

Postcolonial Projection of the Burden of a White European God In Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

Eugene Achike in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, subjects his family to extreme physical violence in the guise of discipline and religious legalism. He repeatedly batters his pregnant wife causing her miscarriage for not going with him to visit the English priest; he lashes his wife and children with his leather belt for breaking a Eucharist fast; and he deforms his only son's hand for missing two questions in a catechism test. Eugene ruthlessly scalds his daughter's feet with boiling water for walking into sin when she stays with his pantheist father under the same roof, and he almost kills her for hiding a picture of him. This paper deals critically with the hypothesis that Eugene Achike is a psychopathic postcolonial mimic potentate who disdains his ethnic language, culture and faith. The paper investigates how Eugene projects his psychological throes unto his family members for fear of not conforming to the teachings of a culture and a religious faith that belong exclusively to a racist white European colonialist god.

Key words: Postcolonial—Projection—Nigeria—Religion—domestic violence

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Under the superfluous characterization of Eugene Achike as the self-dedicated man of the church; the philanthropist Christ-like Nigerian entrepreneur who spendthrifts on his Catholic community; and the devout advocate of the implementation of western-style democracy in Nigeria, there is the lacerating deep psychological pain of dissonance between his public image and his inner psyche. The disturbance in Eugene's character ensues from the discrepancy between his public image as a self-aggrandizing postcolonial potentate and the shamefully inescapable colonial mimicry that overrules his psyche. Eugene was brought up in European missionary schools to the beliefs that his black skin is sinful; his native culture is pagan; and that his native language is sacrilegious. Most importantly, however, Eugene ardently believes that his people's sole spiritual salvation comes only through a white European God who speaks proper English. Ironically, the defender of public democracy and national liberation imposes oppressive silence and submission on his household; the community's great philanthropist disowns his pantheist Igbo-speaking father; and the seemingly loving patriarch flagellates his family for the slightest transgression against his beliefs.

In broad psychoanalytic definitions, projection is a defense mechanism that a person adopts to overcome the dissonance between binary mismatching cognitive beliefs about his self image. Discrepancy arises between a person's evaluation of himself as a good person and his innate knowledge of possessing negative traits; as a consequence, he tries to reduce psychological pressure by projecting onto others what is troublesome or causes psychic imbalance. Typically, Eugene Achike, the main character in *The Purple Hibiscus*, the Nigerian writer

Chimamanda Adichie's debut, is such a person suffering from the dissonance between his idealistic public image and his innate negative traits, so he attributes his negative impulses and feelings unto others, especially unto his family. This paper aims at investigating the psychological defense mechanism of projection as adopted by Eugene in dealing with the inner disturbance between his present postcolonial mimic potentate superego and his past postcolonial victimized id. Theoretically, projection is opted for as a means of releasing the tension that results from repressing one's negative attributes, whether he/she is cognizant of possessing or not. In Eugene's case, he projects unto his family characteristics which are identical to his oppressed postcolonial self, and of which he is conscious of possessing.

Eugene is keen on maintaining the rule of his household by painful circumscription of its member's minds and souls. He segregates his wife and children within the limits of the high walls of his mansion, and the limits of a discipline that tyrannizes their bodies, their speech, and most of all their religious belief and academic accomplishment. Eugene was sent by his father to a missionary school to work as a houseboy for the parish priests. Two years later, he worked as a gardener for the priests until he finished secondary school. As a reward, Eugene was sent to England to receive his university education. Those early years of service at the missionary schools were the formative basis of Eugene's cognitive self as he identifies his whole being with the Catholic teaching he received from the priests. Eugene returns to his homeland with the conviction that his religious conversion redeemed him from the empty sinful life of his kinfolks, especially his father who worships pagan "gods of wood and stone," and that his life

“would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission”
(*The Purple* 47).

Eugene’s sense of cultural and human inferiority stems from a long history of colonial spiritual subjugation. In *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Partha Chatterjee argues that though the colonizing western domain availed in imposing its materialistic paradigm over the realms of the colonized countries by its material presence, “anti-colonial nationalism [created] its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it [began] its political battle with the imperial power. It [did that] by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual” (6). Nonetheless, Nigeria first encountered the spiritual colonization before the materialistic one. Catholic organizations started sending their missionaries to Nigeria in 1842, long before it became a British colonial protectorate in 1914. Nigerian natives were recruited by those missionaries to spread the European Catholic faith, and English became the language of education in the church schools. Consequently, a socio-cultural divide occurred between the elite Nigerian new converts who sent their children to the European missionary schools—adopting the faith and speaking the language of the European white Christian colonizer—and the indigenous Nigerians who follow the Igbo tradition. This division of the Nigerian society—same as in many other colonized countries—triggered the dichotomy of superior westernized foreign language speaking natives and soulless subhuman inferior traditionalists. This stratification of the colonized people falls into the main colonialist discourse as Frantz Fanon explicates in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

For colonialism, this vast continent was a den of savages, infested with superstitions and fanaticism, destined to be despised, cursed by God, a land of cannibals, a land of ‘niggers.’ Colonialism’s condemnation is continental in scale. Colonialism’s claim that the pre-colonial period was akin to a darkness of the human soul refers to the entire continent of Africa. (150)

