“Omelora”: Orthodox and Disciplinary Masculinities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus

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Abstract
This paper examines the connections between masculinity and orthodoxy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus to underscore the intersections of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity. Adichie depicts two contradictory figures of Catholic orthodoxy, namely, Eugene and Father Amadi and the consequences of their performances of masculinity. Where Eugene enacts violence on his family in the name of piety, Father Amadi demonstrates receptivity to human suffering as crucial to piety. I draw on the ideas of Michel Foucault and Raewyn Connell to demonstrate how discipline, control, and male power operate in the domestic sphere and their effects on subjectivities and bodies. Adichie’s portrayal of Eugene articulates a model of disciplinary power undergirded by orthodoxy. Eugene, therefore, dramatizes orthodox masculinity. I argue that Adichie envisions a redefinition of masculinity by presenting Father Amadi as an alternative to Eugene’s enactments of orthodoxy. I conclude that Adichie provides us with an understanding of how people can deploy violence in the name of piety and religion. Indeed, Adichie emphasizes the need to redefine masculinity cognizant of the dignity of all humanity.

Keywords
masculinities, orthodoxy, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Purple Hibiscus, Michel Foucault, Nigerian novels

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Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents Eugene as an archetypal Big Man in her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Eugene is the father of Jaja and Kambili—the male and female protagonists—in the novel. He typifies an Igbo patriarch, and his performances of piety represent an extreme of Catholic orthodoxy and reveal the contradictions surrounding masculinity. Through her characterization of Eugene, Adichie demonstrates the following: first, religion, class, and ethnicity shape the constructions of masculinity; second, there exists an incongruity between perception and reality, that is, between the idealization and the practice of piety; and lastly, that violence is instrumental in enforcing discipline. While the public perceives Eugene as an Omelora—“the one who does for the community”—and deifies him, his family holds him in terror. Omelora is usually a chieftaincy title an Igbo community confers on any man who has distinguished himself through philanthropy. Such men tend to be rich, generous, and lionized by their community. In the book, *To Be a Man Is Not a One-day Job*, Daniel Jordan Smith (2017) offers a compelling ethnographic account of Nigerian, predominantly Igbo, men to show the connections between masculinity and money. He argues that money is central to how Igbo men define and perform manhood. He documents instances of the Big Man, a trope that recurs in much of African fiction, including Chief Nanga in Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1967), Koomsom in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969), Babamukuru in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Cash Daddy in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009). Adichie appropriates the archetypes of the self-made Igbo man and the Big Man, epitomized by Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), to construct the character of Eugene. Eisenberg (2013) has hailed Adichie as a literary heir to Achebe and other critics have uncovered parallels between her and Achebe’s novels (Akpome 2017; Dyer 2015; Hewett 2005; Kurt, 2012; Olushola 2015; Tunca 2012; Vanzanten 2015; Whittaker 2011). However, Achebe’s and Adichie’s novels are set in different temporalities—*Things Fall Apart* is set in precolonial/colonial Nigeria, whereas *Purple Hibiscus*’ milieu is postcolonial Nigeria.

In this paper, I examine the connections between masculinity and orthodoxy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* to underscore the intersections of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity. Adichie depicts two contradictory figures of Catholic orthodoxy, namely, Eugene and Father Amadi and the consequences of their performances of masculinity. Where Eugene enacts violence on his family in the name of piety, Father Amadi demonstrates receptivity to human suffering as crucial to piety. I draw on Michel Foucault’s ideas on discipline and punishment to demonstrate how male power operates in the domestic space of the home and its effects on subjectivities and bodies. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie criticizes Eugene’s disciplinary power and its deleterious effects on the household. She shows how such a power can endanger the lives of both the perpetrator and his family. I argue that Adichie envisions a redefinition of masculinity by presenting Father Amadi as an alternative to Eugene’s orthodoxy. I conclude that Adichie provides us with an understanding of how people can deploy
violence in the name of piety and its idealization. I also argue that Adichie emphasizes the need to redefine masculinity cognizant of the dignity of all humanity. In so doing, this paper contributes to scholarship on gender, African masculinities, and studies on religion and domestic violence. In the next section, I review existing scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus* and the ideas of Michel Foucault and Raewyn Connell, which inform this paper’s analysis.

