

## Original Paper

# OLD WINE IN A NEW WINESKIN: ACHEBE'S OKONWO A CHARACTER ARCHETYPE OF ADICHIE'S EUGENE ACHIKE

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### **Abstract**

*The investigation and establishment of character types in literary texts is a cardinal thrust of archetypal criticism as a critical tool. Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Adichie's Eugene otherwise referred to as Papa in *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) are character types in two canonical African fictions not only because both are male protagonists but also due to a number of other remarkable characterizations which they share in common. In fact, Eugene can be said to be a modern Okonkwo in various ways. Utilizing the vital tools and tenets of archetypal criticism, a critical juxtaposition of the two major characters in the two novels unveils that both characters are caring but cruel, and indeed unleashed multidimensional phallogocentric violence in monumental proportions to their immediate family members, particularly to their women. Both characters are unsympathetic to their wives and possess similar volcanic temperaments. Also, both men have "no patience" with their biological fathers and maintain frosty relationships with them on account of certain grievances and grudges borne in their hearts against them over a protracted period of time. Indeed, both men can be said to be ashamed of their own fathers. But their disgusts for their fathers transform them into men of actions rather than of words and leisure, even as both characters become diligent creators and managers of wealth by their personal determination, courage and hardworking attitude as opposed to the indigent backgrounds they germinated from. Unfortunately, both characters encounter tragic ends in their seemingly unguarded pursuit for preservation and perfection.*

### **Keywords**

*Archetype, Character, Investigation, Relationship, Disgust*

## 1. Introduction

Chimamanda Adichie's opening statement, "Things started to fall apart at home..." (p. 3) in her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* is invariably an allusion to the evocative title of Chinua Achebe's defining narrative, *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe in turn equally alluded to the third line of Williams Butler Yeat's famous modernist poem, "The second coming" which reads: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." Adichie's allusion to Achebe's novel at the very beginning of her debut significantly heralds a number of striking similarities in both texts. One of such notable similarities is visible in their choice and characterization of their male protagonists. Although Okonkwo is a major character emanating from an important seminal First-Generation African novel and Eugene is also a central character in a prominent Third-Generation African prose published forty-five years after the former, both protagonists share certain striking attributes from various perspectives. It is in perception of such similarities in literary texts that Gigo Divya and Kevin George state that "An Archetype is an original template from which copies are made" (p. 55). One can therefore infer that as a character type, Okonkwo is "the original template" from which Eugene is carved. Also, Stanley Konitz avers: "Old myths, old gods, old heroes have never died. They are only sleeping at the bottom of our mind, waiting for our call. We have need of them. They represent the wisdom of our race" (qtd in Gillespie, p. 58). This study therefore focuses on the investigation of the similarities of characterization of Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Eugene in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Incidentally, both are flat characters in that their actions in the narratives are predictable and stereotypical.

## 2. Theoretical Underpinning

As an established critical theory, archetypal criticism analyses or interprets a literary text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes in the images, characters, symbols, plot and even narrative structures in literary texts. The term "archetype" is a compound lexical item emanating from "arch" which can serve both as a prefix and an adjective, and "type" which is a noun. As an adjective, "arch" denotatively means "principal" or "chief," while as a prefix, it is normally used to refer to the "highest" or "the most significant." The word "type" emanates from the Latin "typus" which refers to an "image," "figure" or "impression."

*The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* (2011) refers to archetypal criticism as "... a form of analysis based on the identification and study of recurring symbolic and mythic patterns." It goes further to state that "... archetypal criticism was originally employed in the discipline of Anthropology by Sir James George Frazer in a compilation entitled *The Golden Bough*. Similarly, M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham corroborate this view in their assertions which are worth quoting at length:

In literary criticism, the term archetype denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are held to be the result of elemental and universal forms or patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in the

literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader, because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author. An important antecedent of the literary theory of the archetype was the treatment of myth by a group of comparative anthropologists at Cambridge University, especially James G. Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) identified elemental patterns of myth and ritual that, he claimed recur in the legends and ceremonials of diverse and far-flung cultures and religions. Archetypal literary criticism was given impetus by Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934) and flourished especially during the 1950s and 1960s. (p. 13)

Although the critical template is said to have boomed in the 1950s and 1960s, its grounded relevance and validity in literary discourse remains unequivocal as profoundly portrayed in the two aforementioned primary literary texts guiding this study. Also, Onunkwo, Nwogwu and Orjiakor have described archetypal criticism as “essentially a text-oriented approach” (p. 44). It is however widely believed that archetypal symbols vary more than archetypal narratives or character types.

