justifies it: one of continued peril and persecution by sinister forces waiting "to take us back to Pharaoh"; but with cautious hope in the assurance of the promise of "Jesus Christ our Lord" (GW 247, GWR 218).

A Grain of Wheat, then, is concerned with the lives of the ordinary people of Kenya who were at the frontlines of the struggle for independence. It departs from the traditional novel in that its primary focus is not on one

⁵⁰A. Smith 53.

⁵¹Maughan-Brown 129.

⁵²Welbourn 133.

particular central figure, but on the community as a whole, of which the Christian characters form one segment. Formalistically the novel in its original version demonstrates Ngugi's artistic sophistication. It brings together a masterful manipulation of multiple narrative voices and points of view with a complex, shifting chronological scheme and a method of characterization that produces Lukácsian types whose intricately interrelated experiences dramatize the tragedies and hopes of an anxious community. The novel also gives evidence of the developing tensions between rivaling aesthetic priorities arising out of Ngugi's deepening commitment to Marxist materialist revolutionary politics. In the original version Ngugi falls short of giving the forest fighters his unequivocal approval, though we can agree at least in part with Gakwandi that it is a qualified "defence of that movement."⁵³ While the novel still exhibits a fondness for Christian ethics and an attraction to a theology of liberation, here mission Christianity is understood more as an implement of colonial control and an obstacle to the formation of a national identity. By 1970 Ngugi would openly castigate mission Christianity as an agent of imperialism, suggesting to the assembled leaders of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa their own hypocrisy by asserting "Christ himself had always championed the cause of the Jewish masses against both the Pharisees (equivalent to our privileged bourgeoisie) and the Roman colonialists" and further suggesting that Christ today "would have been crucified as a Mau Mau terrorist, or a Communist."⁵⁴ In a vocabulary indicative of his ideological orientation, he went on to insist that if the Church in the postcolonial

⁵³Gakwandi 232.

⁵⁴Ngugi, Homecoming 34.

world was to have any relevance "it must be a meaningful champion of the needs of all the workers and peasants of this country,"⁵⁵ and pleaded for a return to "the primitive communism" of the early Church so that in cooperation with "members of other organizations which avow humanism, [it] could help in the struggle to move away from the strange land of capitalism, neo-colonialism and western middle-class culture."⁵⁶ Just as these remarks indicate the direction Ngugi's political vision was taking, they also anticipate the direction his art would begin to take as well. In the fiction he subsequently produced ideology and political positions begin to take on increasingly greater importance. The sort of aesthetic of ideological 'commitment' that Maughan-Brown values begins to assert itself.

Christianity and Neocolonialism: Petals of Blood

If A Grain of Wheat marks Ngugi's coming of age artistically, Petals of Blood is a "profoundly experimental novel"⁵⁷ that signals a major "turning point in his conception of novelistic form and his presentation of political ideology of the left."⁵⁸ Partly to accommodate his deepening commitment to Marxist ideology and partly to compensate for what he was beginning to see as the inability of the conventional 'bourgeois' novel to adequately represent the plight of the marginalized in the post/neocolonial world, in this text Ngugi brings together elements of the traditional realist novel and the novel of

⁵⁵Ngugi, Homecoming 34.

⁵⁶Ngugi, Homecoming 36.

⁵⁷A. Smith 78.

⁵⁸Joseph McLaren, "Ideology and Form: The Critical Reception of Petals of Blood," The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ed. Charles Cantalupo (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995) 74.

'socialist realism' with elements of the oral tradition-- "orature" as he would later call it⁵⁹--such as myth, heroic folk epic, allegoric fable, and satire.⁶⁰ The result is an extremely rich and complex text characterized by a multiplicity of constantly shifting narrative voices and points of view and a variety of modes of characterization, which requires careful attention on the part of the reader. This complexity is perhaps most succinctly illustrated in Ngugi's treatment of Christianity and Christian characters. Formalistically, it is the Christian characters that are drawn in the greatest variety of modes, depending on their centrality to and role in the narrative. Some are represented in terms of traditional or 'bourgeois' realism, others according to the norms of socialist realism, while still others are depicted as allegorical archetypes. Further, whatever the mode of characterization, each serves an important role in articulating Ngugi's developing view of the role of religion in society. Far more than simply dramatizing religion's inadequacy as an answer to capitalist modernity, as Smith has suggested,⁶¹ these characters each dramatize particular Marxist assumptions about the class origins, nature, and political function of religion in society and more specifically the role of Christianity in the multinational capitalist project. In the process, they also point to the contradictions in Ngugi's simultaneous desire for social modernity and cultural integrity.

In such early fiction as "The Village Priest" and The River Between (and in early non-fiction as well⁶²), Ngugi

⁵⁹Ngugi, Decolonising 12.

⁶⁰Simon Gikandi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 134-135.

⁶¹A. Smith 70.

⁶²See, for example, "African Culture: The Mistake that Kenyatta Made," Sunday Post 6 Aug. 1961: 10; and "Let Us Be Careful About What

tended to depict Christianity as one of the facilitating factors for achieving the desirable benefits of material modernity. Like Joyce Cary he thought traditional culture (including religion) dogmatic, superstitious, and a hindrance to 'progress.' European culture's greatest strength, said the young Ngugi, is its ability "to change and embrace new ideas", and at the heart of that culture is Christianity.⁶³ Though he was painfully aware of Christian Europe's failure to live up to its ideals, he nevertheless maintained an enthusiasm for what he saw as the liberating aspects of Christian liberal humanism. It is this belief in overall superiority of Christian humanism that is behind the original Joshua's fraternal partnership with Livingstone, Waiyaki's enthusiasm for European education and a contextualized Christianity, and even the appeal Kihika finds in a liberational reading of the Bible message. It was only after his 1966 visit to the United States, where he encountered the negative side of "material progress" (slums, homelessness, and "beggars crawling in the streets" in the midst of fabulous wealth), that he started to perceive Christian liberal humanism as a "root-cause" of "racialism" and capitalist economic exploitation.⁶⁴ In other words, he began to see Christianity as simultaneously responsible for the intellectual liberation that made material modernism possible and for enslaving the working masses with its ideology of love, pacifism, and anti-militancy. This contradiction, in turn, is at the heart of a dilemma in the present novel, which desires material progress but longs to

We Take from the Past," Sunday Nation 5 Aug. 1962: 31 (the latter is described in Carol Sicherman, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources 1957-1987 [London: Hans Zell, 1989,] 11).

⁶³Ngugi, "African Culture" 10.