The hegemonic colonial power demeans the culture of the colonized and distorts their past. Colonization, as V.Y. Mudimbe explains in *The Invention of Africa*, “broke the culturally unified and religiously integrated schema of most African traditions” (4). As a result, the colonized abjured their indigenous identity and became convinced that the elevation of their humanity depended on their adherence to the Western culture. The colonialist power, thus, controlled the colonized mind and embedded the belief that it would regress to sinful degradation and bestiality if it stops its adoption of the colonizer’s spiritual and cultural paradigm. This created an inferiority complex on part of the colonized as Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality....The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

Although Adichie wrote *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, long after Nigeria won its political independence in the 1960s, the novel features the pathologically disturbed familial life of Eugene Achike, which is extensively affected by his psychological imbalance as a postcolonial mimic potentate. The novel is set in postcolonial—and post-independence—Nigeria while its main action is focused on Eugene Achike’s household. At first glance, *Purple Hibiscus* seems a *Bildungsroman* told in the first narrative voice of Eugene’s daughter, Kambili, about herself and her brother coming of age: facing the challenges of their incipient adulthood during a time of political disturbance. Nonetheless, the struggle of the Achike siblings for personal independence from their father’s oppressive colonial mimicry is an allegorical representation of Nigeria’s strife for independent cultural and political identity.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie presents the microcosm of the Achike family as an allegorical emulation of the postcolonial Nigerian social macrocosm. Though the British occupation of Nigeria ended in 1960, it left a legacy of Western cultural and religious beliefs about the sinful barbarity of the Nigerian self that is only corrigible by the implementation of a violent and/or oppressive discipline. Ironically, however, that kind of oppression is practiced by the Nigerians themselves who doubly colonize their kinfolks. In the public sphere, after decades of political independence from the British occupation, the Nigerian people still suffer under the yoke of repeated military coup dictators who suppress their freedom of expression, usurp their country’s wealth, and brain drain their intellectuals. In the domestic sphere, Nigerian households—same as the Achikes’—are doubly

colonized by the post-colonial mimics who practice patriarchal oppression that amalgamates the legacy of colonial oppression. In *The Decolonized Home: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus* Susan Strehle explicates that “the underlying assumptions of male priority and power met reinforcement from Western patriarchy in and after colonialism, leaving African women doubly oppressed” (106). *Purple Hibiscus* is a literary expression of what Strehle refers to as “an emerging African feminism” that draws on the belief that the liberation of African nations is connected to the liberation of their women. The novel is recounted from the first narrative viewpoint of Eugene's daughter Kambili, whose journey of self-liberation allegorically represents the hopeful liberation of all African nations from post-colonial patriarchal mimicry that is impersonated in the characterization of her father.

The psychological imbalance in Eugene's character stems from the dissonance between the discrepant images of himself. This is illustrated in the novel through the turbulent mood swings he passes through. Kambili's first-person narrative point of view provides an extensive description of her father in whom she takes pride as the iconic figure in the community. The novel begins with a descriptive narrative of the family's participation in the Ash Sunday service in which Father Benedict talks about Eugene's defense of freedom and truth in his privately owned newspaper, then he prays for him, and the whole congregation answers ““Yes” or “God bless him” or “Amen””(5). Father Benedict has always talked about how Kambili's father is “making the biggest donations to Peter's pence and St. Vincent de Paul...paying for the cartons of communion wine, for the new ovens

at the convent where the Reverend Sisters baked the host, for the new wing to St. Agnes Hospital” (5). There is always a tone of reverence in Kambili’s narrative for the grandeur of Eugene Achike’s personality as a father and the “*omelora*,” or the one who “does for the community” (56). Eugene is also regarded in veneration by the clergymen and the community as a pious and modest Catholic. He always sits in “the front pew for mass” and while no one kneels to receive the communion Eugene would kneel and shut his eyes “so hard that his face tightened into a grimace” (4). Kambili says, “Father Benedict usually referred to the Pop, Papa, and Jesus—in that order. He used Papa to illustrate the gospels” (4).

In addition to Eugene’s outwardly pious and philanthropic characteristics, he is also given physical mightiness that makes him outstandingly a superior male figure. Kambili says that her father was “so tall that he sometimes lowered his head to get through doorways, that his tailor always used extra fabric to sew his trousers” (207). Adichie explains in Ike Anya’s interview “*In the Footsteps of Achebe: Enter Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nigeria’s Newest Literary Voice*” that the traditional epithet of the “Big Man” is expressive of the idea of the African patriarchal extensiveness, which she rejects altogether “I can’t stand the empty Big Manism, something my people do too well.” The archetype of “Big Man” assumes the highest point of desirable masculinity in African cultural awareness as Kathryn Holland explicates in *The Troubled Masculinities in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions* that “the success of the Big Man was measured not only by material wealth, but by the appearance and loyalty of familial and other followers.” With his extensive largesse, his exemplary piety,

and his physical strength, Eugene Achike is indeed the embodiment of the traditionally established African concept of “Big Man” as Holland explains further, “...the Big Man displayed his status by the lavish use of luxury items and the number of his family and dependents, and in later times the model adapted to encompass both indigenous and Western displays of behavior, consumption and hospitality” (122). The characterization of Eugene Achike combines elements of grandeur that amalgamate his self-image as the most powerful man with infallible authority and vain pride in his capacity that verges on arrogance that competes with God’s power as Cheryly Stobie notices in *Dethroning The Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus*:

Adichie neatly presents Eugene’s conflict between humble charity and overweening pride in his ambiguous comment to a grateful recipient of his generosity: “It is God. It is all from God”. While the intended meaning that Eugene is the conduit of God’s beneficence is clear, there is also a suggestion of Eugene’s hubris in that he is unconsciously conflating his power with God’s” (425-426).