### 3. Issues and Discussions

#### 3.1 Frosty Relationship with Biological Fathers

One observable trait clearly exhibited by the two protagonists in the two novels is that they maintain a relationship devoid of warmth and cordiality with their biological fathers. At the opening chapter of *Things Fall Apart*, the reader is promptly informed that Okonkwo “... had no patience with his father” (3). Being patient with someone implies the ability to tolerate or accept delay, annoyance or incompetence from that person without complaint or anger. Therefore, that Okonkwo “... had no patience with his father” Unoka, means that he cannot tolerate his incompetence and so is usually irritated or angry with him. Unoka's incompetence or weakness stem from three main factors as stated in the narrative:

Unoka, for that was his father's name, had died ten years ago. In his days he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine, called his neighbours and made merry. (pp. 3-4)

One factor is his indolent attitude which results to the second one identified as improvidence which is a man's inability to provide for the daily needs of his family. In the largely patriarchal Igbo traditional society where the novel is set, a man's inability to effectively play the role of a breadwinner in his own home is considered a serious and debilitating deficiency. In fact, such a man is lowly regarded to the point that he can be referred to as a woman; an *agbala* (TFA 11). It is in this regard that Odimegwu and Okemgbo have averred that “In Igboland, a man is known for his ability to provide for his family ... integrity... bravery ...” (“Men's Perceptions”). Unoka is not associated with any of these virtues and is therefore not well-regarded anywhere in Umuofia, not even among his neighbours. Charles Larson has equally stated that in Umuofia, the setting of TFA, “a man could not inherit title and rank from his family, but, rather, had to achieve these by his own abilities” (pp. 31-32). The third factor is Unoka's lack of capacity to think or plan for the future. Having the capacity to think for the future could have

enabled him to make possible preparations that could have resulted to future wellbeing including preparation for the economic establishment of his only surviving son Okonkwo. But he demonstrates absolute irresponsibility in that regard.

His lack of capacity to think for the future and proclivity to squander "...any money that came his way" (pp. 3-4) almost instantly is informed by his warped philosophy of life which he always verbalizes: "... he always said that whenever he saw a dead man's mouth, he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime" (4). The consequence of this perception is that Unoka plunges into indebtedness and poverty day after day. "Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbour some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts "(4). Thus, both as a youth and a grown-up, Unoka is not particularly associated with any praise-worthy achievement, virtue or value in his society but rather with failure and poverty, and this makes his son Okonkwo to be ashamed of him even in his death (*TFA* 7). In a typical achievement-oriented Igbo traditional society, Unoka's status is described thus:

Unoka, the grown-up, was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back. When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. (*TFA* 4,7)

Okonkwo resents his father's failure and earnestly tries to detach himself from it physically and emotionally. In fact, he grows to be afraid of his father's failure as the narrator states:

...his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was *agbala*. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so, Okonkwo was ruled by one passion - to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (p. 11)

It is in view of these delineations that Igboin and Igili have referred to Unoka as "... the father of Okonkwo ... who brings nothing but disgrace to himself and family" (p. 151). Thus, Okonkwo not only feels indignant regarding his father's incompetence and deficiencies, he equally hates him and everything he stands for with undiluted passion. This accounts for the frosty relationship he maintains with him. Unoka's inconsequential existence perhaps accounts for the end of his presence in the first chapter of the novel.

Similarly, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* equally portrays Eugene as a protagonist with an unsavory relationship with his biological father on account of certain grievances and grudges borne against him over a protracted period of time. The first time we meet Eugene and a mention of his biological father is made in the narrative, we are informed that "...he prayed for the conversion of our Papa-Nnukwu, so that Papa-Nnukwu would be saved from hell" (p. 61). One might be tempted to think at this point that such a prayer reflects love, concern, care and a healthy relationship with the man being prayed for, but

ironically it does not. It is also significant to note that Okonkwo's and Eugene's fathers are devotees of the African traditional religion. But while Okonkwo who is equally a devotee of the same religion does not resent his father on account of that, Eugene vehemently does so due to his conversion to Christianity (Catholicism), as well as the profound influences of colonialism.

