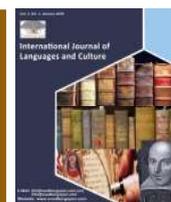




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Caring but Brutal: The Irony of Religious Fanaticism in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple hibiscus*

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Abstract

A deconstructionist evaluation of the character of Eugene Achike in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* reveals him as a violator of certain fundamental scriptural tenets as enunciated in the Bible, rather than a quintessential scripture believer and adherent which he usually prefers to present himself to be. The Bible which contains sixty-six books, beginning from Genesis to Revelation, is profoundly and generally referred to as the inspired as well as the inspiring word of God by Christians irrespective of denomination. Having often read and referred to the Bible, one would have expected Eugene to abide by its codes. But this is not actually the situation. Contrary to biblical injunctions, Eugene brutalizes his wife and children; he makes them live in perpetual fear and anxiety rather than being a pillar of succor and support as expected of a Christian husband and father. Eugene's domestic despotism and terrorism is first signified in his conversion of a missal to a missile which he thoughtlessly targets at his only son Jaja to crush him. Also, he does not really carter for his age-stricken father, Papa-Nnukwu even when the man is sick, despite his stupendous wealth and large-scale philanthropic gestures to various individuals and organizations. He does not visit his father nor allow him to visit him in his palatial residences. He does not greet him. Simply put, Eugene has no regard for his father, contrary to the biblical injunction: "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12, New King James Version). After evaluating these attitudes and propensities with clear biblical injunctions, the study posits that Eugene's acclaimed devotion to the Christian faith is at most superficial, self-serving and even hypocritical.

Keywords: *Caring, Brutal, Irony, Religion, Superficial*

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1. Introduction

In matters of ethics and adjudication regarding the Christian Church and its members, the Bible is usually referenced as a dependable compendium of authority. And when a proselytizer makes the popular statement, "The Bible says," there is always an implied reference to authority and finality. It is like saying, "God says" and therefore no need for argumentation. The characterization of Eugene Achike in Adichie (2003) *Purple hibiscus* is a monumental demonstration of ironies because although he regularly reads the Bible and equally professes it, his brutal handling of his wife and children, as well as his dishonour and neglect of his own father completely negates biblical doctrines. An irony is a figurative

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portrayal which occurs when there is incongruity between what might have been expected or hoped for and what really takes place. It entails a discernible contradiction between appearance and reality. According to Tavadze (2009), “There are different reasons for using irony in literary text.... The stylistic device may create specific relationship between the reader and the speaker, between the characters in a story or just between us and the reality around us. On the other hand, irony may serve as a tool of implication in the text” (4).

In the light of this study, it can be said, among other things, that irony as a stylistic design is used to implicate the character of Eugene as a superficial, self-serving and hypocritical fanatic because despite his pious religious claims, Eugene still spreads the tentacles of violence with its concomitant subjugation and trepidation (Okpalla 3). This is why Peters (2010) refers to him as “a father whose severe abuse will leave lasting scars – both physical and emotional” (5) on his wife and children. The cardinal purpose of religion is for the overall good of man in his ultimate search for salvation, fulfilment and allegiance to his Creator. But when religion becomes a tool for repression or unethical deprivations, it becomes questionable, pervasive and otiose. It is in view of this that Shanjendu (2019) asserts that:

Religion helps to shape the character of an individual and thereby it moulds social life. It brings forth the sense of social value in the mind of people. In obeying the social laws or to respect the elders and to show sympathy towards the feelings of others or to discharge the social obligations faithfully, the role of religion is immense. Moreover, religion teaches that man’s love and services to God will be real only if he loves and serves humanity. (84)

Eugene’s religiosity does not seem to take actual cognizance of these noble virtues associated with true religion, hence the justification for referring to him as a fanatic – one who is merely motivated by irrational and rabid devotion to a cause – Catholicism in this instance. This is why he reads the Bible and yet sees nothing wrong in blindly brutalizing his wife and terrorizing his children for flimsy and inconsequential reasons. This is also why Papa-Nnukwu – a father to a wealthy man like Eugene languishes in the jail of hunger and neglect as he laments: “My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate” (*Purple hibiscus* 83). Eugene simply refers to him as a “heathen” and abandons him even in sick conditions. All these call to question Eugene’s religious claims; his knowledge of the “truth,” as well as the genuineness of his human rights activism. Ganyi (2013) unapologetically highlights these perspectives when he states:

Set against the background of political upheaval in Nigeria, Ngozi Adichie’s work explores the dynamics of a family ruled by an extremist Catholic fundamentalist father whose word is law. Eugene Achike the pivot around whom the entire action of the novel revolves practices Catholicism according to his colonialist or white priest’s dictates and not in accordance with biblical injunctions which prescribe honour and respect for parents and elders. So, he is able to reject his father whom he tags a “heathen” and thus not worthy of association. To the average reader, Eugene is not only hypocritical and thus unheroic, but is also a chauvinist who uses religion as a ploy for domination of his wife and entire family. He refuses his wife many things, including freedom of association and even procreation as he severely beats her to the point of miscarriages. The children are not spared the brutality or violence as Jaja, his son, has a finger mutilated by him and Kambili, his daughter, is hospitalized in a coma for keeping a drawing of her supposed “heathenist” grandfather. (2)

2. Theoretical Dashboard

As earlier stated, the theoretical position guiding this study is deconstruction. It is a critical theory which originated from France in the late 1960s and closely associated with the works of two French philosophers namely Rowland Barthes and Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1988). While Derrida’s famous 1966 lecture entitled “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” is often noted as the beginning of deconstruction, Barthes’ essay, “The Death of the Author” (1968) is believed to be the intellectual trigger which signifies the transition from structuralism to deconstruction. The theoretical template avers that a text has multiple meanings, not any particular, limited or restricted interpretation. For Johnson (1988), “Deconstruction is not synonymous with ‘destruction.’ It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word “analysis,” which etymologically means “to undo.” The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by careful teasing out of the warring forces of signification within the text” (5). Deconstruction unveils the unintended or unconscious rather than the conscious aspect of the text; all the meanings which its apparent textuality does not necessarily recognize or appreciate. Barry (2002) asserts that “The deconstructive reading aims to ... show that what had looked like unity and coherence actually contains contradictions and conflicts which the text cannot stabilize” (77). Also, in his perceptions and elaborations on deconstruction as a theoretical model, Bressler (1994) notes thus:

With the advent of deconstruction theory and practice in the late 1960s, however, the structuralist assumption that a text’s meaning can be discovered through an examination of its structural codes was challenged and replaced by

the maxim of undecidability. A text has many meanings and therefore no definitive interpretation. Rather than providing answers about the meaning of texts or a methodology for discovering how a text means, deconstruction asks a new set of questions, endeavoring to show that what a text claims it says and what it actually says are discernibly different. By casting doubt on most previously held theories, deconstruction declares that a text has an almost infinite number of possible interpretations. And the interpretations themselves...are just as creative and important as the text being interpreted. (115).

Although the overt characterization of Eugene in *Purple hibiscus* portrays him as a religious and principled personality, a deconstructive evaluation presents him as an unrepentant lawbreaker; father hater, 'ticking time bomb,' child oppressor and wife battering hypocritical brute whose pious claims to the Christian faith, knowing 'the truth' and abiding by it are substantially questionable. This is the thrust and crux of this study.

3. Issues and Discussion

3.1. *Maltreatment of Wife and Children*

As husband to Beatrice and father to Kambili and Jaja, Eugene can be said to be provident, but he is nonetheless brutal to the trio. Indeed, *Purple hibiscus* demonstrates wide-ranging instantiations of heart-rending trauma through Eugene's highhandedness and extremity in the treatment of his wife and children (Abonyi *et al.*, 2021). Although his home can be seen to be stuffed with materialistic fulness, his brutality towards his wife and children constantly overshadows, even nullifies his care and provisions. While he often inflicts physical, mental and psychological injuries to them at home, he always expects them to showcase a happy and unperturbed countenance to outsiders in order to convey the message that all is well with them. In his Church, St. Agness, he is perceived and presented as a model; a character worthy of emulation for his courage in confronting military tyranny and for his philanthropism. Father Benedict uses the metaphor of a shining light to make reference to him during his sermon on Palm Sunday because he believes that he is forthright and always stands for the "truth" despite the threats to his life and costs to his vast business empire. Ironically, Eugene remains an unrepentant domestic despot because the same oppression and subjugation which he fights at the national level against iron-fisted military tyrants is precisely what he perpetrates at home against his own wife and children. This is not in conformity with the scriptural injunction: "Husbands, love your wives just, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleans her with the washing of water by the word..." (Ephesians 5:25-26). It is also not in line with Ephesians 6:4 which states: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath..." (NKJV). Eugene not only provokes his son Jaja unto rebellion but also multidimensionally suppresses his daughter Kambili and wife, Beatrice.