Nevertheless, behind this façade of reverence and magnificence, there is a lacerating sense of inferiority that belies Eugene Achike’s psychological being.

In *Projection, Paranoia and Cognitive Dissonance* Trudie Silman Goldmann hypothesizes that projection is enacted as an ego defense mechanism when an individual—suffering from a state of tension—tends to attribute his negative and/or inferior traits onto others

as a “tension reducing process.” Goldmann, further hypothesizes that “the more difficult it is to deny possession of undesirable characteristics, the less should be the tendency to engage in similarity projection onto others” (14). Goldmann’s hypotheses are derived from the classical Freudian notion of projection as an unconscious strategy an individual uses to defend his ego against the knowledge of possessing anxiety-causing characteristics of which he/she is cognizant. In the same vein, Carl Jung explains in *Analytical Psychology: its Theory and Practice* that when an individual tends to use projection as a means of upholding his self-satisfying positive image, he “projects negative qualities and therefore hates and loathes the object, he has to discover that he is projecting his own inferior side, his shadow, as it were, because he prefers to have an optimistic and one-sided image of himself” (179). Accordingly, projection is a self-esteem defense mechanism in which seeing one’s negative characteristics in others reduces one’s pain that he possesses these characteristics. Psychological studies differentiate between two basic notions of projection: the classical one based on the Freudian definition of projection and the modern other that is attributive projection. Jeff Scimel and et al. in *Evidence That Projection of Freud Trait Can Serve a Defensive Function* argue that

researchers found that when certain negative attributes were difficult to deny, participants were more like to see these characteristics in a favorable target, implicating attributive projection. On the other hand, when certain negative attributes were easy to deny, participants

were more likely to see these attributes in an unfavorable target, implicating classic projection. (970)

In Eugene Achike's case, his attitude toward his familial and social peripheries demonstrates both types of projection onto favorable and unfavorable targets.

Eugene's darkest fears pertain to his previously colonized dark self-image as a downtrodden subaltern. The colonizing forces of Nigeria and other African countries embedded a derogatory stereotypical image of the African subject as a member of an inferior human genealogy immersed in barbaric sensuality and primitive paganism. Adichie has masterfully drawn a complex picture of Eugene's personality which features his rupturing struggle with the demons of somatophobia against his black body. Eugene is the product of missionary instruction as Corinne Sandwith writes in *Frailties of the Flesh: Observing the Body in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*, and he adopts the "Judo-Christian belief in the body as encumbrance and trap, of the body as allied to sin and Satan" (98). The Christian concepts of sin and redemption are essentially related to the bodily suffering of Christ; accordingly, the body is salvaged and purified if burnt and lacerated. Eugene's anxiety stems from his inner struggle to shun the blemishes of that shadowy image of the barbaric African that was tyrannically obliterated by Western missionaries. Eugene projects his darkest fears of conforming to the stereotypical image of the African as a heathen and a sensual subject onto his close family members and onto his community at large. As a young man, Eugene received severe punishment as a corrective measure by the

English missionaries, and now as a parent, he imposes these punitive measures on his family.

First of all, Eugene imposes silence on his family members as he monitors every word that comes out of their mouths. On several occasions, and in fear of their father's violence, Kambili says that she and her brother Jaja speak with their eyes. Their mother Beatrice also "[speaks] the way a bird eats, in small amounts" (20). Despite the luxury of Eugene's big mansion, the silence he imposes on its dwellers turns it into an empty, lifeless and senseless prison as Kambili narrates:

Our living room had too much empty space, too much wasted marble floor that gleaned from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture was lifeless: [...] the leather sofa's greeting was a clammy coldness, the Persian rugs were too lush to have any feeling. (190).

This morbid silence affects Kambili's psychology as she becomes impeded in social interaction and develops a stuttering inability that hinders her from making friends. With her "tongue tied" she becomes that laughing stock of her classmates because at crucial moments she becomes inhibited as her words "would not come" (139). Kambili's stuttering results from her pathetic fear of her father's judgment; therefore, she feels "as though [her] mouth were full of melting sugar," (26) when she says something that receives his endorsement. This stranglehold of silence allows only for empty formulaic replies—always religious in content such as "God will deliver us" (28)—that result in making Kambili and Jaja too oppressively restricted for their adolescent age. Ironically, Eugene who owns a newspaper that

promotes democratic ideals imposes despotic silence on his household. His editor Ade Coker remarks that Eugene's children are "always quite," and wittingly says, "imagine what the *Standard* would be if we were all quite" (58). The young Achikes are enforced into inhibition that is projected onto them by their father who has been brought up into utter subjugation to a "white British God," and as Susan Strehle explains, they live "in the "self-canceling shadow of their father's own unworthiness" (111).