The supposed good but hypocritical prayer said by Eugene for his father's escape from hell is at his family's return to their ancestral home, Abba, for the Yuletide season. Abba is the very setting where Adichie makes critical revelations regarding Eugene's relationship with his father, Papa-Nnukwu - a pantheistic patriarch who even in the face of hunger and denials of support from his wealthy son, Eugene, still prays that the sun should not set on his prosperity.

The Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria are well-known for their mass return to their ancestral communities during the Yuletide season as Eugene's family has just done. It is usually a period to re-unite and fraternize with relatives, friends, kinsmen, residents and visitors in a community as one might dim fit. After Eugene's family devotion where Papa-Nnukwu's "escape from hell" is prayed for that morning, his true relationship with him is revealed in his stern directives to Kambili and Jaja regarding a purported visit to Papa Nnukwu:

Kambili and Jaja, you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and greet him. Kevin will take you. Remember, don't touch any food, don't drink anything. And, as usual, you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes. (p. 61)

Eugene's multilayered instructions to his children concerning their intended visit to his own biological father reveals that just like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, he equally resents his father even though he prays for his conversion to his faith and consequently his salvation from hell. "...you will go this afternoon... don't touch any food, don't drink anything ... you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes." Truly, if it is not stated that Papa-Nnukwu is Eugene's biological father, anyone reading those instructions would have thought that the purported visit is to the house of an avowed enemy who is both dreaded and distrusted. Yet those instructions only foreground greater issues regarding the kind of relationship Eugene maintains with his father. And that is not the first time he would give such instructions to his children as Kambili states:

We had heard this every Christmas for the past few years, ever since we had started to visit Papa-Nnukwu. Papa-Nnukwu had called Umunna meeting to complain to the extended family that he did not know his grandchildren and that we did not know him. Papa himself never greeted Papa-Nnukwu, never visited him. (p. 61)

Unlike Okonkwo who resents his father Unoka for his lazy and lackluster existence, Eugene's disgust for his own father to the point that he refuses to greet or visit him stem from the fact that Papa-Nnukwu refuses to be "converted" to Catholicism which would have made him to "...throw away the *chi* in the thatch shrine in his yard" (61). But Papa-Nnukwu has maintained that "he would not throw away his *chi*; he had already told Papa this many times" (61). Ironically, while Eugene prays for the conversion of his father and his consequent escape from hell, his actions towards him depict resentment and

disgust. Kambili would further reveal that Eugene “sent slim wads of naira through Kevin or through one of our *umunna* members, slimmer wads than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus” (61). This implies that he supports his family driver, Kevin, financially, more than he supports his own father because he regards his father as “a heathen” (62). Eugene has also “decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound” (62), and “had not made an exception for his father” (62). Thus, he not only refuses to visit his father but equally forbids the man from visiting him.

Eugene’s resentment for his father accounts for the contrast between his residence at Abba and that of his father which, according to Jaja, are not far apart: “Papa-Nnukwu lives close by, we can walk there in five minutes” (62). But while Eugene lives in a sprawling mansion with “gleaming white walls and pillars,” his father lives in “a thatch-enclosed compound...” (62) with a “creaking wooden gate, which was so narrow that Papa [Eugene] might have to enter sideways if he ever were to visit (emphasis mine) (63). In further describing Papa-Nnukwu’s residence during that visit, Kambili states:

The compound was barely a quarter of the size of our backyard in Enugu. Two goats and a few chickens sauntered around, nibbling and pecking at dry stems of grass. The house that stood in the middle of the compound was small, compact like dice, and it was hard to imagine Papa and Auntie Ifeoma growing up there. Papa-Nnukwu’s house had a verandah, which was bounded by rusty metal bars. ... Papa-Nnukwu was sitting on a low stool on the verandah, bowls of food on a raffia mat before him. He rose as we came in. A wrapper was slung across his body and tied behind his neck, over a once white singlet now browned by age and yellowed at the armpits. The enamel bowls contained flaky fufu and watery soup bereft of chunks of fish or meat. (63-64)

In reference to Papa-Nnukwu’s health condition, Kambili observes that “his left eye was going blind and was covered by a film the colour and consistency of diluted milk. His teeth were yellowed and widely spaced ...” (61-65). Indeed, everything about Papa-Nnukwu speaks of misery, wretchedness, neglect and abandonment. Yet he has a wealthy son in the person of Eugene; an industrialist, a social crusader and a philanthropist who is greatly involved in diverse monumental charity efforts and has received several notable recognitions for such commitments.