⁶⁴Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams iii-iv.

retain traditional social simplicity. The problem is that traditional culture and religion, though seen as idyllic and more humane than western modernist culture, are incapable of creating the circumstances necessary to stimulate modern material progress, while western Christian liberal humanism, which is a major impetus behind such progress, is also an instrument of capitalist exploitation and suppression. It is, further, a dilemma Ngugi is here incapable of resolving.

Set in Ilmorog, a fictional colonial-backwater-turned-modern-industrial-center in postcolonial Kenya, the novel takes the deceptively simple form of a murder mystery. Three prominent industrialists--Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria--have been killed and Inspector Godfrey is in pursuit of the culprit. Munira, Wanja, Abdullah, and Karega--a teacher, a barmaid and prostitute, a peasant-turned-shopkeeper, and a union organizer respectively--are the chief suspects. In the course of the ten days of their interrogation the narrative unfolds, each taking turns revealing piecemeal their intricately intertwined individual histories together with the story of Ilmorog's transformation from a largely ignored pre-colonial pastoral community to a cesspool of neocolonial foreign capitalist exploitation. In the process Ngugi pieces together in patchwork fashion a highly political examination of the intricate relationship between capitalism and modernity in the postcolony.

Following the publication of A Grain of Wheat Ngugi began reformulating his ideas about the role of literature and the writer in society. Already in 1967 he was questioning the propriety of an African writing in European languages.⁶⁵ Subsequently, as his Marxist sophistication deepened, he also reassessed the relationship between the

⁶⁵See his comments in Marcuson, Gonzalez, and Williams v.

writer and his community and the place of literature in the cause of national and class liberation. In a 1973 essay, for instance, he wrote that he was beginning to see the production of literature as "conscious acts of men in society."

At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes, of a community's wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter, and in the process creating and recreating itself in history.⁶⁶

He would later expound on this, noting that the writer is "a product of history, of time and place[,] . . . a member of society" and of a particular class in whose struggle he or she must inevitably participate.⁶⁷ The writer's subject matter is that history, and the product of his or her creative activity is a reflection of that society: "its economic structure, its class formation, its conflicts and contradictions; its class power political and cultural struggles; its structure of values". The novel in particular, he felt, "especially in its critical realist tradition", is an important vehicle for this end because it is at once analytical and synthetic: it pulls society apart and puts it together. Particularly in a postcolonial

⁶⁶Ngugi, Writers 5-6.

⁶⁷Ngugi, Writers 72. This and the next two quotations.

society struggling to define itself while simultaneously confronting neocolonial capitalist exploitation, there is a greater urgency for full participation in the struggle by all members of society: "Literature and writers", he said, "cannot be exempted".⁶⁸ For the writer, then, this implied engaging with what Achebe called "the big social and political issues" or risk becoming "completely irrelevant".⁶⁹ The writer's task, in other words, is to use his or her creative powers to help "in the community's struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitive relations", and his or her relevance is determined by which side he or she takes in the class struggle of his or her time.⁷⁰

The emphasis in his essays on class struggle and on the centrality of modes of production and their control in social formation make the Marxist locus of Ngugi's developing view obvious. With this ideological orientation he approached the composition of Petals of Blood. Consequently, when the novel was published critics were quick to note the ideological shift from that of his previous works,⁷¹ and as Joseph McLaren has pointed out, their response has been varied, revealing "the controversial nature of the political novel and the continued debate regarding art as ideology."⁷² The narration, particularly when articulating Karega's point of view, is laden with Marxist rhetoric and positions. Yet, as Smith has suggested, it is a mistake to simply regard this

⁶⁸Ngugi, Writers 73.

⁶⁹Quoted in Ngugi, Writers 74.

⁷⁰Ngugi, Writers 75.

⁷¹For representative reviews see Lewis Nkosi, "A Voice from Detention," West Africa, 20 Feb. 1978: 334-35; Cyril Treister, "An Addition to the Genre of the Proletariat Novel," rpt. in Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o 267-70. In addition Joseph McLaren (cited in n58 above) gives a thorough review of the novel's critical reception.

⁷²McLaren 73.

character as a spokesman for the author, however much Ngugi may actually sympathize with him: he is too much of an ideologue and his vocabulary and speeches too cliché-ridden to be taken seriously.⁷³ Rather, Smith says, Ngugi's Marxism is expressed through the conception and structure of the novel.⁷⁴ Whereas his earlier works exhibited what at times seem only an underlying consciousness of the economic and class-oriented aspects of colonialism and its neocolonial offspring, this novel assumes Marxist theories of history and social organization, and offers a fairly sophisticated class analysis of pre-, colonial, and post-/neo-colonial Kenyan society. Nationalism and issues of race endemic in colonialism that were at the heart of his earlier novels are replaced here, as Patrick Williams notes, by the problems associated with colonialism's principal legacy, capitalist modernity: urbanization; industrialization; the commodification of goods, services, and even people; the drive for profit and the accumulation of wealth; rural depopulation; class formation.⁷⁵ Ngugi's interest is not so much with individual characters or heroes as it is in *Ilmorog* itself.⁷⁶ The four central suspects/characters are all realistic Lukácsian types. That is, at the same time that they are unique individuals with unique stories they are also representative of the petit bourgeoisie, the peasants, the workers, and the women whose individual experiences reflect the collective experience of the exploited and oppressed segments of postcolonial Kenya's society. The complex time scheme and narrative structure as well records what Simon Gikandi has called a "blue book" Marxist account of the village's transformation

⁷³A. Smith 73-75.

⁷⁴A. Smith 73.

⁷⁵Williams 81.

⁷⁶A. Smith 73-74.

from an unromanticized pre-colonial pastoral society whose primitive modes of production centered around common labor,⁷⁷ to a multinational capitalist-modernist industrial center rife with class exploitation and class conflict over control of the means of production.

Just as Ngugi's concepts of history, of social organization, and of the driving impetus behind colonial expansion had undergone a transformation between the publication of A Grain of Wheat and the present novel, so too had his views of the Church and its place in the colonial-capitalist project. A number of critics have suggested that despite the Marxist rhetoric of the novel, Ngugi has remained essentially a "Christian writer".⁷⁸ Such arguments strike me as placing too much significance on Ngugi's familiarity with and continued use of Biblical material. Rather, I agree with Christopher Wise when he says that despite Ngugi's early appreciation for the "utopian and radical (if not transcendental) 'truth content' of Christianity," beginning with Petals of Blood he unequivocally and totally rejects Christianity "as an untimely and inappropriate solution to the dilemmas of contemporary Kenyan society."⁷⁹ Through the intimate relations of the 'Christian' characters with the forces of neocolonial capitalism, the novel ultimately becomes a repudiation of Ngugi's earlier appropriation of Christianity and Biblical rhetoric for his nationalist

⁷⁷Gikandi 143.

