

EUGENE AS A COMMUNITY PRACTITIONER IN ADICHIE'S PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse the character of Eugene Achike, the enigmatic father portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Despite his portrayal as a violent and controlling figure at home, Eugene's engagement in the community presents a more complex image. This investigation explores Eugene's role as a community worker, analyzing the conflicts between his public activism and his private authoritarianism, as well as how he uses his position as a newspaper editor to advocate for social justice. His support for the rights of the marginalized and his opposition to corruption demonstrate a genuine desire to improve the welfare of others. However, this study delves further to question whether Eugene's community involvements serve to rationalize his abusive behavior within his family, and if his pursuit of a better external world masks a conflicting reality within his home. It also examines the impact of Eugene's colonial education and societal expectations on him, and whether his strict adherence to traditional masculinity contributes to the contrast between his public and private personas. This analysis explores the cultural context influencing Eugene's choices, acknowledging the complexities of navigating tradition and personal growth. Ultimately, "Eugene as a Community Practitioner in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" aims to provide a nuanced understanding of this intricate character, asserting that while Eugene's commitment to social justice is praiseworthy, it does not excuse his domestic violence. By exploring the contradictions within him, the study sheds light on the challenges of effecting both individual and societal transformation.

Keywords: Eugene Achike, Community Practitioner, Domestic Violence, Social Justice, Colonial Education, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* is a profound examination of the interplay between family dynamics, societal norms, and the intricate nature of human connections in Nigeria after colonial rule. The central focus of this intricately crafted story revolves around Eugene Achike, a person of significant authority in his society and the head of the Achike family. Eugene's role as a community practitioner, demonstrated through his participation in diverse social activities and his commitment to effecting change, provides a central perspective for comprehending the complex interaction between personal initiative and society conventions.

Eugene Achike in *Purple Hibiscus* is shown as a character who embodies contrasting qualities, displaying both strength and weakness, as well as authority and fragility. Eugene, a prosperous entrepreneur and ardent follower of the Catholic faith, garners esteem and affection in his community. He is highly regarded for his generous donations and valuable contributions to both the church and society. His role as a community leader provides him with an opportunity to bring about change and impact the lives of individuals in his vicinity.

However, beyond the surface of seeming achievement lurks a more sombre truth characterised by oppressive control inside the household, extreme religious zeal, and strict conformity to societal standards.

Eugene's job as a community practitioner is closely connected to his identity as a parent and husband, influencing both his personal dynamics and the wider social fabric of his town. The father's authoritarian parenting approach, marked by stringent punishment and strong commitment to his own moral principles, significantly influences the lives of his children, especially his daughter, Kambili, and son, Jaja. The Achike household is characterised by an oppressive atmosphere, where Eugene's arbitrary rules and severe punishments prevail.

This environment reflects the broader societal order in which Eugene operates, which is marked by patriarchal authority and religious dogma. Nevertheless, Eugene's role as a community practitioner grants him a certain level of independence and influence, allowing him to skillfully traverse the complex network of social and political forces that shape Nigerian society. His participation in a wide range of community activities, including philanthropic initiatives and political involvements, demonstrates his aspiration to bring about change and influence the destiny of his country. Eugene's activity is motivated by both his personal moral convictions and a strong will to challenge and demolish the repressive systems that rule Nigerian society (Stratton, 2020)

However, Eugene's pursuit of societal transformation is not without of its ambiguities and intricacies. As he manoeuvres through the complex and corrupt realm of Nigerian politics and challenges the deeply rooted systems of power that sustain unfairness and disparity, he is compelled to face the restrictions on his own ability to influence change and the outcomes resulting from his decisions. His unwavering commitment to his personal set of moral principles frequently prevents him from recognising the subtle complexities of human existence, resulting in his engagement in acts of brutality and oppression under the guise of moral rectitude. In addition, Eugene's role as a community practitioner is made more complex by his turbulent connection with his family, namely his children, whose lives are profoundly influenced by his strict and fanatical beliefs.

His endeavours to shape them according to his own likeness, to imbue them with his own principles and convictions, inevitably result in their defiance and eventual liberation. Eugene's function as a community practitioner is shaped not just by his activism that is directed towards the public, but also by the complex dynamics of his family life. Within the sphere of family, Eugene's power and influence are both intensified and tested.