When Auntie Ifeoma, Eugene’s younger sister, returns to Abba for the same Yuletide season and decides to take Papa-Nnukwu along in her car with her children, Kambili and Jaja for sightseeing on Christmas day and they drive pass Eugene’s expansive and beautiful compound, Papa-Nnukwu’s lamentation is as touching as it is revealing:

Papa-Nnukwu stopped, turned to look back towards our house. “*Nekenem*, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit in everyman in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries. (83)

His statements reveal his pain, regrets, frustration and abandonment by his own son who is a wealthy and influential figure in the nation. It is on account of his sick condition that Papa-Nnukwu is later taken to Auntie Ifeoma’s residence at Nsukka and Jaja who equally visits Auntie Ifeoma’s family with Kambili observes that “Papa-Nnukwu is so skinny now” (152). When he eventually dies in his night

sleep, Auntie Ifeoma does not convey the message to Eugene until he coincidentally drives to Nsukka to carry Jaja and Kambili back to their Enugu home. On breaking the news of Papa-Nnukwu's death to Eugene, Kambili informs the reader that he "sat down slowly and lowered his head into his hands. But when he looked up, I did not see traces of tears in his eyes" (186). Rather, his concern and question to Auntie Ifeoma is stated thus: "Did you call a priest to give him extreme unction?" (186).

Ifeoma, of course, ignores his disappointing question and decisively directs a more sensible one at him: "Will you not help me bury our father" (186). As Papa-Nnukwu's only surviving son and a wealthy one at that, as well as an elder brother to Auntie Ifeoma, this question should have been the other way round. In a typical patrilineal Igbo traditional society, the responsibility of burying a father usually primarily lies on the male children, so long as the deceased has them. The daughters can assist in any way they can, depending on their material capacity and choice. Eugene's response, however, depicts his religious fanaticism and resentment for his father even at death: "I cannot participate in a Pagan funeral..." (187). Indeed, the two major characters created by Achebe and Adichie in their novels under investigation clearly demonstrate great resentment for their biological fathers and consequently maintain frosty relationships with them throughout the narratives.

### 3.2 *Caring But Cruel to Their Women*

Another observable characterization of Okonkwo and Eugene in the two narratives is that although both men demonstrate responsibility and capacity in providing for the daily needs of their immediate family members, both men possess fiery temper and are nonetheless oppressive to their wives. Thus, both men unleashed multidimensional patriarchal violence to their women and children and can be regarded as domestic tyrants. It is on account of this that the women in the lives of the two protagonists are somewhat subdued and continuously live in fear of the peevishness of their temperamental husbands. This kind of relationship does not bring out the best in any woman and obviously never did in Okonkwo's and Eugene's women. It is this sort of attitude towards the women at the home front that results to what Udumukwu (2012) refers to as "...the absence of solidarity from the women in his life" (12). Consequently, "The absence of solidarity is replaced by incidents of violence against the women in his life" (12).

Achebe acknowledges these when he informs the reader that "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper..." (TFA 12). That Okonkwo "ruled his household with a heavy hand" suggests autocracy or totalitarianism which usually breeds fear and uncertainty among the subjects as it is precisely the situation in his household. This is evident in a number of situations in the narrative. For instance, when he returns home with the ill-fated lad, Ikemefuna whom the *ndichie* (elders) of Umuofia have directed should be kept in his custody until his fate is decided, "he called his most senior wife and handed him over to her." "He belongs to the clan. So, look after him" (TFA 12). Having no prior information about the arrival of Ikemefuna to their home, the woman is startled and therefore inquires to know more about the lad: "Is he staying long with us?" Rather than giving an answer or explanation to her question,

Okonkwo “thundered”: “Do what you are told, woman!” Then he queried, “When did you become one of the *ndichie* of Umuofia?” It is at this point that “Nwoye’s mother took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions” (12). It is implicit in this statement that the same “terrible fear” which grips Ikemefuna on his arrival at Okonkwo’s household has equally gripped Nwoye’s mother on account of Okonkwo’s “thundering” to her for a simple question she asked him as her husband. Thus, instead of her question eliciting an answer, “Okonkwo thundered and stammered” and the supposed husband and wife conversation is brought to an abrupt end. Okonkwo’s angry outburst compels her to “ask no more questions” (12).