⁷⁸Peter Nazareth, "The Second Homecoming: Multiple Ngugis in Petals of Blood," Marxism and African Literature, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger (London: James Currey, 1985) 120. Also see Govind Narain Sharma, "Ngugi's Apocalypse: Marxism, Christianity and African Utopianism in Petals of Blood," Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o 292; and K. Indrasena Reddy, The Novels of Achebe and Ngugi: A Study in the Dialectics of Commitment (Delhi: Prestige, 1994) 87.

⁷⁹Christopher Wise, "Messianic Hallucinations and Manichean Realities: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Christianity, and the Third World Novel," Christianity and Literature 45.1 (1995): 32.

project.⁸⁰ Instead, Church and Gospel become a depository of bourgeois-capitalist values and a functionary of multinational capitalism, one of Althusser's ISAs employed by capitalist exploiters for the purpose of keeping the peasant and working classes in a state of constant subservience.

At the very beginning of the narrative, for instance, the editorial in the aptly-named Daily Mouthpiece (suggestive of a state-controlled press) announcing the triple murder implicitly traces the beginnings of Ilmorog's transformation from a sleepy rural village into a modern industrial city to "the days of Krapf and Rebman", the first CMS missionaries to what would become modern-day Kenya,⁸¹ and in making the connection suggests a clear link between missionary activity and the arrival in Africa of a colonial power that is foreign-capital inspired. Elsewhere, the third-person narrator depicts the prototypical first missionary as an adventurer "armed with the desire for profit that was his faith and light and the gun that was his protection" (PB 88). He is identified with the soldier and with the colonial administrator and settler as part of a "Holy Trinity" formed of "the Bible, the Coin, the Gun" (PB 88). Native conversion, as well, is not attributed to faith but rather to the bourgeois aspirations of an African middle class responding to a mixture of the power of "gunpowder", the attraction of "tinkling coins", and the advantages to be found in the "trickery of the pen and the law" for acquiring property (PB 90). Then there is the institutional Church in Ilmorog. Long ignored by missionary and capitalist alike, it is only after the establishment of

⁸⁰Craig V. Smith, "'Rainbow Memories of Gain and Loss': Petals of Blood and the New Resistance," The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o 108, n4.

⁸¹Ngugi, Petals of Blood, 1977 (Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1986) 5. All references are to this edition and are cited in the text as PB.

the Theng'eta Brewery and the influx of foreign capitalist interest that the Church--"an impressive affair" built "with donations from Christians in Kenya, and from churches abroad" (PB 297), and suggestively located next to a brothel (PB 281)--takes off under the leadership of the former Rev. Kamau, now known as Rev. Jerrod Brown, "one of the most respected men in the Anglican hierarchy" (PB 147) and as self-centered and materialistic as the worst of the capitalist exploiters, foreign and native alike. Still later, the Revival movement, to which Munira and Lillian are converted and which opposes Karega's unionism, is linked to "churches in America" specifically associated with vocal real-life anti-communist evangelicals like Richard Wurmbrand and Billy Graham, whose tracts are recommended reading to the brethren (PB 306). Further, not only are these 'mother churches' anti-communist, they are hypocritical bloodsuckers "which make a lot of money by insisting on the followers giving a tenth of their salaries as tithe", of which a small portion would subsequently be 'beneficently' returned as a "contribution to Harambee church-building efforts" (PB 306). Finally, what Christian characters there are among the Africans who are not materialistic like Brown or Munira's father Waweru, are emotionally exhausted and on the verge of mental collapse, like Munira and Lillian, and use religion as an escape from the obscenities of capitalist modernity. Unlike A Grain of Wheat and its predecessors, in which the critique of the Church is primarily of individual Christians and their faults and failings, here both the institutional Church and the Gospel message are presented as closely aligned with and serving foreign capitalist interests by either disarming and pacifying resistance or by deluding the exploited and distracting them from recognizing the reality of their situation.

While the shift in Ngugi's ideological grounding is interesting for the implications it has vis-à-vis his positioning of Christianity in the colonial and capitalist projects, of greater interest are the implications this shift has for his approach to the form of the novel. One of the difficulties Gikandi suggests Ngugi has with traditional form is that its focus is on the experiences of "unique bourgeois individuals" while Ngugi began to feel that for his purposes what was needed was a focus on "the social collective".⁸² On the one hand he believed the "critical realist" novel the most effective literary form for representing "the moving spirit" of the times that produce it.⁸³ On the other, as he would later write, he was also becoming uneasy with its appropriateness for the people for and about whom he was writing⁸⁴--"the peasants and workers who have built Kenya"⁸⁵--, largely because of its "bourgeois origins" and what he was beginning to see as its inherent bourgeois preoccupations,⁸⁶ which he believed as foreign and incomprehensible to the African peasantry and workers as the European languages in which novels were normally written. At the same time his deepening sense of urgency for the writer to "take[] sides"⁸⁷ with his or her class have made him increasingly uneasy with the aesthetic demands of realism, as the later revisions to A Grain of Wheat suggest. Still, particularly at the time he was writing this novel, Ngugi "was not yet ready to abandon the form Conrad's novels had taught him to appreciate and which he had so effectively mastered in A Grain of Wheat. One result of this artistic tension for Petals of Blood is a

⁸²Gikandi 138.

⁸³Ngugi, Writers 72.

⁸⁴Ngugi, Decolonising 77.

⁸⁵Ngugi, Writers 98.

⁸⁶Ngugi, Decolonising 65.

⁸⁷Ngugi, Writers 6.

complex variety of modes of characterization. The central characters--members of the class with whom Ngugi wants to identify--are portrayed in a critical realistic manner, but from a Marxist point of view. Other, less-developed African characters tend to be drawn in the conventions of 'socialist' realism or as stock characters, while those at the fringes of the narrative and outside the community in which Ngugi is most interested, such as the foreign missionaries, are generally presented as satiric allegorical archetypes. Further, both types are not self-revealing, but are presented either from the biased viewpoint of one of the central figures or from the vantage of the not-always-neutral third-person narrator. This mixing and shifting of form is most evident in the Christian characters, since as a group they cross the boundaries of class, race, and nation.