This article aims to analyse Eugene's role as a community practitioner in *Purple Hibiscus* and explore the intricate dynamics of power, agency, and social transformation in postcolonial Nigeria. This analysis seeks to examine how Eugene's behaviours, goals, and relationships meet with larger societal factors, influencing and transforming both the community and family dynamics. Eugene Achike ultimately represents a highly significant figure, symbolising the intricate and contradictory aspects of the human condition in a world characterised by inequality, injustice, and the ongoing fight for freedom.

Research Objectives

- 1) To analyse Eugene Achike's community practitioner character in *Purple Hibiscus* analysing how his actions, motivations, and relationships impact postcolonial Nigeria's social and political dynamics.
- 2) To examine Eugene's dual identity as a revered community leader and a domineering patriarch in *Purple Hibiscus* to illuminate family dynamics and social change in contemporary African literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is renowned for its insightful depiction of family dynamics, religious extremism, and societal changes in postcolonial Nigeria, receiving widespread praise. This seminal work of contemporary African literature has sparked critical analysis and academic exploration of its themes, characters, and narrative style. The following literature review delves into the scholarly discussions regarding Eugene Achike's portrayal as a community practitioner, analyzing how his behavior, motivations, and relationships influence the novel's broader social and political context. Eugene Achike's role as a community practitioner is pivotal in unraveling the complex relationship between personal choices and societal expectations in *Purple Hibiscus*. Throughout the story, Eugene is portrayed as a highly influential figure within his community, admired for his charitable acts, business knowledge, and steadfast devotion to Catholicism. Despite having the power to instigate change and mold the future of his nation, his authoritarianism and religious extremism also loom over the lives of those in his neighborhood.

A key theme explored in the academic studies on *Purple Hibiscus* is the juxtaposition of Eugene's public image as a community practitioner with his private roles as a father and husband. Margaret Fafa Nutsukpo, in her work "Domestic violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" argues that Eugene's dual persona mirrors the inherent conflicts in postcolonial Nigerian society, where patriarchal dominance and religious fundamentalism clash with aspirations for modernization and advancement. Arndt posits that Eugene's strict parenting style and unwavering adherence to Catholic beliefs stem from his wish to retain authority over his family and uphold traditional values in a changing society (Nutsukpo, 2017). Similarly, Ruth Nzegenuka delves into the intricacies of Eugene's character in her essay "Representation of Violence on Women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" Ruth suggests that Eugene's abusive behavior towards his family reflects the broader power structures prevalent in Nigerian society, where a select few hold power and control. She contends that Eugene's position as a community practitioner exacerbates these power differentials, as he leverages his influence to perpetuate oppressive systems. Beyond his roles as a husband and father, Eugene's participation in various community initiatives sheds light on his character as a community practitioner (Nzegenuka, 2014). Boateng, Boatema in his article "Black Indigenities, Contested Sovereignities" argues that Eugene's humanitarian endeavors are not solely driven by altruism but also by a need to assert dominance and reaffirm his moral superiority and he suggests that Eugene's charitable acts function as a form of social capital, allowing him to uphold his influence and status within the community (Boateng, 2023).

Furthermore, the political involvements of Eugene provide a perspective to delve into the intricacies of power and agency in *Purple Hibiscus*. Ima Usen, et.al. explores Eugene's engagement in political activities in her work "The Example Of A Hero: A Deconstructionist Reading of Eugene in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" posits that Eugene's activism demonstrates his aspiration to challenge the existing order and advocate for societal transformation, his endeavors are frequently compromised by his own inconsistencies and boundaries. He indicates that Eugene's authoritarianism and religious extremism ultimately impede his capacity to bring about substantial changes, emphasizing the inherent conflicts between individual agency and societal restrictions in postcolonial Nigeria. Moreover, literary critics, alongside scholarly analysis, have provided interpretations of Eugene Achike's persona and his function as a community figure in *Purple Hibiscus* (Etim & Emmanuel, 2015). In her critique for *The New York Times*, reviewer Michiko Kakutani commends Adichie's nuanced depiction of Eugene, portraying him as "a multifaceted and contradictory character whose actions echo throughout the narrative." Kakutani proposes that Eugene's character symbolizes a miniature version of the broader social and political dynamics in postcolonial Nigeria, rendering him a captivating and intellectually stimulating protagonist. The critical discussions surrounding Eugene Achike as a community figure in *Purple Hibiscus* yield valuable insights into the complexities of power, agency, and social transformation in postcolonial Nigerian society. By analyzing Eugene's behaviors, intentions, and connections, both scholars and critics have illuminated how individual experiences intersect with wider societal influences, molding and reshaping the structure of community and family. As a pivotal figure in Adichie's celebrated novel, Eugene Achike continues to prompt scholarly examination and contemplation on the enduring impacts of colonialism, patriarchy, and oppression in present-day Africa (Nderitu & Siboe, 2024).