Again, Okonkwo’s ruling of his household with a heavy hand manifest in his manhandling of Ojiugo his youngest wife. This occurs when she “went to plait her hair at her friend’s house and did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal” (*TFA* 23). Okonkwo did not know about her mission of going to plait her hair and has been waiting for his meal in his Obi. “After waiting in vain for his dish he went to her hut to see what she was doing. There was nobody in the hut and the fireplace was cold” (*TFA* 23). Disappointed and infuriated, he inquired to know from his second wife where Ojiugo has gone. On learning that “She has gone to plait her hair” “Okonkwo bit his lips as anger welled up within him” (23). Then he walked back to his Obi to await her return. When Ojiugo eventually returns, Okonkwo “beat her very heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace” (*TFA* 24). Although the other two wives and neighbours passionately entreated him to stop beating Ojiugo, reminding him that it is a sacred week when such violence ought not to be unleashed on anyone, Okonkwo continues with the beating because “he was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess” (24). Regarding this particular incident, Udumukwu (2007) argues that the account reflects “the pattern of domestic violence in Okonkwo’s household” (33).

Also, at the advent of the New Yam Festival, Okonkwo’s household is in a celebratory mood as they eagerly waited for the day of the festival. The narrator states that “the festival was now only three days away” and that “Okonkwo’s wives had scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light” (30). However, it is observed that “he was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be happier working on his farm” (30). Now, as “the three women talked excitedly about the relations who had been invited and the children reveled in the thought of being spoilt by these visitors from motherland,” “... the storm burst. Okonkwo who had been walking about aimlessly in his compound in suppressed anger, suddenly found an outlet” (30).

It is pertinent to note that Okonkwo’s “suppressed anger” is not in any way connected to either the actions, inactions or utterances of any of his three wives at this point. The women have simply done what is expected of them at the period, such as “scrubbing the compound walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light,” even “drawing patterns on them in white yellow and dark green, painted themselves with cam-wood and drawing beautiful black patterns on their stomachs and on their backs,” “decorated their children’s hair” which they “shaved in beautiful patterns” (*TFA* 30). All these efforts by the women are obviously made to ensure that they appear sufficiently attractive and beautiful

for their husband, Okonkwo, and that the entire compound is equally neat and attractive to receive the usually expected visitors during the New Yam Festival. Ordinarily, such dedicated efforts ought to have attracted a commendation from a less fastidious character, at least at that material time. But rather than appreciating the efforts of these hardworking women in keeping the compound spectacularly clean, and their bodies beautiful for him as their husband, he is in a mood of “suppressed anger” which “suddenly found an outlet” (30).

The outlet is identified in the agency of the question: “Who killed this banana tree?” (30). Knowing the implication of the question, the joyful mood of the entire household is abruptly frozen as “a hush fell on the compound immediately” (30). Okonkwo repeats his question and even intensifies it: “Who killed this tree? Or are you all deaf and dumb?” Observing the actual state of the said banana tree, the narrator states: “As a matter of fact, the tree was very much alive. Okonkwo’s second wife had merely cut a few leaves of it to wrap some food, and she said so “(30). Then “without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping” (30). It is only when he has done this that he is said to be “satisfied” and then he requests Ikemefuna to get his gun for him as he “decided to go out for hunting” (31). In other words, Okonkwo’s anger is only satiated when he has succeeded in inflicting both physical and emotional pains to a hitherto joyful women of his household. He feels relieved and leaves for hunting only when he has succeeded in dampening, even killing their joy. What a man!

Ikemefuna is still trying to bring the gun when the particularly oppressed woman, his second wife, out of anger for being so mercilessly maltreated, “murmured something about guns that never shot” (31). Okonkwo heard it and “ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children” (31). When he “jumped into the barn” and discovers that the woman was “quite unhurt” although she lies down there “very much shaken and frightened,” Okonkwo “heaved a heavy sigh and went away with the gun” (31) while his wife and children, of course, continues with their wailing. That Okonkwo can have a feeling of relief and satisfaction only when his wives and children are agonizing and wailing truly speaks volume of his personality and character as a husband.