The foreign missionaries, with whom Ngugi has no sympathy, are primarily handled as satiric caricatures serving also as metaphors for European colonialism. First there is Rev. Hallowes Ironmonger, the headmaster of Siriana--by this point a regular feature of Ngugi's fiction--at the start of Munira's student days in the early 1940s. His name, as Killam has suggested, is allegorical, indicating he is "a man whose religion is as heated as a forge and his activity is to shape the tools which will serve God and the nation."⁸⁸ By the 1940s he is already decrepit, a "gentle old man . . . rather absent-minded" and out of touch with reality (PB 28), indicative of Ngugi's estimate of these agents of 'benevolent' colonialism. His school for Africans resembles a traditional English public school, complete with "gold-laced black gown" (PB 28), and his notion of civilized life is epitomized by traditional

⁸⁸Killam 106.

English afternoon tea (PB 53). Although the students do not harbor the same hostility for him that they do for other white men, he and his wife, together with their other-worldly preoccupations, are objects of gentle amusement and derision for the more politically- and materially-minded students. Further, their relationship with the young, intelligent, athletic Chui is also evocative of the paternalistic colonial relationship between missionary and African. The narrator (Munira at this point) suggestively notes that the Ironmongers have practically adopted Chui like "the son they had never had" (PB 28). They shower their attentions on him, taking him to concerts and puppet shows in the city, presumably to expose him to what they consider the finer things of 'civilized' culture. They have also given him given the pet name Shakespeare, suggesting the hopes they had for making him into an African Englishman. Ironically, they never use the other appellation--Joe Louis, after the African-American boxer--that was applied by his fellow students in recognition of his athletic prowess and which confirms his status as a black champion who can defeat his white opponents. Because of their other-worldliness they are dismissed as largely innocuous and ineffectual. Their return to England, where they have gone to "wait for death" (PB 28)--a disparaging comment on the meaning of their life's work--is neither celebrated nor mourned.

Whereas Ironmonger's brief appearance permits him little more than satiric treatment, his successor, Cambridge Fraudsham, receives more complex development in which Ngugi brings together elements of satire, allegory, and socialist realism to produce an archetypal missionary-imperialist. Like Ironmonger his name is allegoric, "bluntly" exposing him as a product of an elitist institution and also as a fraud and a sham whose real

priorities are not in the advancement of his students but in keeping Africans in their place.⁸⁹ However, because more of his personal history, his opinions, and his relations with his African students are revealed, he becomes more than a stock caricature. Like the nameless headmaster of Weep Not, Child, the details of Fraudsham's biography and certain (entirely negative) aspects of his character are borrowed from long-time Alliance headmaster, Carey Francis.⁹⁰ Both served in the First World War and were products of Cambridge. Both subsequently became headmaster of elitist colonial schools, remained bachelors, and dedicated their lives to educational missionary work in Africa. Both were also unapologetically patriotic, sharing an unshakable, romantic, idealistic conviction in the honorable intentions of imperialism and the potential greatness of the empire. Upon taking up their post as headmaster both were immediately confronted with a student strike instigated by policy changes regarding student conduct that ultimately ended with the expulsion of several students.⁹¹ Finally, in sharp contrast to the generation of Ironmonger, both are the sort of highly educated and culturally 'enlightened' missionary whose policies of

⁸⁹Herta Meyer, "Justice for the Oppressed. . .": The Political Dimension in the Language Use of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1991) 97.

⁹⁰Carey Francis's biographical information comes from L. B. Greaves, Carey Francis of Kenya (London: Rex Collings, 1969); and B. E. Kipkorir, "Carey Francis at the Alliance High School, Kikuyu 1940-62," Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya, ed. B. E. Kipkorir (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980) 112-159.

Kipkorir's biography in particular, supported by comments of Alliance graduate and a leader of the independence movement Oginga Odinga (Not Yet Uhuru [London: Heinemann, 1967] 46-47; also "Foreword," in Greaves vii-viii), would indicate that whatever resemblances there are between the real-life Francis and the fictional Fraudsham are superficial.

⁹¹For a detailed discussion of the student strike at Alliance at the beginning of Francis' tenure, see Kipkorir 122-125; also J. Stephen Smith, The History of Alliance High School (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1973) 120-121.

'respecting' and 'preserving' African 'otherness' and 'accommodating' indigenous cultures are nothing less than extremely patronizing. They are the type whom David Bosch has criticized for "a sentimental interest in exotic cultures, who insisted on the 'otherness' of the young churches and treated them as something that had to be preserved in their pristine form."⁹² Consistent with behavior expected of this sort of missionary, Fraudsham, like Francis, implements policies against Africans dressing in trousers, wearing shoes, or eating rice, affectations both felt only produced men "who would want to live beyond their means" (PB 29).⁹³ The mission of the school, Fraudsham says, is not "to turn out black Europeans but true Africans who would not look down upon the innocence and simple ways of their ancestors" (PB 29). Noble sentiments on the surface, and sound missionary policy from a contextualizing point of view; but as Bosch⁹⁴ and Luzbetak⁹⁵ both argue, the problem is that it is for the African, not the European, to decide what constitutes a "true African." What makes Fraudsham's (and Francis's) position more ironic is the insistence at the same time on British style discipline, which included sports, saluting the Union Jack every day "to the martial sound from the bulges and drums", chapel services with hymns appealing to God to wash the appellants "whiter than snow" (a form of linguistic racism Ngugi would continually criticize in his

⁹²David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 449.

⁹³Though Kipkorir (120) indicates that Francis's dress code policies failed, mostly over student and staff opposition, and that he subsequently did not press the issue.

⁹⁴Bosch 449.

⁹⁵Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 70-71.

nonfiction⁹⁶), and prayers for God's continued blessing on the Empire (PB 29).

Ngugi also inscribes in his character a sense of moral superiority, which he then subverts to expose what he sees as both Christian and European hypocrisy regarding Africans and collaboration in the project of colonial domination. He does this by making use of the 1959-60 case of Peter Poole, the first European in colonial Kenya to be tried and ultimately executed for killing an African, Kamawe Musunge, who was shot because "he had thrown a stone at [Poole's] dogs" (PB 164).⁹⁷ In the novel the nameless African lawyer who comes to the aid of the Ilmorog pilgrims (himself a Siriana alumnus like Munira, Chui, and Karega) recalls the feelings among the student body as Poole's scheduled execution approached. Fraudsham, he recounts, called a student assembly and, by way of defending Poole, "argued about the need to be sensitive to animals. The measure of a civilisation was how far a people had learnt to care for animals" (PB 164). He suggests that Poole "had been a little excessive, maybe. But he had been prompted by the highest and most noble impulse; to care for and defend the defenceless" (PB 164), and concludes his clemency appeal, to be sent to the governor, by quoting Shakespeare's famous song of praise for the quality of mercy from The Merchant

⁹⁶See "Literature and Society." Writers 14-15; also the revised version in Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society, (Oxford: James Currey, 1997) 10. Also see "Education for a National Culture," Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1983) 94; and "Cultural Dialogue for a New World," Moving 43.