Similarly, Eugene imposes on himself and his household speaking in English and prohibits Igbo both in everyday conversation and in prayers. Kambili, keenly observes her father's adoption of the British accent especially when he "spoke to Father Benedict," as verily she notices how he becomes "gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he has always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious." The dichotomy in Eugene's personality results from his sense of inferiority that has been created, as Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "by the death and burial of [his] cultural originality" (18). Eugene's personality, indeed, exemplifies the embodiment of the fractured psychology of the colonized African subaltern. Fanon explicates, "[a] Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question."

Eugene projects his sense of inferiority toward his Igbo language on the members of his household. He prohibits his family from speaking Igbo in public because they have to "sound civilized in public" (41). In this sense, Eugene subconsciously relates high civilization and religious piety to the English language: the language of

the white Christian colonizer. In this regard, John Mclod writes in *Beginning Postcolonialism* that colonialism imprinted in the colonized peoples' subconscious minds the normalizing notion of their subjugation to the colonizing powers; henceforth, accepting inferiority through a process he labels "colonizing the mind." According to Mclod, colonialism "establishes ways of thinking. It operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language; to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonizers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world" (9). Eugene's post-colonial European mimicry shows notably in the manner he acts in the presence of European white Christians. For instance, Kambili remarks how her father "changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict...in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious" (47). Visiting her Aunt Ifeoma, Kamili notices the difference between the two households as her aunt and cousins speak Igbo and English alternatively. The Achike siblings are at ease singing psalms and saying prayers in Igbo at their aunt's house: something that is definitely prohibited by Eugene both at home and at church. In this regard, Ifeoma verily remarks "Papa [is] too much of a colonial product" (41). Therefore, projecting his aversion to the Igbo language onto his social periphery, Eugene "liked it when the villagers made an effort to speak English around him" (61) because this satisfied his inclination to maintain his distinguished European mimicry.

Similarly, Eugene's disdain for the Igbo culture is exemplified in his treatment of his father Papa Nnukwu—an aged pantheist who suffers twice because of his senile illness and his son's neglectful

ingratitude. Eugene disowns his father as he considers him an atheist. Kambili says that her father never visited Papa Knukwu; nevertheless, he sends him slim wads of money through his driver Kevin, “slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus” (63). Eugene prohibits his children from visiting their grandfather, touching him, or eating his food. On her visit to her aunt, Kambili becomes scared of confessing to her father that her grandfather was at her aunt’s house: she becomes terrified to “have to confess that [she] had shared a room with a heathen” (150). Eugene, on the other hand, venerates his father-in-law and insists on making his children call him Grandfather in English. Kambili’s maternal grandfather was very light-skinned “almost albino, and it was said to be one of the reasons the missionaries had liked him.”(68) Even though his father-in-law died, Eugene still talked about him often, his eyes proud, “as if [he] were his own father” (68). The discrepancy in Eugene’s attitudes toward his father and father-in-law is only explicable in light of Eugene’s inferiority complex towards his indigenous culture and black skin color. Eugene’s reverence of his father-in-law stems from his adoration of the image of the ameliorated African subaltern being light-skinned, speaking English, and doing things “the right way, the way white people did” (69).

Eugene, on the other hand, projects onto his father the disdain for the stereotypical image of the indigenous Nigerian. In *Stereotypes Focus Defensive Projection*, Olesya Govorun elaborates on the idea of projection as a process of casting one’s negative qualities unto others as a means of protecting one’s self-image. Govorun, writes, “a person projecting onto stereotyped targets may not feel that he or she is distorting reality because stereotypes provide assurance that one’s

judgment is realistic” (782). The sublimation of the father-in-law and the contempt of the father are (portrayed) featured symbolically in *Purple Hibiscus* through the motif of the two fathers’ pictures. While Eugene proudly hangs the picture of his father-in-law “framed in deep mahogany” (69) at his mansion, he almost kills his daughter for trying to protect the torn pieces of a painting of his father. After Eugene vehemently tears the painting, Kambili lays her body on the ground over the torn pieces, “curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus” (211). Still, foaming with anger, Eugene keeps kicking Kambili’s fragile body and flagellates it with his belt until he breaks her ribs and leaves her unconscious. Eugene’s crushing of his daughter’s body is the symbolic crushing of his colonized childhood: an extended metaphor of projection in which a defeated father is crushing his offspring who tries to protect the symbolic reminders of the remains of their defeated cultural heritage. It is noteworthy that Eugene’s recurrent acts of violence against his household are explicable in light of projecting his fear of condescending to the negative images of the black-skinned, non-Christian and non-English-speaking African subalterns.

Ifeoma verily describes Eugene’s family as living in a “house [that] is on fire” (214). Violence in the name of fervid religious conformity assumes a pivotal role in Eugene’s pattern of despotic authority over his wife and children. Cynthia R. Wallace comments, in “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Redemption,” that Eugene’s violence against his family is “always linked to the patriarch’s desire for his family’s perfection in the eyes of God” (470). In Eugene’s case this “God” happens to be a white

unforgiving perfectionist European deity who had subjugated him in childhood, and in turn, he projects this subjugation in his adulthood onto his family. In a continual self-proclamation of being the representative of God, Eugene metes out severe penalization against his family. For instance, when his ten-year-old son Jaja misses questions in a Catechism test in the “Holy Communion class”, Eugene takes him upstairs and locks the door in order to beat him. Jaja “in tears, [comes] out supporting his left hand with his right” (146). Obviously Jaja is left with a “deformed finger,” which he later in life, as a teenager, runs over the painting of his dead grandfather Papa Knukwu. Jaja says, “I have Papa Knuwu’s arms”. Minutes later, Eugene tears the painting to shreds and almost kills Kambili who tries to protect it.