Research Questions

- 1) How does Eugene Achike's function as a community practitioner in *Purple Hibiscus* influence the distribution of power, individual capacity for action, and societal transformation within the novel's postcolonial Nigerian backdrop?
- 2) How does Eugene's authoritarian parenting style and strict commitment to societal norms affect the depiction of family relations and individual agency in *Purple Hibiscus* and how do they relate to the broader themes of oppression and resistance in the story?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examines Eugene Achike's community practitioner role in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. This method uses textual analysis and literary criticism to examine Eugene's actions, motivations, and relationships in the novel's social and political context. Textual analysis is to examine Eugene's character and community practitioner role in key passages and narrative elements. The researcher examines Eugene's public persona as a respected community leader and his private life as a father and husband by closely reading and analysing novel excerpts. The researcher seeks to identify themes, motifs, and narrative techniques that illuminate Eugene's contradictions and complexities. Literary criticism and scholarly analysis enhance this study's interpretation of Eugene's character and significance in the novel. According to *Purple Hibiscus* the researcher contextualises

Eugene's actions and motivations within postcolonial Nigeria's socio-historical context. The researcher seeks to better understand Eugene's character and its implications for the novel's themes by studying patriarchy, religion, and social change.

This interdisciplinary study analyses Eugene's character and community practitioner role using postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and cultural studies. The researcher seeks to reveal Eugene's and the novel's many meanings by placing it in larger theoretical frameworks and intellectual traditions. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a holistic analysis of the novel's themes and motifs, revealing postcolonial African literature's power, agency, and identity issues. In addition to textual analysis and literary criticism, this study uses reader-response theory to recognise the subjectivity of interpretation and the impact of reader experiences on meaning. The researcher seeks to capture the text's multiple meanings and readers' varied interpretations of Eugene's character by considering scholars' and readers' interpretations. This approach uses close textual analysis, literary criticism, interdisciplinary insights, and reader-response theory to examine Eugene Achike as a community practitioner in *Purple Hibiscus*. This study explores power, agency, and social change in Adichie's acclaimed novel by placing Eugene's character in postcolonial Nigerian society and using various theoretical perspectives.

DISCUSSION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* presents a compelling case study in human complexity through the character of Eugene Achike. Eugene's seemingly contradictory roles the crusading social reformer and the abusive patriarch have sparked rich critical discourse. This discussion delves deeper into the factors shaping Eugene's behavior, exploring the motivations behind his social activism and the forces that contribute to the disconnect between his public and private personas.

The Enigma of Eugene's Social Activism

Eugene's unwavering dedication to promoting equality and fairness is unquestionable. His newspaper editorials passionately champion the rights of the marginalised, addressing pressing concerns such as police misconduct and unethical behaviour. This commitment indicates a sincere intention to enhance the well-being of others. Some argue that Eugene's social activism is driven by personal gain. His focus on addressing issues in the outside world may serve as a means of diverting attention from the injustices he contributes to within his own household. It is possible that by publicly supporting the marginalised, he may be trying to address his own oppressive behaviour, find solace for his conscience, or seek validation from others. This supports Ihekweazu's viewpoint that Eugene's social activism originates from a sense of powerlessness. Powerless to influence the societal shifts taking place in Nigeria, he maintains complete authority within his own personal realm (Anyachebelu, 2023). This highlights Eugene's determination to question those in power and advocate for fairness.

"His editorials were fearless. He criticized the government openly, wrote scathing pieces about police brutality, and exposed corruption in high places" (Adichie, 21).

"He believed in a better Nigeria, a more just society" (Adichie, 127). Nevertheless, a more balanced viewpoint recognises the potential for sincere societal consideration despite his imperfections. Eugene's impressive intellectual abilities, possibly a result of his education during colonial times, enable him to effectively champion for change.