**Literature Review**

*Purple Hibiscus* tells the story of the Achike family and the tensions, misery, violence, and tragedy surrounding their daily reality. The family includes Eugene, his wife Beatrice, and their two children Jaja and Kambili. The fifteen-year-old female protagonist Kambili narrates the story, showing the oppression each family member suffers at the hands of Eugene, the patriarch, and the repression Nigerians faced during the country’s military dictatorship. The book traverses, in its setting, between Enugu, Abba, and Nsukka (southeastern Nigeria), and includes other characters, mainly related to the Achike family. The novel explores such themes as male violence, repression, rebellion, freedom, corruption, and religious bigotry. It also deals with love, hope, resilience, sacrifice, and transformation. Adichie has authored two other novels, namely, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2014), and the short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2010).

Some scholars have examined the female voice and agency (Andrade 2011; Strehle 2008; Taoua 2018; Toivanen 2013), and female bodies (Hillman 2019; Stobie 2012) in *Purple Hibiscus*. Others have explored the subject of faith and religion (Chennells 2012; Stobie 2010), nationhood (Cooper 2008; Uwakweh 2010), and childhood (Coker 2017; Ouma 2009) in the novel. My analysis of *Purple Hibiscus* extends literary appreciation of Adichie’s vision of gender redefinition by focusing on her depictions of Eugene to demonstrate her critique of orthodoxy and hegemonic masculinity. Eugene’s character typifies how religion, ethnicity, and class inflect performances of manhood.

Udumukwu (2011) avers that “Eugene is ruled by a sense of fear; that is fear of contamination from what he perceives as pagan values. Accordingly, his perspective is dominated by closure as exemplified in the closed doors, the high walls that barricade the family house both at Enugu and in the village” (197). Strehle (2008) buttresses Udumukwu’s point: “Indeed, Eugene interprets walls as forms of social and moral discipline designed to tame and domesticate” (107). Eugene is invested in disciplinary power, and consequently, the disciplinary undergirds his enunciations of piety and masculinity.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Michel Foucault discusses how the modern penal system in Europe developed and how disciplinary power was foundational to its emergence. Of relevance to this paper, however, is Foucault’s discussion of discipline and embodiment. In the chapter on “Docile Bodies,” *Foucault* (1979) examines how educational, industrial, medical, psychiatric, and psychological institutions have attempted to discipline the body by training and transforming it into a “manipulable” or
“docile” object. Foucault (1979) writes that “[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (152). The goal of discipline, according to Foucault, is to make the body more productive for power. In this understanding, the body is not only an object but also a target of power. Consequently, Foucault (1979) views discipline as “a mechanics of power” because it “produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile,’ bodies” (154). Foucault (1979) also emphasizes the nexus between discipline and detail, claiming that “[f]or the disciplined man, as for the true believer, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to wield it” (156). Furthermore, Foucault (1979) states that detail is a norm of Christian traditions. Schedule, observance, and ritual are part of “the discipline of the minute” (156). Though Foucault’s discussion of discipline is focused on the penal system, his ideas nonetheless orient my analysis of Eugene’s performance of orthodoxy. Eugene’s house can be read as a penal structure and his disciplinary methods rely on control and punishment. To be clear, he deploys discipline to subjugate his family not for economic uses but to exact piety and transform its members into docile bodies.