Similarly, although chunks of fish and meat and assorted food and drinks can be seen to be constantly available at Eugene’s dinning, and the family resides in a beautiful and expansive compound which Kambili says “was wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing *atilogu*, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual somersaults and land on the next dancer’s shoulders” (9), Beatrice, Eugene’s wife, can be seen to be suffocating under the heavy hands of Eugene’s phallocentric domestic despotism and fiery temper. Okuyade Ogaga avers that “their fussy mercantile father builds a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness, a world that lacks ventilation, which guarantees a steady relationship with the outside when the inside becomes too suffocating” (7). In reference to this situation, Brenda Cooper asserts that “*Purple Hibiscus* is the story of Kambili who is the fifteen-year-old

first-person protagonist. She lives in the violent and repressive atmosphere of her father, who physically abuses her meek mother, herself and brother, Jaja, by beating them into submission” (1).

When Beatrice, after undergoing her medical checkup, informs Kambili, “*Nne*, you’re going to have a brother or a sister” (20), Kambili welcomes the news with a joyful “Thanks be to God” (20). It is a long-awaited pregnancy after several miscarriages; Kambili her last child at the moment is already fifteen and in Junior Secondary School. For Beatrice, it is a dream come true as she gladly specifies that her baby will be born “in October” based on her doctor’s investigation and report. In reference to relatives and kinsmen who taunted her for not having “more sons” for her wealthy husband, Beatrice says, “They do not know that God works in mysterious ways” (21), a statement which reveals her conviction that her yet to be born baby is a consolatory gift from the Almighty God and an appropriate answer to her mockers. It is her much cherished and valued pregnancy. Later on, when Kambili intimates his brother Jaja that “Mama is pregnant,” Jaja is equally joyfully surprised. He knows that the birth of the baby would mean a lot for the family; it would be like taking away a bunch of reproach and mockery from her dear mother. so, he immediately asserts his readiness to defend the baby from threats when eventually delivered: “We will take care of the baby; we will protect him” (32). Even the teenage Kambili, henceforth, begins to regularly monitor and observe the home and her mother’s condition and notices that everything in their home has remained the same except “Mama’s belly; it started to bulge, softly and subtly. At first it looked like deflated football, but by Pentecost Sunday, it had elevated her red church wrapper just enough to hint that it was not just the layer of cloth underneath or the knotted end of the wrapper” (28).

When, on account of the pregnancy, Beatrice says, “My body does not feel right” (29), and indicates her unwillingness to go with Eugene, Kambili and Jaja to visit their parish priest, Father Benedict after mass at St Agness, Eugene does not show an iota of understanding or sympathy to her plight. He rather, subtly pressures her and “waited for her to walk towards him, and then he turned and they started to walk to the priest’s house” (30). Observing her health condition at this particular time, Kambili notices that her “skin looked like the liquid had been sucked out of it, ashen, like the colour of cracked harmattan soil” (30). It is this unhealthy appearance that makes Jaja to ask: “What if she vomits” (30). Yet their father, the man responsible for the pregnancy she is carrying remains unsympathetic and interprets her initial indication not to follow them to visit the parish priest as “thwarting God’s will and putting selfish desires first” (30). Instead of being concerned about her deteriorating health condition and taking her to a clinic for the necessary medical attention, he ironically prays for God to forgive her. When they return home, Beatrice continues to suffer neglect, even oppression and suppression in the hands of her husband - a supposedly pious Catholic.

There is no indication whatsoever that her health has improved when Eugene, like Okonkwo, heavily beats her up right inside their bedroom. Kambili says, “I heard the sounds. Swift, heavy thuds... counting made it seem not that bad. I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open” (32-33). This is reminiscent of Okonkwo beating Ojiugo at the Week of Peace. The result of this cruelty

is that Beatrice collapses and is “slung over [Eugene’s] shoulders like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border” (33, emphasis mine). His carrying her from their bedroom to the hospital reveals that “there’s blood on the floor.” Stating their reaction to the situation, 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). Kambili’s notification that “Mama did not come home that night” foreshadows their tragic loss.

Then when Mama returns from hospital “the next afternoon,” Kambili observes that “her eyes were vacant, like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town.” Then with so much pain in her heart, Beatrice announces that “there was an accident, the baby is gone” (34). This is how Eugene’s phallocentric cruelty cuts short her joy midway; the joy of adding another baby to the family after several years of waiting, praying and expecting. Sadly, this is one out of a number of such tragic experiences of Beatrice in the novel. Thus, in the words of Okuyade Ogaga, in reference to Eugene, “His barbarous act makes his wife suffer chains of miscarriages” (254). In his study on “geographies of pain,” Francois Lionnet has noted that any form of violence against women “perpetuates their invisibility and dehumanization” (206).