His failure to demonstrate a husband's genuine and Christ-like affection for his wife and children has prompted Dick (2018) to whip that "Eugene is lacking in providing emotional support for his children. His wife is forced into passivity, being punished the same way her children are punished" (32). She further maintains that his "incessant battering of his wife even during pregnancy emotionally depletes his children" (32). His harsh actions and utterances not only deplete his children emotionally but also provoke Jaja to rebellion as earlier stated.

Eugene's maltreatment of his wife and children crystalizes mainly in form of domestic violence and social alienation. It is in this view that Ifechelobi (2014) submits that "members of Eugene Achike's household do not have a mind of their own; instead, they live at his mercy and according to his dictates" (21). For Asma Zahoor, Eugene is "a staunch religious zealot who wreaks havoc on his family members on account of their inability to live life on his terms and conditions" (1006).

The first encounter with Eugene's home in the narrative promptly reveals a family in a state of disharmony, crisis, fear and uncertainty as orchestrated by him. Even at this point, his decisive violence at the home front is not in doubt as Kambili states: "...Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere" (3). The singular reason that triggers this violent action which results to the destruction of a vital decorative property of the family as the figurine is that Jaja refuses to go for communion. Jaja says, "The wafer gives me bad breath. And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me" (6). Eugene's violent reaction in this regard marks the beginning of a chain of violence that would engulf the entire household, culminating in his wife's unfortunate decision to poison him. When in response to Jaja's reasons, Eugene stamps: "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that," Jaja insists, "Then I will die" (6). Eugene's position and Jaja's insistence in this manner sparks a cataclysmic tension which Eugene ought to have handled better with maturity. At this stage, Kambili the first-person narrator observes that "fear had darkened Jaja's eyes to the colour of coal tar" (6-7). Then he looks at Eugene in the face and restates: "Then I will die, Papa" (7). The metaphor of the darkening of Jaja's eyes with fear is a reflection of several years of brutality and stifling airlessness that have dominated his existence. Eugene never ceases to deploy the colonial brand

of Catholicism as a veritable tool for domestic despotism. Obviously, his public activism contradicts his private authoritarianism (Christopher and Devi, 2024).

Unable to effectively manage his combustible emotion, Eugene picks up the missal and targets Jaja like a rocket launcher. This conversion of a missal to a missile marks the beginning of his end in the narrative. Instead of hitting Jaja as fiercely intended, the missal missile misses him completely and hits the glass etagere which crashes into pieces on the floor. The symbolic crashing of this valued figurine which Kambili says, “Mama polished often” is described thus: “It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger-size figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them. Or rather it landed on their many pieces. It lay there, a huge leather-bound missal that contained the readings for three cycles of the year” (7).

The crashing of the figurine on the floor as graphically narrated by Kambili is reminiscent of the effects of any high caliber grenade on hitting its target in a typical war theatre. Eugene’s deployment of a vital paraphernalia of his denominational dogma and worship – the missal as a missile really calls to serious question his pious religious claims, as well as his purported moral grandstanding. If actually he has genuine regard for an important item and symbol of his doctrinal worship as the missal which usually contains “the readings for three cycles of the church year,” he would not have, without regrets converted it to a missile of attack against his only son, Jaja. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2024): “The missal developed from various books used in the early church. By the 5th century, a separate mass book had been developed for the use of each participant in the liturgy. The revised missal issued in 1970 consists of two volumes: one containing the order of the mass and the other a lectionary of scripture readings covering a three-year cycle.” More specifically, the “readings” that are contained in a typical missal in the Roman Catholic Church include chants, some scriptural passages, prayers and directives for the conduct or celebration of the mass. So, it is an important religious book, especially in the Catholic Church where it is regarded almost as highly as the Bible.