His editorials showcase a discerning grasp of societal problems, indicating a sincere aspiration for a fairer world. It is evident that Eugene faces a profound struggle within himself, torn between his own inner demons and a sincere aspiration to bring about positive change (Amete & Asigbo, 2021).

The Legacy of Colonial Education and the Disconnect

Eventually exploration is necessary to understand the influence of Eugene's colonial education on his worldview. Colonial education systems frequently fostered a feeling of detachment from customary ways of life, all the while advocating for Western ideals. This disparity may account for the difference between Eugene's public image and his personal conduct. His familiarity with Western concepts of social justice could inspire his involvement in activism, while the hierarchical nature of the colonial system may manifest as assertiveness in his personal life (Isha Doshi, n.d.).

"He received his education at a renowned British boarding school, where the language spoken was of high prestige and the sport of choice was cricket" (Adichie, 18). The quote portrays a depiction of privilege and elitism, detailing an individual's upbringing in a renowned British boarding school. This educational background implies access to privileged opportunities and cultural advantages linked to the upper class. The reference to speaking the Queen's English and playing cricket further solidifies this perception of privilege, emphasising the conventional symbols of high-class British society. In this description, the author creates a foundation for delving into themes of social class, power dynamics, and cultural identity. Readers are encouraged to reflect on how these backgrounds influence individuals' viewpoints and encounters in society.

"Maybe his education and exposure to a different culture had caused a disconnect between him and the customs he was expected to maintain" (Adichie, 128). The passage implies that the character's education and exposure to a different culture might have resulted in a disconnection between him and the traditions that were anticipated of him. There seems to be a clash between the values and norms of his upbringing and the culture he has become a part of. The concept of "distance" evokes a feeling of detachment or disconnection from one's cultural heritage, prompting inquiries about one's sense of self, affiliation, and the impact of external factors on individual principles. It encourages contemplation of the intricacies of cultural adaptation and the obstacles individuals encounter when managing multiple cultural identities.

In addition, Quayson's exploration of mimicry provides an alternative perspective on Eugene. His public image as a social reformer may involve imitating the appearance of a forward thinking intellectual, he is still confined by the traditional power dynamics of his society. There seems to be a disconnect between his public persona and his private conduct (Ato Quayson, n.d.).

Religion and Morality: A Distorted Lens

Eugene's interpretation of Christianity plays a crucial role in shaping his actions. His "rigid piety," as Uzodinma argues, serves as a tool for control within the family, leading to hypocrisy and a distorted sense of morality. He justifies his violence by claiming to be enforcing God's will, masking his abuse as righteous discipline. This aligns with Ndibe's critique of Eugene's "authoritarian Christianity" (Nwokeabia, 2014).

"He believed his brand of Christianity was the only true one, and that it was his duty to enforce it in our home" (Adichie, 22). This quotation encapsulates the character's rigid

belief in the superiority of his diversity of Christianity and his conviction that it must be enforced within his household. It reflects a dogmatic mindset that sees no room for diversity of belief or interpretation. The phrase “his duty to enforce” conveys a sense of authority and control, suggesting an imposition of his beliefs onto others. This mindset can foster intolerance and division within families and communities, highlighting the dangers of religious fundamentalism and the importance of respecting differing perspectives and beliefs in fostering harmony and understanding (Phan, 2023).

“His voice, usually booming with righteous anger when he condemned corruption in the government, was now a low, menacing growl” (Adichie, 92). In this quote, Adichie vividly contrasts the usual demeanor of the speaker with their current state. The shift from a “booming” voice, indicative of confidence and moral indignation, to a “low, menacing growl” suggests a profound change in the speaker’s disposition. The use of “righteous anger” implies a strong sense of moral integrity and conviction in condemning corruption. However, the transformation to a “menacing growl” hints at a darker, more ominous presence, possibly reflecting a deepening sense of frustration or disillusionment. This shift in tone could signify a departure from conventional methods of addressing corruption towards a more sinister approach.

However, a more balanced perspective acknowledges the potential for his faith to motivate his social activism. Eugene’s belief system might compel him to fight for a more just society, a society that aligns with his distorted understanding of Christian values. This complexity resonates with Anyadike’s argument that Eugene’s internal conflict stems from the tension between his faith and his personal flaws (Eisenberg, 2018).