Despite Beatrice’s subjugation, dehumanization and tragic miscarriage of her long-awaited baby, Eugene, remains unrepentant in maltreating her. Rather than being sober and remorseful over his cruelty towards his own wife, he orders the family to “recite sixteen different novenas. For Mama’s forgiveness” (35). One therefore wonders who has actually sinned and who should be forgiven in this regard.

Another pathetic exemplification of Eugene’s phallocentric brutality towards his wife, Beatrice, is stated when she visits her children, Kambili and Jaja, in their aunt’s place at Nsukka where they had earlier gone for holidays. On learning that she was hospitalized, just before she came to Nsukka, Aunt Ifeoma inquires to know what has happened to her that resulted to her hospitalization. Her responses are heart-chilling; a revelation of the beast which resides in her temperamental and cruel husband. Looking particularly at Kambili, Beatrice says, “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).

In reference to the miscarriage which she suffers as a result of this maltreatment, she says, “My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it. I was six weeks gone” (243). This is how Eugene consistently aborts his wife’s dream of adding another baby to the family until he pushes her to a point of fatal resistance; the gradual poisoning of his meals. One also wonders why Beatrice’s belly remains the target of Eugene’s brutal attacks. Thus, both Okonkwo’s and Eugene’s women suffer great pains in the hands of their husbands who turn themselves to domestic tyrants and indeed brutalized them physically and psychologically.

### *3.3 Achieve Material Success from Humble Beginnings and Equally Experience Tragic Ends*

Despite maintaining frosty and unsavory relationships with their biological fathers and equally being

characterized as provident but cruel to their wives, Okonkwo and Eugene also achieve material success and fame from humble backgrounds. This implies that both characters can be said to have achieved economic breakthrough and societal reputation through hard work, unwavering courage, determination and focus on their respective goals. They can also be said to be lucky to have encountered various persons of goodwill who facilitated their success in life rather than their biological parents. Although a few mentions of the fathers of the two characters are made in the fictions, no serious descriptive space or recognitions are actually given to their mothers. Thus, while Okonkwo's mother is mentioned sparingly in *Things Fall Apart*, Eugene's mother seems not to be cited at all in *Purple Hibiscus*. Both men seem to have lost their mothers quite early and are equally portrayed as men of targets and actions; goal-getters, one would say, not men of many words.

*Things Fall Apart* actually begins with the exposition on Okonkwo's background. At this stage, it is promptly announced in the second sentence of the narrative that "his fame rested on solid personal achievements" (3). One of such superlative achievements is that "as a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was non beaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino" (3). In Igbo traditional society of Okonkwo's era, possessing a unique talent in wrestling and deploying it to win a big contest as Okonkwo has done in this instance is considered a huge achievement. Villages who have great wrestlers like Okonkwo usually carry their shoulders high in pride and dignity, especially when they meet people from other villages who are less successful in such a feat. During such intervillage wrestling contests, the champion, like Okonkwo, is usually lifted to the shoulders of energetic young men of the village who would carry them round the wrestling arena several times, singing their praises to the high heavens alongside their women. Such wrestling bouts were usually held during New Yam Festival or any other traditional festival considered to be significant to the existence of the people. In other words, having a great wrestler(s) in a particular village or community is not just a matter of personal honour for the champion himself but indeed a communal one - an honour which every member of such a community shares in one form or the other, particularly during festive seasons when the contests were usually held among the villages.

Since Okonkwo inherited no barn from his lazy and improvident father, Unoka whom he is ashamed of (TFA 7), he knew early enough that if his economic status must change, then he must move away from his father's shadows and identify with hardworking and successful people. His determination to succeed is revealed when the narrator states that although "he neither inherited a barn nor a title, not even a young wife... he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundations of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed, he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death" (15). It is this passion to succeed that compels him to take "a pot of palm-wine and a cock to Nwakibie" (15), from whom he solicited for seed yams and indeed succeeded in securing eight hundred seed yams from him. Nwakibie is described as "a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty

children... and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan. It was for this man that Okonkwo worked to earn his first seed yams” (15).