Eugene’s characterization exemplifies Raewyn Connell’s (2000, 2005) concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” a form of manhood revered, honored, and desired in communities. Messerschmidt (1993) defines hegemonic masculinity as the “idealized form of masculinity in a given historical setting” (82). Eugene’s title of Omelora, the one who does for the community, typifies his hegemonic status in society, underlining the links between masculinity, status, wealth, and institutions. In contrast, Stephen Whitehead, Stephan F. Miescher, and other masculinities scholars have challenged Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity. Whitehead (2002) contends that “the fundamental inconsistency in the term hegemonic masculinity is that, while it attempts to recognize difference and resistance, its primary underpinning is the notion of a fixed (male) structure” (93-4). In their study of African masculinities, Lindsay and Miescher (2003) have called for caution in the usage of the concept to explain the models of masculinities during the colonial era. Coles (2009) observes that hegemonic masculinity fails to take “into account men’s lived realities of their own masculinities as dominant in relation to other men, despite being subordinate in relation to the cultural ideal” (30).

However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), has reformulated the concept of hegemonic masculinity to incorporate “a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics” (847–48). As Robert Morrell (2001) notes, “in addition to oppressing women, hegemonic masculinity silences or subordinates other masculinities, positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy” (608). The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a context to understand how gender is constructed in intersection with other social categories such as wealth, prestige, and power and with institutions such as the church and community associations. It illuminates the ways in
which social and political formations privilege and legitimate relations of dominance and subordination among men and domination over women. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene valorizes and displays hegemonic notions of masculinity and disciplinary power.

**Method**

I employ close reading and textual analysis of selected scenes and actions in *Purple Hibiscus* to show Eugene’s fixation on discipline and his embodiment of order and discipline. I also examine his performances of hegemony and orthodoxy in different settings and how these performances constrain his family’s freedom, subvert their autonomy, and wreak violence on their bodies. Lastly, I conclude my discussion of orthodox and disciplinary masculinities in the novel by arguing that Adichie positions Father Amadi as a counter-figure of hegemony and orthodoxy. Father Amadi’s performances of piety demonstrate that masculinity can be reframed, even within an orthodox institution such as the church. In addition, Father Amadi acknowledges the suffering of others and therefore evinces a receptivity to otherness, as I will discuss later. These analyses will deepen our appreciation of Adichie’s critique of the relationship between masculinity and hegemony, the consequences of such a relationship on the family, and the possibilities of redefining masculinity in hegemonic cultures.

**Analysis**

This first section focuses on Eugene’s performances of orthodox masculinities in public and private spheres. His orthodoxy is most evident in the church and his community, on the one hand, and at home with his family, on the other. In the next section, I contrast Eugene’s orthodoxy with Father Amadi’s to show Adichie’s reformulation of masculinity.

**Enforcing Piety**

I now begin the analysis with a scene in the beginning of *Purple Hibiscus* where Kambili reflects on her father’s piety. This scene is taken from the section of the book titled “Speaking with our spirits.” The event takes place before Palm Sunday.

But then, Papa was different. I wished that Mama would not compare him with Mr. Ezeudu, with anybody; it lowered him, soiled him. (20)

These are Kambili’s thoughts when her mother comes into her room and reveals that she is pregnant. The conversation between mother and daughter switches to Papa (Eugene). Beatrice praises her husband for resisting his clansmen’s promptings “to have children with someone else” due to her miscarriages (*Adichie 2003*, 20). She compares him to Mr. Ezeudu, who married a second wife; the comparison, in Kambili’s
mind, seems to be an insult because she knows that Mr. Ezeudu may also be a Big Man, but he is not anything like her father. Comparing both men, for Kambili, demeans and demystifies what her father represents: a quintessence of piety. From the text, we barely know why Kambili perceives Mr. Ezeudu as second-rate. Adichie herself provides no evidence to support Kambili’s insinuation about his apparent “inferiority,” so we can only rely on another source, that is, Father Benedict who admonishes his congregation to “Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in this country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government did not threaten his business. But no, he used the Standard to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising. Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom” (5).