⁹⁷Ngugi gives the family name as "Pooles". For details of the case see Robert B. Edgerton, Mau Mau: An African Crucible (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 1990) 209ff; also the following Times articles: "Murder of African Houseboy: Briton Sentenced to Death in Kenya," 11 Dec. 1959: 10; "Briton's Appeal Failed," 22 Mar. 1960: 10; "Petition to Governor" 12 Aug. 1960: 8; "Pleas for Poole Rejected" 17 Aug. 1960: 8; "Poole Due to Die Today" 18 Aug. 1960: 8; "Poole Hanged in Nairobi" 19 Aug. 1960: 10.

of Venice.⁹⁸ Ironically, Poole is at once justified and even turned into the victim while the African students are made to feel guilty for not sufficiently caring about defenseless creatures like dogs or appreciating the nobility of Poole's intentions. The lawyer goes on to suggest that such sermons and lessons represented conscious efforts on the part of the missionaries "to obscure racism and other forms of oppression" and make Africans "accept our inferiority so as to accept their superiority and their rule over us" (PB 165).

As in Weep Not, Child, Siriana functions as a metaphor for Kenya's colonial experience. Initially the Africans are in awe of the European missionaries and desirous of the social and material benefits that European education can bring. Partly as a consequence of European technological superiority and partly as a result of religious and cultural 'indoctrination', which was an inescapable part of mission education, the Africans developed a sense of their own inferiority, which for a long time was accepted practically unquestioned. Revolts against European domination, while not completely unheard of (as the Harry Thuku protests of 1923 demonstrate), tended to be few and for the most part uncoordinated. The Europeans, as Fanon argues, were able to maintain their dominant position because they were able to keep the Africans divided and convinced of European superiority.⁹⁹ However, they are not able to maintain their position indefinitely. As the second

⁹⁸IV.1:181-184. As the Poole trial postdates Ngugi's Alliance days this incident cannot reflect anything he personally witnessed. Nevertheless, the well-publicized case may be the source for a similar rock-throwing incident in A Grain of Wheat (GW 49-50, GWR 41-43). In that novel Dr. Lynd threatens to unleash her vicious dog on Karanja when she finds him about to throw a rock at the animal. Ironically, Karanja was acting in self-defense: he had been cornered and was about to be attacked by the dog.

⁹⁹Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967) 169ff.

strike against Fraudsham in Karega's student days indicates, the presumed moral superiority, with which Fraudsham shamed the student body in connection with the Poole case, only backfires to prove him an out-of-touch eccentric. When his beloved pet dog dies, he first calls an assembly to lecture the students once again on how the way a society treats animals is indicative of its level of 'civilization', and how keeping pets is a means of developing "appreciation of human life and God's love", which provokes laughter among the students, whose own societies value animals for the contribution they make to communal life (PB 169). He then tries to force the students into giving Lizzy a dignified human burial, complete with coffin and pallbearers. Unlike previous generations, though, these students "had opened [their] eyes" (PB 170) and were no longer prepared to either acknowledge the superiority of the Europeans' ways or accept unquestioned their rule and direction. This revolt against Fraudsham mirrors a wider social revolt against the colonial power. The consequence of this populist uprising, however, is "a black replica of Fraudsham" (PB 171): a new African headmaster whose only difference from his predecessor turns out to be the color of his skin.

While the foreign missionaries are primarily treated as satiric archetypes, the minor African Christian characters--which include "Brother Ezekiel" Waweru, Rev. Jerrod Brown, Wanja's unnamed father, and the prostitute Lillian--are all drawn in a low mimetic mode of socialist realism. While they are not stock characters or flat stereotypical caricatures, because of their limited appearances neither are they well developed types. Rather, each is sufficiently treated so as to allow their particularity to evidence itself, yet each is also drawn with specific assumptions in mind about the nature and role

of religion in general--and Christianity in particular--in the creation and maintenance of capitalist colonial and neo-colonial class structures and the accompanying exploitation.

Waweru, says Killam, is for Ngugi "the most loathsome [character] in the book," one of those Africans who, "over the years, have persistently sided with the oppressor."¹⁰⁰ He is one of those early converts, most often from among the marginalized in the pre-colonial society, who like Achebe's Unachukwu (Arrow of God) were quick to recognize the power of the invaders and the personal advantages to be gained by siding with them. Dispossessed of the family lands by "more powerful mbari lords and wealthy houses who could buy more potent magic and other protective powers", the youthful Waweru is seduced into abandoning his father by the lure of the mission and the power he (correctly) perceives it will bring in pursuing his bourgeois desires (PB 89). Eventually he becomes the colonial-capitalist-Christian equivalent of the pre-colonial landed classes who had exploited and marginalized his family. For him Christianity serves not only as a means for achieving material success but also a potent weapon for maintaining his class privilege. Membership in the Church provides him access to money--"coins through bringing more souls to Christ"--with which he could buy up land, and favor with the colonial government in the form of permission to grow cash crops in competition with white farmers, all giving him a head-start over his "pagan neighbours" in climbing the social ladder of colonial Kenya (PB 90). As a "wealthy landowner and a respected elder in the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church", the revered "Brother Ezekiel" both exploits his position in the Church and twists the

¹⁰⁰Killam 105.

egalitarian message of the Gospel in order to keep his laboring brethren in Christ submissive and loyal, and also to drive out the occasional "devilish spirits" who would cause trouble on the farm by inciting the faithful to demand higher wages (PB 13-14). During the 'Mau Mau' revolt he sided with the colonial government, preaching against "the movement" and denouncing the batuni oath, for which he had his ear cut off "as a warning" (PB 92). Although he subsequently ceased preaching against the movement, as Munira notes, "at least he had not abandoned the faith and the side that he had chosen" (PB 92). In the post-independence era, however, he seems to have lost his scruples against oaths and secret societies. Rather, he has taken--and encourages both his wife and son to take--the loyalty oath of the Kamwene Cultural Organization (KCO), the extortionist strong-arm of the neocolonial regime whose thugs quash opposition through violence and intimidation. Far from ironic, like his earlier refusal to oath it is another affirmation of his continued loyalty to 'the faith and the side that he had chosen': he is a class traitor.