Beatrice’s reaction to Eugene’s deployment of the missal missile to shatter her precious figurine is silence mixed with fear and uncertainty as Kambili states: “She stared at the figurine pieces on the floor and then knelt and started to pick them up with her hands. The silence was broken only by the whirl of the ceiling fan as it sliced through the still air” (7). In stating the impact of Eugene’s action on her, Kambili says, “Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I FELT SUFFOCATED” (7, emphasis mine). Reminiscing and describing her mother’s care for the figurine and a wife’s ordeals in the hands of her husband two weeks before the missal missile attack on Jaja, Kambili says, “The last time, only two weeks ago, when her swollen eyes was still the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado, she had rearranged them after she polished them. She limped slightly though one leg was shorter than the other... Her brown face flawless but for the recent jagged scar on her forehead...” (15). One realizes the sadness of her situation on noticing that she is, after all, a meek and submissive woman who has sacrificed a notable education she has acquired to become a full-time dependent house wife to a domestic tyrant. Adaobi Olivia Ihueze and Ike Chidimma blessing have attributed Eugene’s “strict and oppressive rule” of his household and “religious extremism” to his colonial exposures when they state that “The various atrocities he commits in the text are directly linked to the values he adopted during the era of colonialism” (72).

When Kambili is in her room “after lunch” reading James chapter five because she is expected to “talk about the biblical roots of anointing of the sick during family time” that evening, Eugene is in his bedroom battering and pummeling his wife, Beatrice. Ironically, the assignment to read that portion of the Bible and prepare to discuss it during their evening is given by him. But while his daughter is dutifully preparing to handle such a noble task, Eugene is equally busy with his self-assigned task of beating up his wife right inside their bedroom. Kambili says, “... I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds on my parents’ hand-carved bedroom door. I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open” (33). What follows the opening of the door reveals that Eugene stops pummeling the pregnant woman only when she collapses. “Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers brought in bulk at the Seme Boarder” (33). And as he carries her to his car for onward movement to the hospital, Jaja observes that “There’s blood on the floor” (33). When they drive to the hospital, Kambili says, “We cleaned up the trickle of blood which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water colour all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped” (33). The result of this brutality of Beatrice by a supposedly religious husband is the painful loss of her long-awaited pregnancy. She announces this to her children on her return from the hospital the next day: “... the baby is gone” (34).

Kambili is traumatized by this incident that she losses a great deal of concentration in her academic studies. “The words in my text books kept turning into blood each time I read them. Even as my first term exams approached, even as we started to do class reviews, the words still made no sense” (37). At the end of the term, Kambili takes second position instead of her usual first. With eyes deep and sad, Eugene says, “You didn’t put in your best this term. You came second

because you chose to” (41). In another pathetic instance of Eugene’s manhandling of his wife, again resulting to a loss of her cherished pregnancy, she reveals thus to Kambili in the presence of Aunty Ifeoma: “You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne?* Your father broke it on my belly. My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agness” (243).

Although morning and evening prayer times where he is always “flipping through his Bible” (59), reading or teaching from it are routines in his family, he never ceases to manhandle his wife and children whenever he adjudges them to have fallen short of his draconian rules and expectations. In yet another heart-rending brutality, Kambili is in her menstrual period as she reports that “there was a red stain on my bed, wide as an open notebook” (100). Describing her state of health at that moment, she says, “cramps racked my belly. I imagined someone with buckteeth rhythmically biting deep into my stomach walls and letting go (100). It is because of this malady that she requests for Panadol from her mother who in absolute fear and “in a whisper” obliged and urged her to “eat a little corn flakes because she needs “something in her stomach to hold the Panadol” (100). Kambili is still standing and “wolfing” down the cereal when Eugene unexpectedly and without notice bumped into her room and questioned: “What are you doing, Kambili? You are eating ten minutes before mass?” (101). Kambili is dumbfounded. Even with Beatrice’s cogent explanation that “her period started and she has cramps” (100), Eugene swings into full violence. Jaja’s interjection: “I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol, Papa. I made it for her” cannot help matters either. He is not concerned about his daughter’s health condition but rather with “the desecration of the Eucharistic fast” (100). With no iota of concern, Eugene’s brutality of a mother and her children is described thus: “He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back” (102).