The first scene in *Purple Hibiscus* introduces the reader immediately to Eugene’s practice of violence against his family in the name of religious conformity. He throws his “heavy missal across the room and [breaks] the figurines” of his wife Beatrice, when Jaja refuses to go to the Palm Sunday mass. The image of Eugene throwing the book of liturgy as a violent reaction against the transgression of his household has some metaphorical connotations. First, it indicates the association of religious legalism, oppressive order and punitive violence in Eugene’s patriarchal authority. Second, this scene highlights the centrality of the religious practice in the life of the Achike family—the three narrative sections of *Purple Hibiscus* are subtitled after the chronological order of the Christian holy day: “Palm Sunday,” “Before Palm Sunday,” and “After Palm Sunday”. Third, the scene manifests the swiftness of Eugene’s fervent legalism in executing his punishment against transgressors, as well as his careful slowness in

“pressing hard on each forehead [of the church’s congregation] to make a perfect cross with his ash-covered thumb” (3). The fourth connotative importance is related to the author’s choice of the title “Breaking Gods” for this first part of the narrative as it does not merely refer to the actual breakage of the little figurines but also to the metaphorical breakage of Eugene’s patriarchal authority. The figurines were tiny ceramic statues of ballet dancers that Beatrice—as a means of psychological relief—had often polished after every brutal beating she received from Eugene. Sometimes, the beating was severe enough to leave her unconscious in one occasion and in another with a swollen face and the “area around her right eye [...] the black purple shade of an overripe avocado (190). Noticeably, these beatings are always caused by his violent zeal for religious conformity. For instance, suffering from morning sickness on a Sunday morning after prayer, Beatrice felt too nauseated to visit Father Benedict as part of Eugene’s Sunday after-prayer routine. However, intimidated by Eugene’s anger, and despite her sickness, she goes into the white missionary’s house. On the same day before dinner, Eugene says a long prayer asking God to “forgive those who had tried to thwart His will, who had put selfish desires first and had not wanted to visit His servant after Mass” (33). In the afternoon, Eugene beats his wife unconscious causing her miscarriage. Afterward, he carries Beatrice “slung over his shoulder like [a] sack of rice,” (34) and leaves a trickle of her blood on the floor to be cleaned by his children.

Significantly, Father Benedict’s house has an arch that looks like an “alter entrance,” and for Eugene, the importance of visiting this house and its European white dweller equals visiting a holy shrine. In this place, Eugene changes his accent “sounding British,” showing his

grace in “the eager-to-please” manner he has always kept in the presence of the white missionaries. Sometimes, feeling satisfied with his visit to Father Benedict, Eugene would drive home smiling with “his eyes bright, his hand gently drumming the steering wheel” (107). Strehle, in addition, explains how Eugene’s reverence of Father Benedict is closely connected to his idea of a white European “imported God who commands British restraint and Victorian repression, the deity who has called Eugene forbids nakedness, spontaneity, laughter, song, and joy. Like the British God, Eugene does not approve of Nigerians” (109). Eugene’s practice of violence against his wife and children comes as a projection of his worst characteristic of spiritual subjugation to the white colonialists. He was forced into subservience to the whites in the name of enlightenment and high culture, and in turn, he forces his family into showing the same servility in their presence. In this regard, Corinne Sandwith writes in *“Frailties of the Flesh: Observing the Body in Chimamanda Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus”* that Eugene’s domestic tyranny is traceable to his “Western-derived” self-image as Europe’s colonized other that is only “made human by violent means.” Accordingly, Eugene as Corinne explains:

Subjects his children to a similar regime as part of the project of western enlightenment. What is suggested here is not the paradox of western enlightenment and tyranny but their reciprocal relationship. In this reading, Eugene emerges as the conflictual figure of this unresolved tension. (104).

Eugene administers every brutal punishment he had received at the hands of the missionaries on his children. For instance, Eugene

punishes Kambili and her brother for staying in the same house “as a heathen;” with their grandfather Papa Nnukwu, and for lying about this transgression. Eugene pours boiling water from a kettle on Kambili’s feet as a punishment for “walk[ing] into sin” (195). This central scene of domestic violence in the novel yields an insightful aspect of Eugene’s psychosis: his violence combined with emotional instability. Kambili narrates how her father’s voice “quavered” as it was “choked with emotion,” and how he was crying with “tears streaming down his face” (195) as he was scalding her feet. The phrases uttered by Eugene in this situation illustrate his deep psychological pain for lacerating himself and his children to reach a point of perfection following the teachings he was brought up to at the missionary Catholic Church:

“Kambili, you are precious.” His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. “You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.” He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face...“That is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet,” he said. (195)

Eugene’s emotional instability stems from the repressed pains of his traumatized adolescence at the missionary school. He was brutally punished by the priest whom he lived with for masturbating by soaking his hands in boiling water—the same punitive measure he currently

inflicts upon his child. Nevertheless, Eugene tells Kambili after burning her feet that everything he does for her is “for [her] own good” (197).