While Waweru is representative of the African nouveau riche, Rev. Brown represents the newly Africanized Western mission churches in the era of neocolonialism. Brown stands for a religion that has morphed from a living and vital faith--the sort of sincere and heart-felt faith among the farm hands that impressed Munira in his youth (PB 14)--into an institution whose primary interest is in protecting its own privileged position in society by facilitating maintenance of the status quo. Like Waweru, he is also materialistic and hypocritical. Before the uprising he had been Rev. Kamau, a preacher Munira recalls meeting occasionally at his father's home during his childhood. With independence, however, he has transformed himself in Rev. Jerrod Brown, in the process becoming part of the new

elite, "one of the most respected men in the Anglican hierarchy" and a candidate for the episcopacy (PB 147). He now lives in opulence in one of the formerly European, upper-class neighborhoods of Nairobi, and sends his children to exclusive boarding schools (PB 145-149, 297). Confronted with the tired, hungry, and ill travelers from Ilmorog who arrive at the door of his luxurious home, the only help he offers is prayers and patronizing sermons against "a life of idleness and begging" (PB 148). Only when the plight of Ilmorog and its 'pilgrims' become a cause célèbre in the newspapers does he bother "to see how the church could help" (PB 185). Later, he rides the wave of economic prosperity brought by the opening of the Theng'eta Brewery to become pastor of the New Ilmorog Anglican Church, where in his sermons he admonishes his bourgeois parishioners against petty personal sins, such as "drinking, too many divorces, too fast driving," and emphasizes "the need to give to the church" (PB 297)--all while failing to mention justice for the oppressed or charity for the poor. He even brushes aside Munira's later challenge to confront his own hypocrisy, dismissing Munira's accusations as the lunacy of "these revivalist cults", which "must be banned" (PB 342). In short, the Church for him personally is a means to material success, and for capitalist society a guardian to protect and maintain middle- and upper-class advantage.

Wanja's father, in turn, is an exploited peasant-worker with petit bourgeois aspirations, one of Fanon's colonized individuals who are awed into passivity by the presumed 'superiority' of the foreigners. Lured as a youth from traditional life by the seductive material appeal of European technology, the glitter of capitalist urban culture, and the promise of advancement, he was sent as a member of the Kings African Rifles to fight, kill, and

perhaps die "for the king" in far-off foreign wars for a cause he does not understand (PB 231). There, also like Achebe's Unachukwu, he has seen, learned to fear, and been converted to the awesome power of the white man. As a reward for his capitulation he has been trained (presumably in the industrial schools of the missions) to fill the need of colonial society for artisans and craftsmen. The Christianity he embraces, in turn, is not an egalitarian brotherhood that dissolves the distinctions of class or promotes a fair distribution of society's wealth. Rather, it is an implement that facilitates the 'divide and rule' policies of the foreign exploiters, becoming a badge of class association which distinguishes aspiring petit bourgeois from the ranks of the 'pagan' peasantry, a distinction he jealously guards to the point of beating Wanja for the offense of being seen "with pagan boys" (PB 38). The material advantages the Church offers to the 'faithful'--and the potentially dire consequences of "God's wrath" for "challenging God's divine message to all mankind" (PB 233)--are sufficient to insure his passive acceptance of the status quo.

Finally there is Lillian. Like Wanja she is one of the dispossessed and exploited women (along side the peasants and the workers in a colonial proletarian culture already under the influence of mission Christianity) for whom the Christian promise of a better world in the hereafter is at once a distraction from the reality of her dispossession and an escape from the relentless obscenities of capitalist modernity. Doubly exploited by class and gender, she is delusional, reduced to prowling bars for clients while singing religious tunes of her own composition, "especially after a drink or two", which are sexually suggestive, and irrationally insisting on her virginal status even after each sexual encounter: (PB 272). Following one last beating

at Munira's hands she disappears from Ilmorog only to return later an evangelical preacher of the Revival movement, preaching pie-in-the-sky sermons about "a new earth, another world, that knew not of classes and clans, that levelled the poor and the wealthy, once they accepted the eternal law of God" (PB 298). On the surface the Revival seems opposed to the hypocrisy of the official Church, yet later it is revealed that it is actually linked to foreign anti-communist evangelical Churches with ties to foreign capital (PB 306). Also, its other-worldly message that urges unconditional "acceptance" of God's will in fact makes it another weapon in the arsenal of foreign exploitation by turning the revivalists into an unwitting fifth column (PB 298).

The most significant Christian character in the text is Munira, one of the novel's central characters whose story forms part of the complex pattern of relationships that fills out Ilmorog's story. Because of his centrality to the narrative, Ngugi does not develop him in either the same satiric, archetypal manner of the missionaries nor the low mimetic mode of socialist realism of his other Christian characters. Rather, Ngugi presents in him a complex personal background--including family, religion, education, career--within the context of the equally complex social setting of his times, which includes colonial domination driven by foreign-capitalist interest, resistance to that domination, and a post-independence, neo-colonial, foreign-capital conspiracy against the peasantry and working classes. And within this complex mixture of the particular and the general, the Church and its impact on Munira's life form one important ingredient.

Munira's Christian name--Godfrey, meaning 'God's peace'--is an irony since throughout his life Christianity has brought him anything but peace. He was raised in the

home of a wealthy, materialistic convert-father, a leader of the Presbyterian Church "mean in his austere holiness", who treated his children and employees alike with the same sort of miserliness, "all crowned with words of God and prayers" (PB 13-14). There is little joy in the religion of his home, little of the spirit of generosity, communality, sharing that is part of the Gospel message. It forms a sharp contrast to the Christianity of the laborers who were "less stilted, . . . more free and seemed to praise and sing to the Lord with greater conviction and more holiness" (PB 14). Rather, for him it is a religion of prohibition, guilt, and punishment, more concerned with regulating private individual conduct than with the welfare of the community. For a teenage Munira confronting overwhelming adolescent sexual pressures it offers no solace or comfort, only condemnation and guilt (PB 14)--guilt which continues to haunt and taunt him, inhibiting his ability to pursue a mature sexual relationship with either his wife, who has been "drained" of all her "sensuality" by "too much righteous living and Bible-reading" (PB 16), or with Wanja (PB 72). Instead, he remains "a prisoner of his own upbringing and Siriana missionary education" (PB 72).

That same Siriana education, which sought to reproduce the atmosphere of an English public school in the Kenya highlands, has also had its impact on him, teaching him too to desire the affectations of Englishness (PB 53). His expulsion from Siriana (together with Chui for protesting Fraudsham's patronizing policies aimed at maintaining class and racial distinctions) has taught him a bitter lesson about the cost of opposing the established centers of power. That single incidence of 'divine wrath' is neither the first nor the last in a series of emasculating confrontations with the centers of power, religious and

otherwise, that leads him eventually into the same sort of religious fanaticism as Lillian.