To Father Benedict, Eugene typifies the virtues Catholic orthodoxy promotes. He serves as an archetype of courage, uprightness, and altruism—a standard-bearer. By contrasting him with the “other Big Men,” Father Benedict shows that Eugene is a man of distinction. Therefore, the whole congregation should not only “look at” but also “look to” Eugene. Father Benedict sermonizes on the sacrifices Eugene has made in the name of social progress, on behalf of the nation. Doubtless, Eugene is courageous in the national domain, deploying journalism to fight for democracy and social justice. He is critical of authoritarian leadership, though, ironically, he reproduces it at home. The public esteems him for his courage to stand for freedom, even conferring an award on him. However, his wife and children live in fear of the limits of freedom he prescribes for them. His newspaper, the Standard, is “the only paper that dares to tell the truth” (136). Yet Eugene disciplines his wife so that she can only “[speak] the way a bird eats, in small amounts” and his children, too, so that they are “always so quiet” (21). Adichie shows the disconnect between his politics and religion; she also shows the contradictions between piety as ideal and piety as practice.

Eugene is not particularly unlike the dictator he usually criticizes in the editorials of the Standard. Toivanen (2013) argues that Eugene “is a profoundly complex character: on the one hand, he is an aggressive home tyrant who causes mental and physical injuries to his family; on the other hand, he is also officially a ‘good Christian,’ a successful businessman, and the fearless owner of a magazine that criticizes the flaws of the military government” (106–7). There is no doubt that Eugene is a complex character, but his obsession with piety predisposes him to violate his family. He has a complex relationship with the truth and “quarrels with the truths that he does not like” (Adichie 2003, 95). It appears that he cannot abide anyone who refuses to “idolize” him. He never steps foot in his father’s house and forbids him from entering his residence, only dispatching his driver if he needs to send money to him. Although he allows his children to visit their grandfather, he threatens to punish them if he finds out that they have eaten in Papa-Nnukwu’s home. He does all these because his father is godless, a “heathen.” Sandwith (2016) points out that Eugene represents

an atavistic figure of the colonial potentate whose deployment of corrective violence is sanctioned by the church. In the disciplining practices carried out in his home, the aversion
to the body, and the punishment of sin, Eugene continues the colonial project of civility, the enforcement of decorum, and the grooming of the native. Like the colonial potentate, too, Eugene conceives of his violent acts in terms of the burden of enlightenment. (103)

According to Kambili, Eugene “likes order. It showed even in the schedules themselves” (Adichie 2003, 23). His obsession with order and control illustrates the utility of discipline in its production of “subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (Foucault 1979, 38). Eugene designs a timetable of activities for each of his children. There is time allocated for study, siesta, family, eating, prayer, sleep, which he revises often. Time is also set aside for washing of uniform. Duran (2017) says, “[t]he atmosphere of mindless repetition of rules, the sense that one is not free to question, and the overshadowing presence of Eugene, even when he is physically absent from the home, all have a great deal to do with the difficulties that Kambili and her brother Jaja have” (50). Kambili even “wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until it was a toddler” (Adichie 2003, 23). That is the extent to which Eugene schematizes his family’s life to discipline it into “manipulable bodies.”

Eugene obsesses about mastering bodies, time, space, and activity involving his wife and children. Similarly, he is fixated on the littlest detail around him, in the church, at home. He is a man of discipline, who disciplines—punishes—his emotions, his family, and whomever he likes, as he deems fit. A man who exerts control of his household, their bodies, their minds. He believes in and demands total submission, not only from his wife and children but also from his father and any other elder who attempts to challenge him. In sum, he epitomizes Foucault’s image of the disciplined man. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene recognizes that discipline and detail are crucial to his project of normalization, reproducing pious bodies, and installing an order of piety in his home. By disciplining his wife and their children, he transforms them into manipulable bodies—subjects of docility. Viewed this way, his investments in religion constitute piety as a “disciplinary tool.” The novel delineates several instances illustrating how Eugene disciplines his family, but the following incident is salient for our discussion. When Eugene and his family arrive at Father Benedict’s parish residence, Beatrice complains of ill-health and wishes not to accompany him:

“Let me stay in the car and wait, biko,” Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. “I feel vomit in my throat.”

Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed a long moment, but it might have been only seconds.

“Are you sure you want to stay in the car?” Papa asked.

Mama was looking down; her hands were placed on her belly, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. “My body does not feel right,” she mumbled.
“I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car?”

Mama looked up. “I’ll come with you. It’s really not that bad.”

Papa’s face did not change. (29)

The above scene dramatizes an instance of the discipline at work. Eugene’s stare and words convey the threat of violence, although a symbolic violence. Beatrice pleads with him—biko, the Igbo word for “please”—asking him to understand her weakened state. Eugene ignores her, having shown limited care for the miscarriages she suffered in the past and construing her reluctance to go with him as impiety. His questions are rhetorical, but they subject Beatrice into complying with his objective. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler highlights the “performative and allocutory action that [the] ‘I’ performs” (66). In the communicative space, Eugene mobilizes the “I” to foreground the authority of the self over the other. In the “scene of address” involving Beatrice and him, he installs himself as the subject who is not responsible for the other yet demands that the other give an account of oneself. The former question (couched in the pronominal “you”) opens a space for the other to equivocate, whereas the second question (articulated by the pronominal “I”) closes the space and compels action from the other.

However, the action Eugene desires from Beatrice is the obligation of the other to comply and remain passive to the ego of the self. His intention in asking her about her sureness “are you sure/if you were sure” two times is not to help her resolve her dilemma but to nullify her voice and agency. Accordingly, the second question invokes “a doing.” Although Beatrice stalls in her response, almost equivocating, but only long enough since the dynamic in the dialogue—or rather, interrogation—has changed from a relation of mutuality to that of a power dynamic marked by asymmetry. She cannot resist the force of his speech, which requires not vacillation, not equivocation, not impasse but that she fulfills the perlocutionary act of attending to its objective—Eugene’s desire for compliance. Beatrice cannot do otherwise because Eugene would punish her for attempting to subvert his desire. As we can see, her body may not feel right, but he disciplines it into feeling right (“not bad”). Consequently, she mortifies her body and prevents the “vomit,” thereby reaffirming his authority. Her reply to his last question reflects her subjugation, completing her self-mortification: “It’s really not that bad” (Adichie 2003, 29). Despite that Beatrice has finally resigned to his authority, Eugene still goes ahead to punish her when they get home later that day. Punishment is crucial for securing discipline (and perfection).

Recall that Eugene has earlier complained about the visiting young priest who “was singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of those Pentecostal churches” and whose kind would “bring trouble to the church” (29). It is, therefore, not surprising that he understands his wife’s action as a “trouble to the church,” transgressive, an errancy—the weakness of the flesh, which he must discipline in the name of the Father. Furthermore, Eugene’s obsession with piety undergirds his methodical approach as an oblate striving for perfection, “to make a perfect cross” (3). Perfection is a symbol of
piety, which orthodox and disciplinary masculinities work to legitimate. For Eugene, his pursuit of perfection inhibits his capacity to cherish kinship because he regards perfection as a mandate he feels obligated by God to fulfill, a mandate his sister rails at: “O joka! Eugene has to stop doing God’s job. God is big enough to do his own job” (95). Eugene remains dogmatic in his stance, undeterred. As he tells his daughter, “[God] expects much from you. He expects perfection” (47).

Other instances of Eugene’s disciplinary character include the following two incidents. The first episode features Eugene’s entire family in Kambili’s bedroom, while the second is between him and his children. The first incident takes place during a Eucharist fast on a Sunday morning. Eugene’s family had never broken the fast before. However, Kambili asks her mother for Panadol to soothe her menstrual cramps. Beatrice advises her to eat cereal before taking any medication, and Jaja serves her some. Eugene enters the room just when Kambili is almost finished eating, and he goes into a rage. Beatrice and Jaja try to explain that Kambili has cramps, but Eugene turns on them: ‘Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?’ The Igbo words burst out of Papa’s mouth. ‘Has the devil built a tent in my house?’ He turned to Mama. ‘You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharist Fast, maka nni?’” (102). As Eugene lashes at his family members with his belt, he keeps “muttering that the devil would not win” (102).