Psychopathically, Eugene suffers from a dissonance between his parental love and his brutality against his children on whom he inflicts punishment for the sake of protecting them from sinning against their bodies or transgressing against the Catholic Church. The prudishness in Eugene’s stance is essentially related to the “myth of black hypersexuality that prevailed under colonialism” as Cheryl Stobie explains, ???in “*Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus*,” that white colonialist adopted violence against the black body as a means of purifying and alleviating it above a presumed bestial nature. Stobie explicates further that as “paterfamilias, Eugene bears the responsibility of monitoring the purity and obedience of his wife and children, a task which he fulfils increasingly zealously” (426). Thus, Jaja cannot have any privacy in his room because Eugene bluntly tells him, “What do you want privacy for? To commit a sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?” (192). It is clear how Eugene’s traumatic past taught him that black skin is sinful; therefore, it must be whipped, flagellated, and burnt to purify it from sin. Eugene, in this sense, is a psychotically disturbed person whose brutality against his family is a psychopathic expression of his defensive love. His protectiveness roots in his fear for them to fall below the standard of the Europeanized post-colonial African he was brought up to by the colonial missionaries.

Eugene’s pathetic love for his family is ironically infused with inflicting pain on them. Kambili narrates how her father used to give

her and Jaja “love sips” from his hot tea with “the scalding liquid that burned his love onto [her] tongue” (291). She narrates another illustrious incident of Eugene’s psychopathic love for his family when he lashes her, Jaja, and Beatrice with his leather belt for breaking the “Eucharistic fast” (101) ten minutes before the mass. Eugene hits his family with his belt while “muttering that the devil would not win” (102). A few seconds later he stops; his face shows crumpling pain; he holds Jaja and Kambili to his body, and asks them “did the belt hurt you? Did it break your skin?” (102). Protectiveness in Eugene’s behavior toward his family is traceable to his repressed traumatic fear of regressing into the sins of his black skin. This embedded fear is a heavy burden that weighs down his whole being as Kambili says, “It was the way Papa shook his head when he talked about liking sin, as if something weighed him down, something he could not throw off” (102). It is, *per se* the burden of traumatic violence Eugene suffered from at the hands of whites that he is currently projecting onto his family as Adedoyin Aguru explains in *Psychopathic Character-Types in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus*:

He is really weighed down with burdens of sins and violence which he has not the wherewithal to resist. He invariably exempts his weakness, personality failure and lack of self control in his attempt to mete out “judgments” against wrongdoers and his self-justification while doing so. (181)

Thus, Eugene’s psychological being is delimited by fear and self-hatred of his sinful blackness as a presumption that was irreplaceably inscribed in him by the white missionaries. Throughout Kambili’s

narrative, her father assumes a point of centrifugal authoritarianism that controls every aspect of their life. Eugene's self-hatred and shame of his black skin; his disdain for the Igbo culture and language; and his intolerance toward traditional religion motivate the execution of his domestic violence as a patriarch who desires the perfection of his family in eyes of God. However, Eugene's God is European, white, and intolerably prudish: a colonizer deity. Cynthia R. Wallace writes, in *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Redemption*, that *Purple Hibiscus* provides a critique of Christian missionaries and their destructive effect on the colonized as the novel aligns "colonial whiteness, conservative Catholicism, and the rule of the father, and exposing their destructive power in the psyche (and body) of the novel's young narrator Kambili as well as her brother, Jaja, and mother, Beatrice" (467).

Nonetheless, true Christian faith calls on believers to extend mercy and love unto the others. Eugene's religious zeal, on the other hand, drives him in the adverse direction of vehemence and ruthlessness. Sophia O. Ogwude discusses this idea in *History and Ideology in Chimamanda Adichie's Fiction* as she deems that Eugene's "Christianity is without humanity" (116). Eugene's religious bigotry, she observes, is of a vindictive and an unforgiving nature: a result of a more comprehensive "cultural conflict" (110) between the European colonizer and the African colonized. The concomitant conversion of the colonized has dire postcolonial consequences, "especially religious intolerance and its often disheartening disavowal of much of [...] African cultural beliefs and ways that it bred on the part of these new converts "(110). In this situation, the colonized is in a state of

recreating the violence and oppression they suffered from in a projective manner.

In the same vein, the psychological effects of colonization upon the colonizer and the colonized assume a pivotal point of interest in Stephen Frosh's *Psychoanalysis, Colonialism, Racism*. In this article, Frosh deals with the hypothesis that psychoanalysis "provides leverage on postcolonial issues—most notably, the damage done by colonialist and racist thought" (141). According to Frosh, the colonized African has been objectified by the white colonizer's gaze that has always denied him the right to be seen as an independent subject. This gaze, Frosh writes, "projects the abjected elements of the White onto the skin of the Black. In particular, the Black is positioned as sexual, aggressive, and physical" (147). Racial oppression in this sense is explicable in terms of psychoanalytic projection. The white colonizer projects his subjective disturbing attributes unto the denigrated and colonized black. This idea is traceable to Frantz Fanon's presumption in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the white man's "Negrophobia" against the black man is a "yielding to a feeling of impotence or of sexual inferiority" (159). Accordingly, Frosh explains that the white colonizer's paranoiac prudishness and his erotophobia trigger the objectification of the Black subaltern as a "repository of its own discontent if it is to survive. The White man projects his repressed sexuality onto the Black, constructing him in fantasy as a sexual paragon and an object for his homosexual desires" (149). Eugene Achike, in *Purple Hibiscus*, exemplifies this notion of double projection as the white colonizer projects unto him his paranoid fears of sexual impotency, homosexuality, and hypersexuality; in consequence, Eugene projects those fears unto his own kinfolds.