While Nwakibie can be said to have facilitated Okonkwo’s material success by giving him seed yams and enabling him to benefit from it through “share-cropping” which is said to be “a very slow way of building up a barn of one’s own” because “after all the toil one only get a third of the harvest” (18), Eugene’s parish priests and Reverend Sisters clearly facilitated his success by bringing him to live with them as a young man and ensuring that he is armed with qualitative education which in those days was a sure gateway for immediate employment and economic advancement. It is noteworthy that upon graduating from institutions of higher learning in colonial and immediate postcolonial Nigeria, one was instantly employed and also given a car in ministries, parastatals and even industries in the then vibrant Nigerian economy flourishing with the consistent production of multiple tons of cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, palm kernel, crude oil, etc.

Thus, Okonkwo rises from the ashes of poverty to create wealth and achieve fame throughout the nine villages of Umuofia. Having conquered the excruciating economic limitations of his background, the narrator observes that “Okonkwo’s prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound closed by a thick wall of red earth” (11). Therefore, while Okonkwo takes advantage of Nwakibie’s generosity and willingness to assist him as a hardworking young man to build an expansive barn where “long stacks of yam stood out prosperously” (12), Eugene harnesses the privileges accorded to him by the Roman Catholic missionaries to acquire quality education. It is this crucial acquisition that further paves way for his uncommon economic prosperity, upward social mobility and recognitions. He establishes a conglomerate which comprises of a reputable newspaper publishing firm and a chain of factories which produce assorted consumables including fruit juice, biscuits and wafers. He also becomes a frontline human rights activist agitating for democracy and freedom in an ailing nation; a nation suffocating under the tortuous jackboot of military despotism. Again, just as Okonkwo is adamant and resistant to the incursion of Christian missionaries in Umuofia, Eugene is equally fiercely resistant to military incursion to Nigeria’s political terrain.

It can therefore be averred that both Achebe and Adichie created two major characters who rise from the ashes of poverty to stardom through hard work, courage and determination. This prompts Etim and Usen to describe Eugene’s characterization as “the story of a man who rose from dust and rust to a position of greatness in society” (17). Unfortunately, both characters eventually experience tragic ends mainly on account of their rigidity and intemperance. Thus, in the words of Kalu Ogbaa,

Okonkwo’s death may have marked the passage of a great era in Umuofia, but his suicide is not a sacrifice to his great society. For neither the gods nor the people would consider suicide a form of sacrifice. Suicide is an abomination in Igbo society. Okonkwo’s death comes because he realizes that he has failed both the people and their goddess, Ani. (134)

Just as Okonkwo’s suicide is believed not to be “a great sacrifice,” for his society, Eugene’s death cannot also be said to be a sacrifice for the Nigerian society since the airlessness and dictatorship which

he fights at the national level are precisely what he perpetuates at the home front, sadly against his wife and children. Had the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights flourished in his own home as he vehemently advocates at the national level, his wife Beatrice - an obviously meek, submissive and humble character would not have contemplated the gradual poisoning of his meals. Had Eugene not been too rigid and intemperate, he perhaps, would not have ended the way he does. Although both Okonkwo and Eugene die on disparate trajectories both men can be said to have failed in securing the emotional and psychological wellbeing of their family members, particularly their women who constantly live in fear of their fiery temper. Both characters can also be said to be terrorists of women and children since members of their families are consistently traumatized on account of their countless irrationalities. It is in this regard that Ben Obumsele submits that,

*Purple Hibiscus* is about the fall from grace and death of an Igbo industrialist whose story recalls Okonkwo's tragedy. Both men, Adichie's Eugene Achike and Achebe's Okonkwo show the same fatal undergrowth of some complexion or habit that over-leavens the form of plausible manners. (19)

#### 4. Conclusion

The study has examined Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* as a character archetype of Chimamanda Adichie's Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*. Archetypal criticism although a theoretical base which flourished mainly in the 1950s and 60s still remains a valid, viable and veritable mode of critical rendition. The evaluation clearly reveals that although the two major characters in the two fictions in question are fanatically devoted to two diametrically opposing religions, Okonkwo to African traditional religion and Eugene to Catholicism (Christianity), both characters can be said to be caring but cruel, even terroristic to their wives and children who constantly live in fear of their fiery temper. Also, both characters portray irreconcilable differences and disgusts for their biological fathers, and can equally be said to have germinated from the rusts and rubbles of poverty to achieve remarkable material prosperity before encountering tragic ends in their conservative pursuits for perfection. The similarities in the characterization of Okonkwo and Eugene suggest, even affirm that the greatness, popularity and relevance of a literary text usually arises more often from the motifs and images it shares with other texts than from the author's own originality.

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