The questions that repeatedly follow these brutal beatings from Eugene are: “Why do you walk into sin? Why do you like sin?” (103). What a father! And to think that he does all these on a Sunday morning as they are preparing to leave for a church service exposes the level of his degeneracy down the pit of cruelty and hypocrisy. For him, eating on a Sunday morning before mass, no matter the condition, is tantamount to walking into sin and liking sin, for which reason a mother must be severely beaten alongside her children.

Eugene’s understanding and adherence to his denominational dogmatic prescription in this instance can be likened to the behavior of the Pharisees in relation to Mosaic Law. Such a Pharisaic idiosyncrasy had attracted a stern rebuke from no less a personality than Jesus Christ Himself during His earthly ministry. As soon as He noticed a similar hypocritical adherence to the Law of Moses by the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus whipped: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay the tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matthew 23:23, NKJV). Eugene’s relentless maltreatment of his wife and children demonstrates that he does not possess the kind of mercy Jesus talks about in the above Bible passage even though he is the breadwinner of the family. While Beatrice suffers more miscarriages from his callous beatings, Jaja sustains a gnarled finger from him at age ten. Kambili will have a kettle of boiled water poured on her feet in a bathtub for “walking into sin”; for returning from Nsukka with a painting of Papa-Nnukwu – a man Eugene refuses to associate with because he is a “heathen.” In another instance of such irrationality, Eugene beats Kambili to a state of coma and she is hospitalized. It is in perception of these anomalies Oseghale (2013) states that “*Purple Hibiscus*... mirrors the religious hypocrisy, pretense and the Christian life of Eugene Achike, his relationship with his old father, his wife and children” (92). Indeed, his relationship with these characters surrounding his life is unworthy of emulation. The relationship is characterized by threat, fear, anxiety, airlessness, turmoil, oppression, suppression, significant losses, crude neglect, emotional and physical trauma, and worse still, forlornly.

3.2. No Regard for Papa-Nnukwu – His own Father

When the Bible says, “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12), it is an unconditional command with a clear divine promise. The command is not predicated on the condition that one’s father or mother must not be a “heathen.” And there is no such proviso whatsoever anywhere in the scriptures. Eugene must have heard or read it from the Bible which he usually carries to his church services, “flips through” and also teaches during his family devotions. Sometimes, he even instructs others like Kambili, as earlier stated, to equally study it and prepare to discuss it during family times. Yet he treats his own father with ignominy and brutal recklessness.

The word “honour” is etymologically Anglo-Norman. It means to treat someone with respect, dignity or admiration. So, when the Bible says, “Honour your father and your mother...,” it means that one should treat his father and mother

with all the respect and dignity which they deserve without the attachment of any conditionality. On the other hand, the word “heathen” is of German origin. Initially, it meant “country dweller” or “civilian.” At the termination of the Roman Empire, however, it was used to refer to individuals who practiced any other religion other than Christianity, Judaism or Islam. In contemporary times, Christian denominations use the term to refer to people who practice religions other than Christianity; someone who does not believe in Christ and is therefore not part of the Christian Church.

Eugene, to say the least, treats his father, Papa-Nnukwu, with utmost disdain because he is a “heathen.” In other words, he is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church or of the Christian faith. He despises his father to the extent that he does not really cater for the needs of the old man despite his stupendous wealth; he does not visit him or allow him entrance to his palatial homes, and he does not greet him. In fact, he gives more money to take care of the needs of his driver Kevin than he gives to his father even when the man is sick. It is only when he dies that he sends so much money to his younger sister, Auntie Ifeoma, for his funeral. Interestingly, the biblical injunction: “Honour your father and your mother...” (Exodus 20:12), has an attachment of a promise to it: “... that your days may be long.” One can therefore aver that Eugene dies untimely partly because he refuses to honour his father; because he treats his father with a disgusting condescension.