Eugene's character also features aspects of what David J. Schroder labels the "Colonial Mentality" in *Colonial Mentality Scale (CMS) for Filipino Americans: Scale Construction and Psychological Implications*. Though the term "colonial mentality" was originally conceptualized for the experience of the Filipino-Americans, its implications involve the universal experience of any colonized people. The process of colonization is based on the systematic denigration, exploitation, and oppression of the subaltern who; as a result, suffers from self-doubt and identity confusion. The mindset of the colonized people becomes inhibited with the perception of their indigenous ethnicity as inferior to the European superior ethnicity. Colonial mentality, as Ankita Nikalje and Ayse Ciftci explain, in *Colonial Mentality, Racism, and Depressive Symptoms: Asians Indians in the United States*, is characterized by the colonized people's practice of an automated internal oppression: a "negative mental health," which outcomes in a "lower psychological well-being among various racial and ethnic minorities" (3). Showing the symptoms of this colonial mentality, Eugene suffers from a debilitated psychological condition or a "curse," which his father prays to be lifted; "Bless my son. [...] Lift the curse they have put on him" (168).

The curse of colonized people, as verily exemplified by Eugene Achike's character, has to do with the mechanism of their colonized mental paradigm. The colonized are psychologically inhibited as they come to see themselves only through the monologic perspective of the colonizers as stereotypically inferior objects. The colonizers impose their hegemonic cultural superiority by means of systematic denigration of the colonized people's ethnicity, religious belief, language and

cultural awareness. This imposition is practiced by violent means in the name of conformity either to the colonizer's superior religious faith or cultural ideology. Therefore, the colonized constantly imitate the colonizer in their attempt to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes imposed in the process of colonization. This consequence also results in the psychopathic projection of all the negative attributes that hinder the imitation process unto the less or non Europeanized members of the colonized society. Colonization, as Albert Memmi explains in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, does not only materially kill the colonized, "It must be added that it kills him spiritually. Colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts men, both colonizer and colonized" (151).

Though *Purple Hibiscus* is repellent with incidents of domestic violence that sometimes verge on brutality at the hands Eugene, it is not void of a message of hope for the younger generations. In fact, the novel is designed on a schema of polar opposites that illustrate contrasts in Eugene's personality as well as in his social periphery. To begin with, Eugene is not a one-dimensional static villain. Despite his domestic violence against his family, Eugene shows a philanthropist side dedicated exclusively toward his church. Remarkably, the reverends at Eugene's church, especially Father Benedict with whom he share all of his secrets, never advise him against his domestic violence. The attitude of the colonial missionaries definitely shows their hypocrisy as they prefer to maintain a firm grip on Eugene in order to ensure the continuity of his expenditure. This symbolically refers to the hypocrisy of the colonial discourse about redeeming and elevating the less cultured nations while colonial presence is all about

usurping others' wealth. The novel shows, by means of contrast, the true spirit of Christian faith as exemplified by the character of Father Amadi and the household of Aunt Ifeoma.

The first scene of the novel is the starting point at which "things were falling apart" at Eugene's house. The following narrative parts are flash backs that recount incidents of violence at the Achikes' house in sheer contrast to memories of merriness and love at their Aunt's house. It was the first time Jaja defies his father's authority that is always cloaked in religious conformity. Defiantly, Jaja says that he refuses to take the host because "the wafer gives [him] bad breath," and it "nauseates" (7) him when the priest touches his mouth. In fact, Jaja's rebelliousness is not as much against religion *per se* as it is against the hegemony of his father's psychopathic assumption of the representative of God. His rejection to take the host is directed at the connection between the wafers, which are a product of his father's factory, and "the body of our Lord" (7). The son's rebellion is ignited by his visit to his aunt Ifeoma as she helps him and his sister break the shackles of their father's religious fanaticism.