The second incident happens shortly after his children return from holiday at their aunt’s home in Nsukka. He promptly punishes them for “living in the same house as a heathen” (191). He tells Kambili to climb into the tub; when she gets in, he burns her feet with hot water:

“So you saw the sin clearly and you walked right into it?”

I nodded. “Yes, Papa.”

“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 towards 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.” (194, italics added)

Eugene treats his family not only as “docile” but also “sacred” bodies, which explains his tendency for disciplining them into piety. He interprets the “sin” as an instance of desecration, as imperfection. Sandwith (2016) posits that “[i]n keeping with the Christian colonial logic of the unruly body—source of sin and the site of repression—the forms of domestic discipline in the Achike household center on corporeal repression and punishment” (99). Before the “purification” of her feet with “hot water,” Eugene explains to Kambili that punishment is part of piety. But his interpretation of what constitutes sin contradicts what is biblically sanctioned; it is also dangerous because it provides him with the justification for enacting violence on his children. As Butler (2005) notes, “violence is the act by which a subject seeks to
reinstall its mastery and unity” (64). For Eugene, violence is crucial for securing mastery. He reinforces the notion that masculinity is inseparable from violence, and it is constitutive of terror.

**Undermining Orthodoxy**

In this final section, I consider Adichie’s presentation of Father Amadi’s receptivity toward others and how his performance of masculinity undermines orthodoxy. Like Aunty Ifeoma and her children, Father Amadi plays a significant role in the transformation of Eugene’s children, Jaja and Kambili. When the children spend a holiday at their aunt’s place in Nsukka, the young Catholic priest drops in to see them and spends time with them. Toivanen (2013) notes that “Father Amadi, with his tender and supportive attitude, becomes a new masculine authority for Kambili” (111). I argue that Adichie positions Father Amadi to demystify Catholic orthodoxy and to articulate other ways of performing piety and masculinity. The priest embraces and celebrates otherness, and his recognition of the other contradicts Eugene’s ideals of piety. Nabutanyi (2017) comments that “[t]he contrast between Eugene’s religious violence and Father Amadi’s life-giving Catholicism arise out of Eugene’s association with Father Benedict and the St. Gregory’s priest’s brand of Catholicism that not only demands blind obedience but also endorses violence as a way of disciplining and raising children” (83). Eugene’s seeming obtuseness contrasts with Father Amadi’s imaginative identification with human suffering.

The first time Eugene sees Father Amadi conducting mass at St. Agnes, he declares: “That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him” (29). He dismisses him as “that young priest” rather than address him by name, and so identifies him with something wild and unwanted, with godlessness, with trouble. He denigrates the priest, questioning the religious authority bestowed on him. Father Amadi may signal trouble with his “unpriestly” attitude to the world by threatening the norm of piety that Eugene idealizes. Mabura (2008) writes that “Father Amadi’s threat, however, is not that easily done away with and despite Eugene’s efforts, it lodges itself in Kambili and Jaja and can be said to contribute to their ensuing revolt” (213). On Pentecost Sunday, Father Amadi conducts the “Mass in a red robe that seemed too short for him” (Adichie 2003, 28). As if that were not “scandalous” enough, he sings an Igbo song halfway through his sermon. Father Benedict disapproves of his congregation singing Igbo songs because he regards them as “native songs” (4). The reaction to Father Amadi’s song is instant, as Kambili narrates: “The congregation drew in a collective breath, some sighed, some had their mouths in a big O” (28). Eugene refuses to join the rest of the congregation in singing.