His dishonour for his father is first witnessed in the text on the morning of their arrival at Abba, their hometown, for the Yuletide season. When they conclude their family devotion that morning, Kambili states that “Papa closed the Bible” (61). His closure of the Bible is immediately followed by his instruction to Kambili and Jaja; that they will go to visit Papa-Nnukwu at noon, with a stern warning that they must not “touch any food,” “drink anything,” and must “stay not longer than fifteen minutes” (61). He allows them to visit the man at all because members of their Umunna – the men of his kindred have intervened and insist that Eugene must not deny the old man the opportunity to see and meet with his grandchildren. Eugene himself does not visit him for even a minute as Kambili observes: “Papa himself never greeted Papa-Nnukwu, never visited him, but he sent slim wads of naira, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as Christmas bonus” (61). He states his reason for disregarding the old man when he says, “I don’t like to send you to the home of a heathen...” (62). Ironically, the father Eugene despises so much still wishes him well even when he is about to die as he prays: “Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity” (166). Considering all these, one really wonders what Eugene actually reads from the Bible as he regularly does. When one hears that he does not greet his own father because he is a “heathen,” one really wonders about the type of Christianity he practices. One also wonders where in the Bible it is written that one should not greet his father if he is a “heathen” or if he does not go to church. On the contrary, the Bible rather advocates that Christians who have spouses or relatives who are non-believers should, through their good character and conduct get them attracted and converted to the Christian faith. This instruction is particularly given by Apostle Peter to Christian women who have “heathen” husbands, and by extension to all Christians. “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe their chaste conduct...” (I Peter 3:1-2).

The emphasis here, as in several similar passages of the Bible is for Christians to use their good conduct and relationship with people they relate with to convert them to their faith. Eugene’s relationship with his father is therefore antithetical. His ruthlessness towards his wife and children does not in any way portray him as an exemplary Christian husband and father which he earnestly wishes to be identified as. Rather, the African patriarchal heritage of subordinating, even suppressing women and children is what he actually exhibits towards the members of his household, not biblical Christianity. It is in this regard that Azuike (2019) has lamented that “The tragedy of theology in Africa today is that cultural garbs have beclouded true scriptural beliefs and practices...” (82-3).

When Jaja and Kambili visit Papa-Nnukwu for the brief moment permitted by Eugene, they are welcomed by the old man. His statement: “If I had meat in my soup, I would offer it to you” (65), reveals his state of wretchedness and neglect by his wealthy son, Eugene. Jaja’s question: “Papa-Nnukwu, are you well?” is in response to his observance of his emaciating and deteriorating body frame. Later on, Papa-Nnukwu will point at Eugene’s palatial residence and lament: “My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate” (83). It is only when he dies that Eugene releases a huge sum of money to entertain and feed guests at his funeral as Amaka reports: “Uncle Eugene gave mom so much money she’s buying seven cows for the funeral” (200). Yet, Eugene’s earlier statement: “He has gone to face judgement” (188) upon hearing that Papa-Nnukwu has died does not conceal his disregard for him even in death. His releasing “so much money” to Auntie Ifeoma for his funeral can, after all, be said to be a face-saving gesture since the same father he refuses to really feed or cater for while he is alive is the father he releases the amount of money that can purchase seven cows and many other commodities for his funeral.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, although Eugene Achike is indubitably the breadwinner of his household, his merciless brutality of his wife and children ineluctably blurs such commitments. His hard-heartedness and refusal to devotedly carter for his age-stricken father, Papa-Nnukwu, even in his deteriorating health condition and despite his overflowing wealth, because he is a “heathen” is the height of religious insensitivity, ignorance and hypocrisy. The same can be said of his refusal to greet Papa-Nnukwu, visit or allow him to enter any of his mansions until the man dies in abject squalor, and, worse still, with the excruciating pain of being neglected, even forsaken by his own wealthy offspring. These propensities and attitudes demonstrate that although Eugene may claim to be a devout Catholic, an ideal Christian or a quintessential believer and scripture adherent, he is nonetheless a practitioner of lawlessness. Such contradictions in his character and characterization might have, after all, accounted for his miserable and untimely demise. Eugene’s negligence and treatment of his own father with disgusting condescension despite his tremendous wealth, and his eventual miserable ending is indeed a message of a thousand lessons to all men and women whose parents are still breathing.

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