For Munira, like Lillian, religious fundamentalism becomes a form of escape. He is a failure in his materialistic father's eyes, a guilt-ridden failure sexually both in his marriage and in his relationship with Wanja (and with Lillian, for that matter), and ultimately a failure as a leader of Ilmorog's delegation to the capital. His feelings of personal and class powerlessness as Ilmorog is gradually transformed into a cesspool of immorality and despair for the workers and peasantry by the influx of foreign capital leaves him susceptible to the self-abandoned, 'other-worldly' appeal of fundamentalism (which Joyce Cary had also criticized in his novels), with its message of the futility of resisting God's will and instead appealing that one "accept: only accept" (PB 298). If his 'conversion' were strictly personal that would be tragic enough; but in his newfound zeal he becomes, like the foreign missionaries before him, an ardent if unwitting champion of foreign exploiters. His revivalism comes into direct opposition with Karega's working-class activism, which Munira sees as a sin of "pride"--namely, of thinking "he and his workers could change the evil [sic] ... could change this world"--from which Karega and his followers must be rescued (PB 299). Because it is essentially a religious message, one that has strong emotional appeal, it potentially has a power to subdue and pacify the masses far greater than any battalion of armed thugs.

Ultimately for Ngugi, Wise says, it will be the workers and peasants who bring about "an end to the intolerable suffering caused by neocolonialism", not religion.¹⁰¹ Each of these Christian characters suggests

¹⁰¹Wise 45.

that, wittingly or not, Christianity and the Church have only contributed to maintaining and extending the exploitation of the peasantry and working classes. In the final analysis, Wise adds, the price for Ngugi's "egalitarian kingdom ends up being the cathartic expulsion of the Christian religion--which is to say, the uncritical acceptance of the orthodox Soviet critique of Christianity (and religion in general) as intolerable."¹⁰² This conclusion represents a complete turnabout from his earliest expectations for the role of the Church in postcolonial Kenya.

Petals of Blood, then, marks a major step in Ngugi's artistic development. It clearly illustrates his struggle as an artist to bridge the gap (or perhaps sharpen and strengthen the link) between aesthetics and politics. His deepening ideological commitment politically to the struggle of the peasants and working classes against capitalist exploitation led him simultaneously to explore a path of artistic commitment. The result was an increasing dissatisfaction with the conventions of the traditional novel that led him to experiment with form. Here that experiment produced a rich and complex text, most clearly illustrated in his handling of the Christian characters, where the tensions between form and ideological and aesthetic commitment are most evident. In his subsequent Gikuyu-language novels, translated as Devil on the Cross and Matigari, Ngugi took a deeper interest in, and made wider use of, more popular forms of literature, particularly the oral traditions, which he said best typifies the "resistance aesthetics of the entire anti-colonial struggle in the area of culture".¹⁰³ Works more

¹⁰²Wise 45.

¹⁰³Ngugi, Writers: A Re-Engagement 23.

closely resembling folk literature (though the revisions to A Grain of Wheat make it closer to 'vulgar' socialist realism), these novels are characterized by a move away from complexity of character in favor of allegorical caricatures: everyone is either good or bad, a collaborator or part of the resistance. He also continues to use, and parody, Christianity and the Bible in both. But his use of religion here tends to be one-dimensional. It is an instrument of oppression, "a vehicle for lulling the poor and turning them away from the material reality of this world."¹⁰⁴ He allows no room for dissent within the Church. While these novels may satisfy the demand for commitment his Marxist aesthetic requires, as fiction the writing suffers.

¹⁰⁴James Ogude, Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation (London: Pluto, 1999) 41.

Conclusion

Edward Said has argued that "both learned and imaginative writing are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions, and intentions".¹ His point was that all writing, indeed all knowledge, is in some way shaped by the discursive constraints of the environment in which it is produced, and consequently is not as objective as we may assume. Said's reference was specifically to Orientalist, and by extension colonialist, texts that presume to construct authentic representations of the colonial 'Other.' His insights have been applied by postcolonial critics to texts of colonialist writers of fiction to expose the common assumptions of colonial discourse that often underlie their representations of Africa. Though Said also suggested that the legacy of the colonial past continues in the present to shape the views and attitudes of descendants of the rulers and the ruled,² few have applied these observations to texts of anti-colonial resistance. However, I see no compelling reason to privilege such texts.³ The very act of resistance demands construction of a separate--and I would suggest parallel--counter-discourse of resistance, with its own set of constraining assumptions.

¹Edward W. Said, Orientalism, 1978 (London: Penguin Books, 1995) 201-202.

²Said, Culture and Imperialism, 1993 (London: Vintage, 1994) 235-236.

³Criticism of Said's work has often focused on his refusal or inability to offer an alternative to the Hegelian dialectic. Robert Young (White Mythologies: Writing History and the West [London: Routledge, 1990] 128), for instance, notes that this leaves Said with the problem of having to repeat the very structures he wishes to deny, which means that counter-discourses are determined by the discourses they are contesting. As important as the problem may be theoretically, I believe it does not invalidate my essential point, namely that the writer's underlying assumptions--whether discursive, ideological or linguistic--influence the representations he or she produces.

Missionary activity, as well, has its own complex discourse. Although missionaries have always been generally motivated by a cause or a call to action distinct from that of their secular counterparts in the colonial project, particularly in the age of imperialism both were products of the same cultural environment and absorbed many of the same assumptions about the respective superiority and inferiority of European and African cultures and about Europe's Oriental and African 'Other.' However, the missionary's particular religious beliefs and the egalitarian nature of the Gospel often tempered their views of the native, causing a split--or at least a tension--with the secular colonial discourse. Consequently at times it has intersected and at other times contrasted with both colonial discourses and postcolonial discourses of resistance. For instance, the nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth century notions of accommodation as a mission strategy shared Orientalist and Africanist assumptions about non-European cultures, which often resulted in efforts to suppress traditional practices unrelated to the Gospel as being inconsistent with it. However, since the 1960s at least its focus on contextualizing the Gospel finds parallels with postcolonial notions of cultural interaction and hybridity as articulated by Homi Bhabha⁴ and others. Similarly, misguided assumptions about the relationship between the Gospel message and its Western European forms of expression at times have provided the basis for a working partnership with the forces of imperialism in the 'civilizing' mission, while elsewhere its recognition of the liberational nature of the Gospel has aligned it with the forces of resistance. A missionary discourse, in other words, occupies a space both between and overlapping discourses of colonialism and resistance and is therefore never in complete

⁴See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994) especially 31-39.

harmony with one or the other. This gap in discursive assumptions among missionaries and colonial and postcolonial writers of fiction results in contested and often ambiguous representations of missionaries.