Mabura (2008) insinuates that “one may deduce that Father Amadi is actually anti-Catholic, at least in regard to the brand of Catholicism introduced in Igboland” (213). I contend that Father Amadi shows that one can be a Catholic and remain empathetic with the other. He challenges orthodoxy by practising a form of piety that is inclusive of
all of humanity. He interacts with all kinds of people, regardless of age, religion, ability, or gender, and entertains no misgivings about their personhood. He plays football with children from poor neighborhoods and feels at home anywhere he finds himself, even making jokes with Jaja’s cousins. Kambili describes watching him and the boys during a water break: “He brought peeled oranges and water wrapped into tight cone shapes in plastic bags from his car. They all settled down on the grass to eat the oranges, and I watched Father Amadi laugh loudly with his head thrown back, leaning to rest his elbows on the grass. I wondered if the boys felt the same way I did with him, that they were all he could see” (Adichie 2003, 178).

Father Amadi also supports Aunty Ifeoma and her children. When he hears that she wants to bring her father to live with her in Nsukka and she has no fuel in her car, Father Amadi offers to get her some, “We have some emergency fuel reserves in the chaplain” (149). His humility and affability help Kambili to overcome her reticence and prejudice toward the other: “Father Amadi included Jaja and me in the conversation, asking us questions. I knew the questions were meant for both of us because he used the plural ‘you,’ unu, rather than the singular, gi, yet I remained silent, grateful for Jaja’s answers. He asked where we went to school, what subjects we liked, if we played any sports” (136). After that conversation with Kambili, Father Amadi visits again and takes her out to run and play football. As Ogaga Okuyade (2009) explains, “[t]hrough Father Amadi she [Kambili] discovers a new brand of Catholicism, which is not mechanical and dictatorial but lithe, which is a direct contrast to the one her father and Father Benedict practice—one which makes room for dissent” (252). By modeling biblical examples of receptivity, Father Amadi evokes the figure of Jesus whom church leaders were known to criticize for his relationships with sinners (Luke 7:34). Father Amadi demonstrates that religion is a mode of being responsible for the other. He neither judges nor discriminates against anyone. Unlike Eugene, who finds paganism revolting, Father Amadi refuses to interpret sin in a rigid and sanctimonious manner. When Kambili tells him, “I sleep in the same house as my grandfather. He is a heathen,” Father Amadi discourages her from such thinking:

“Why do you say that?”

“It is a sin.”

“Why is it a sin?”

I stared at him. I felt that he had missed a line in his scripture. “I don’t know.”

“Your father told you that.”

I looked away, out of the window. I would not implicate Papa, since Father Amadi obviously disagreed. (Adichie 2003, 175).

Father Amadi does not criticize Kambili or Eugene. He understands that her view of her grandfather is colored by her father’s orthodoxy. Instead, he empathizes with rather
than condemn Papa-Nnukwu. On one occasion he stops by and visits Papa-Nnukwu at Ifeoma’s home. Kambili describes his reaction when Ifeoma mentions that her father is recovering well. “Our God is faithful, Ifeoma,” he said happily, as though Papa-Nnukwu were his own relative (163–64). Father Amadi’s unorthodox approach to the practice of piety causes the hair-stylist Mama Joe to ask Kambili: “Did you say he is a fada?” (237). When Kambili says yes, she asks again, “A real Catholic fada?” (237). Father Amadi’s receptivity enables him to “see Christ” in the faces of others. His unorthodoxy facilitates his reconstruction of pious subjectivity.

Conclusion

This paper examined Adichie’s portrayals of Eugene and Father Amadi to illuminate the conflicts surrounding the performances of masculinity and orthodoxy. I argued that Adichie presents Eugene’s character to emphasize the perils of orthodoxy. Eugene’s masculinity performance is associated with control, punishment, and violence and his obsession with Catholic ideals of piety. His ideal of what a man is or how any man should be reinforces legacies of domination. It is these forms of masculinities that Adichie criticizes, while prompting us to rethink culturally valorized notions of masculinity. In contrast, Father Amadi demonstrates receptivity toward the other and acknowledges a common human vulnerability, thus undermining the ideals of Catholic orthodoxy, as Eugene practises. More importantly, through *Purple Hibiscus*’ depictions of Father Amadi and Eugene, Adichie produces a narrative on gender redefinition.

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