Beyond the Binary: A Character in Conflict

The critical discourse surrounding Purple Hibiscus often grapples with the binary of domestic abuser and social reformer. While Eugene’s actions within the home deserve condemnation, a comprehensive understanding requires examining his public persona and the social forces that shape it (Wosu, 2017).

“Fear sliced through me... fear of what my father might do if he found out” (Adichie, 23). This quote from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s work conveys a visceral experience of fear. The word “sliced” vividly illustrates fear’s sharp, penetrating nature, suggesting its ability to cut through one’s being. The fear described isn’t just abstract; it’s specific and deeply personal, rooted in anticipation of a father’s potential reaction. This fear isn’t solely about present danger but also about the consequences of discovery, hinting at a complex relationship dynamic or a past history that intensifies the protagonist’s apprehension. Adichie captures the psychological weight of familial expectations and the consequences of falling short, resonating with universal themes of vulnerability and apprehension.

“He was a man who could write so eloquently about freedom, who could fight so fiercely for the rights of others, yet who chained his own family to silence and fear” (Adichie, 282). This quote summarizes the paradox of a person who outwardly champions noble ideals like freedom and rights, internally imposes oppressive silence and fear upon his own family. It speaks to the complexity of human nature, highlighting the discrepancy between one’s public persona and private actions. Despite the eloquence and passion displayed in advocating for others, this individual fails to extend the same liberties to those closest to him. The juxtaposition of these traits

invites reflection on the inherent contradictions within individuals and the sometimes stark disparities between their beliefs and behaviors (P & G, 2023).

One compelling interpretation suggests that these seemingly opposing roles coexist within Eugene, creating a character grappling with internal conflict. His dedication to social justice might be genuine, fueled by his education and belief system. However, his deeply ingrained sense of patriarchy, coupled with the psychological effects of his own background, might manifest as domestic violence. This interpretation aligns with Ihechukwu's argument that Eugene's behavior stems from a sense of powerlessness. Unable to exert control over the rapidly changing world, he clings to dominance within the confines of his home (Eze, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The Man Behind the Mask - A Legacy of Duality

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* Eugene Achike emerges as a complicated and contradictory individual whose actions and intentions affect the narrative's investigation of power, agency, and cultural standards in postcolonial Nigeria. As a community practitioner, Eugene enjoys a prominent position within his community, admired for his charity, financial ability, and active engagement in church activities. However, his public image as a respected leader hides a harsher reality distinguished by home despotism, religious extremism, and a rigorous adherence to societal standards. Through Eugene's character, Adichie urges readers to confront the complexity of power and agency in a society defined by inequality, injustice, and the persistent legacy of colonialism. Eugene's authoritarian parenting style and ardent religious zealotry create a suffocating climate of terror and tyranny within the Achike family, where his children, Kambili and Jaja, live in perpetual fear of his anger. His efforts to control and manipulate his family members mirror wider concerns of patriarchy and oppression in postcolonial Nigerian culture, showing the ways in which power dynamics intersect with family dynamics to define human identity and agency (Akporherhe & Udi, 2024).

Moreover, Eugene's function as a community practitioner links with bigger issues of social transformation and political activity in *Purple Hibiscus*. His engagement in political demonstrations and protests indicates his desire to question the current quo and fight for a brighter future for Nigeria, however his activities are often hampered by his own inconsistencies and limits. Despite his sincere desire to influence substantial change, Eugene's authoritarianism and religious fanaticism eventually limit his capacity to connect with people and establish combinations across societal divisions. Despite his shortcomings and paradoxes, Eugene Achike's persona serves as an engaging and thought-provoking protagonist, enabling readers to grapple with complicated concerns about power, agency, and cultural norms in postcolonial African literature. Through an analysis of Eugene's actions, motivations, and relationships, Adichie offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of family dynamics, social change, and individual identity in contemporary Africa, challenging readers to confront the legacies of colonialism and oppression that continue to shape the continent's socio-political landscape (Singh, 2024).

In conclusion, Eugene Achike's character in *Purple Hibiscus* symbolises the complexity and contradictions of postcolonial Nigerian culture, presenting a nuanced and multidimensional portrait of a man divided between his need for power and his

dreams for a better future. Through Eugene's character, Adichie challenges us to confront the complexity of power and agency in a society defined by inequality and injustice, encouraging us to think on the prospects for reform and freedom in modern Africa.

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