Ifeoma is the total opposite of her brother Eugene: she is brilliantly characterized in the novel as his foil. Same like Eugene, she received her education at missionary schools, but she did not become a "colonial product" like him. Unlike her affluent brother who owns two mansions, a factory and a newspaper, Ifeoma is a poor widowed university teacher who endures harsh living conditions in the debilitated dwellings of the university's staff members without payment. Unlike her brother who ruthlessly disowns his father and denies him access to his house, Ifeoma hosts her old father in her small

apartment and shows mercy for his old age. In fact, Ifeoma can see through Eugene's psychopathic religious fanaticism as she observes "Eugene has to stop doing God's job.[...] if God will judge our father for choosing to follow the way our ancestors, then God will do the judging not Eugene." (95-6)

Ifeoma encourages her children to speak out their minds and to express themselves independently, unlike her brother who imposes silence on his children, especially his daughter Kambili who feels "awkward and tongue-tied" (50). Ifeoma is a devout Christian who practices prayers and fasting regularly with her children, and sometimes they are led by their regular visitor Father Amadi. Unlike Eugene who disdains Igbo culture and language, Ifeoma and her family sing psalms in Igbo. Their melodious voices are echoed by Aunt Ifeoma who "sing[s] in echoes, like an opera singer drawing the words from the pit of her stomach," unlike Kambili and her brother who "don't sing at home" (126). Similarly, Aunt Ifeoma's house is full of life, freedom and laughter unlike Eugene's big mansion that is morbidly silent and domineered by oppressive prohibitions and "meticulously drawn" (24) schedules. Kambili notices how her aunt and cousins prayed for "of all things, laughter" (128). And because the merciful are blessed "they shall obtain mercy" (Mathew 5:7) Aunt Ifeoma's house always rang out with laughter that "bounced around all the walls, all the rooms"(140).

Aunt Ifeoma is also a strong opponent of women's independence and dignity. Unlike Eugene who batters his wife as a matter of course, Ifeoma's late husband Ifediora "never raised a hand to [her]" (251). The two couples did not get along because Eugene wanted to impose his

version of faith of his sister's family. Ifeoma is a strong and independent woman who would not bend to her affluent brother's bribes which he uses with other weak characters. She says that Eugene offered to buy her and her husband a new car if they comply with his psychopathic version of religious legalism; "he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup" (96). Nevertheless, despite her poverty, Ifeoma shows too much ideological liberalism and independence to the dislike of the totalitarian Nigerian regime. Ifeoma decides to immigrate to the United States after threats from the police. There are numerous points of contrast between Ifeoma and her brother that support the idea that Eugene is a postcolonial psychopath who projects his inferiorities and weakness unto the weaker others. Ogwude writes that Eugene's superfluous Christian piety is a mask behind which he practices his "determined oppression of the weak and helpless, his wife and their teenage children as well as his aged father" (117).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses the effect of colonization on the psychology of the colonized people creating what he labels a "psycho-existential complex" (14). This psycho-existential problem results in the self-objectification of the Black subaltern as an inferior entity in reference to the hegemonic existence of the White. Likewise, in *The Souls of the Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois hypothesizes that the Black develops a "double consciousness" (3) that delimitate the self-identification of the Black person only through the scrutinizing gaze of the White Colonizer. This results in a continual internal oppression of the self as the colonized unconsciously engage in mental

enslavement of the self by holding the degenerative values of the colonizer.

In conclusion, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis. A plethora of research papers read the narrative discourse of the main character Kambili from a postcolonial perspective, mostly with feminist and religious critical foci; nevertheless, the nature of ruthless domestic violence practiced by her father against their family requires further investigation. This paper deals with the pivotal assumption of how the mentally colonized subject, as Eugene Achike in *Purple Hibiscus* proves to be a typical example, becomes entangled in a continual process of psychological defense mechanism enacted by the projection of his negative attributes unto his social periphery. Adichie's characterization of Eugene Achike, as a psychopathic postcolonial mimic, proves to be an excellent case study of psychological effects of colonialism and racism on the colonized nations. The paper fathoms the depth of the Eugene Achike's psychological throes and traces them back to a full cycle of projection encompassing the colonizer and the colonized. The White colonizer projects his inferiorities and insecurities unto the colonized Black by attributing him the negative traits of bestial sexuality, paganism, and ignorance. The Black becomes entangled in the sinister cycle of projective persecution when he mentally adopts the white colonizer's negative attributes about his race and believes in his violent persecution as a corrective measure. Throughout *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene projects the violence practiced against him by the white colonizers in the name of religious legalism, prudishness and culturalization.

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ملخص

يمارس يوجين آتشايك في رواية الكركدية القرمزى للكاتبة أديتشي أشد صنوف العنف الجسدي بحجة التأديب و إقامة الشرع الديني؛ فهو يضرب زوجته الحامل مرات عدة، و يتسبب في إجهاضها لعدم ذهابها معه لزيارة القس الإنجليزي، و يجلد زوجته و أبناءه بحزامه لعدم صيامهم للقربان المقدس، ويشوه يد ابنه الوحيد عندما يخطئ في الإجابة عن سؤالين في اختبار التعليم المسيحي، و يحرق قدما ابنته بالمياه المغلية، لأنها زلت بقدمها في الخطيئة، و باتت مع أبيه الوثني تحت سقف واحد، و كاد أن يتسبب في قتلها؛ لأنها خبأت صورته. يتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة النقدية فرضية أن شخصية يوجين مضطربة نفسياً لكونه رجلاً يقلد السيد المستعمر فيما بعد الاستعمار فيحترق لغته و ثقافته و معتقده الإثني. كما يعمل هذا البحث على دراسة ما يقوم به يوجين من إسقاط لمناعبه النفسية على أفراد عائلته خوفاً من عدم تطبيق تعاليم ثقافة ومعتقد ديني تنتمي بشكل حصري إلى إله عنصري أبيض ومستعمر أوروبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار—الإسقاط النفسي— نيجيريا - الدين - العنف الأسري.