The four writers we have looked at here are united by the common experience of a colonial society; Joyce Cary and Elspeth Huxley on the side of the colonizer, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the side of the colonized. In their fiction each has also taken particular interest in the role of Christianity and mission in the colonial project. As they construct their representations of Christianity and mission, each demonstrates in their writing the determinative influence of the assumptions, imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases of the discursive constraints under which they were writing. None were themselves missionaries, though Achebe, raised the son of indigenous missionaries, comes close. Cary and Huxley, from the perspective of the colonizer, have generally seen Christianity as an instrument of 'civilization' whose role in the colonial project is one of edifying primitive and often savage Africans. Achebe and Ngugi, from the perspective of the colonized, have both acknowledged at one time or another the contribution Christianity has to make to African societies. In terms of the colonial encounter, however, both have also seen mission as at best a well-intentioned though misguided and often inadvertently damaging form of enculturation and at worst an implement of colonial oppression used to subdue and control Africans.

Cary's representations of missionaries and Christianity in the colonial project were shaped partly by romanticized and idealized notions of imperialism, by the secular attitudes and assumptions of the colonial service, and also by his personal religious ideas. Despite his first-hand observations of African life, the assumptions about Africa

and Africans that inform his novels coincide with the general European perceptions of his time--shared frequently by missionaries--namely, that Africans were primitive technologically, culturally, and psychologically.⁵ His novels reflect the tensions that frequently existed between colonial administrator and missionary, who often shared common objectives but for different reasons. His particular religious beliefs, especially his conclusions about the similar nature of traditional African beliefs and evangelical Christianity, inform his portrayal of the impact of evangelical mission Christianity on African 'primitives' and its consequences for the civilizing mission of colonialism. While in his non-fiction he has repeatedly praised missionary efforts to facilitate modernization of living standards in Africa, in his fiction he has repeatedly represented evangelical Christianity as hindering the fostering on a universal scale of the sort of free minds he thought necessary to unleash the individual creative powers necessary for 'progress.'

Huxley's fiction, in turn, embraces the romanticized notions of settler colonialism she absorbed as a child growing up in Kenya. Although she had a greater affection for Africans than Cary, and a deeper insight into and appreciation for their cultures, her novels nevertheless share many of the same stereotypical assumptions about the African nature: they may be chronologically adults but they are emotionally, morally, and intellectually adolescents. While she did sympathize with Africans regarding the way they were treated by colonial society, she nevertheless shared with Cary a belief that Europe had a moral responsibility to lead them into modernization. Herself an unchurched Christian, she was not necessarily convinced of the

⁵Cary, The Case for African Freedom, New ed. (London: Martin, Secker & Warburg, 1944) 28.

superiority of Christianity as a set of religious beliefs, nor did she share the missionary's interest in the propagation of Christianity as a religion.⁶ However, she was convinced of the moral superiority of European civilization and considered the Christian moral code its defining characteristic, the principal thing distinguishing the European from the African. In her fiction the missionary clearly represents this superiority and is the primary conduit through whom this is transmitted to the native. While they may at times share to a lesser degree in the failings of the settler community, they nevertheless represent the hope for a 'civilized' future for Africans.

Achebe, meanwhile, shows a deeper interest in the religious nature of the colonial encounter. He recognizes to a greater extent than either Cary or Huxley the central, integrated role of religion in the cultural and community life of a people. Like Cary Achebe is concerned with the consequences of 'dogmatism,' or inflexibility in the face of undeniable new truth. His novels examine in particular the repercussions of such inflexibility for traditional societies in the colonial context of an unequal power relationship. In his portrayal of Christianity there is ambiguity similar to the type we find in Ngugi's earliest fiction. On the one hand he recognizes that Christianity has something to offer traditional society.⁷ On the other, he blames the uncompromising ethnocentrism of missionaries like Smith and Goodcountry, which matches the inflexibility of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, for the failure of a truly Igbo Church to evolve, which leads ultimately to the collapse of traditional society

⁶C. S. Nicholls, Elspeth Huxley: A Biography (London: HarperCollins, 2002) 384, 431; also "Elspeth Huxley," Times, 13 Jan. 1997: 21.

⁷Chinua Achebe, "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," 1973, Hope and Impediments: Selected Essays (New York: Anchor-Doubleday Books, 1990) 31.

before the irresistible pressure of a Christianity backed by imperial power.

Finally, the gradual transformation of Ngugi's religious and political attitudes towards mission Christianity parallels the evolution of African nationalism. In his earliest fiction he is sympathetic to Christianity in a way similar to early Gikuyu nationalists like Harry Thuku and those founders of the Independent Church Movement Welbourn calls the 'East African rebels.'⁸ In his maturity, however, he gradually turned towards Marxist materialist politics, just as had men like Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, and his representations of Christianity and mission record a similar turn. Whereas the liberal Christian humanism of his youth pushed him to seek ways of inculturating Christianity into the Gikuyu context,⁹ in the fiction of his Marxist maturity Christianity and foreign missionaries have become caricatured tools of capitalist colonial exploitation and African Christians similarly caricatured collaborators with the foreign oppressors.

Just as it is impossible to speak of definitive mission models that account in every detail for the policies and actions of every missionary,¹⁰ so it is similarly difficult to establish a theoretical framework that will account in detail for each writer's fictional representation of missionaries and Christianity. As fiction these texts differ from histories in that they are additionally subject to the demands of storytelling, which includes though is not limited to plot and characterization. Nevertheless, each writer's perception is influenced by his or her individual background, experience, beliefs, and ideological assumptions. It also

⁸F. B. Welbourn, East African Rebels (London: SCM Press, 1961).

⁹Alan Marcuson, Mike Gonzalez and Dave Williams, "James Ngugi Interviewed by Fellow Students at Leeds University," Cultural Events in Africa 31 (June 1967): ii.

¹⁰Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology, 1988 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995) 64.

draws upon the discursive restraints, the social assumptions and received wisdom of the community he or she presumes to represent. As they create their representations, to borrow again from Said, they draw on a body of experience and knowledge that 'seems' correct to them.¹¹ What we wind up with are competing versions and visions of truth.

¹¹Said, Orientalism 202.

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