Wanton Killing in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “A Private Excipereince” and “The American Embassy” in The Thing Around Your Neck

By

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Abstract

This essay establishes that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s short stories, “A Private Experience” and “The American Embassy”, deal with the theme of wanton killings in Nigeria and that these killings have political, religious and ethnic undertones. Postcolonialism is the theory employed in the analysis of the stories. The paper identifies some of the killings, traces their causes and origin and concludes that the killings have caused Nigeria the lives of her prominent personalities; the causes are trivial and the origin is usually from the northern part of Nigeria. The paper also establishes that, sometimes, the leadership instigates the killings to further the divisions and hatred that already exist among Nigerians so that they can never come together to overthrow the obnoxious government. We conclude that the crises in Nigeria have reduced Nigerians to types instead of the individuals they really are: the punishment for a crime committed by a person affects all the people that belong to the person’s ethnic group because he represents his ethnic group. The paper also proffers solutions: the government needs reconstruction since Nigeria’s problems emanate from leadership; Nigerians need to rethink to remove bias from their actions, recognize and respect individual differences and treat all Nigerians equally.

Introduction

During the colonial era, literary artists joined the African nationalists to fight against colonialism in Africa. They did so in anticipation that independence will put to an end the exploitative and bad leadership of the colonialists and project an Africa that is strong, more united and peaceful. Such writers as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono were at the fore-front of this fight. The novels that deal with colonialism include Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, The Poor Christ of Bomba, The Old Man and the Medal and Houseboy. These works and others of their kind have played a remarkable role in winning independence for many African countries. After independence, another problem set-in: the inability of African leaders to decolonize their minds and rule Africa according to the dictates of the African situation. They still inclined towards the colonial masters for direction and guidance. This undue inclination towards the white by the African leaders in piloting the affairs of Africa is what critics tagged neo-colonialism. The situation is completely not what African independence fighters bargained for. What they stand for is for an Africa that would be free from all the Western influences and does things the African way. To resolve this problem of undue inclination towards the colonial masters, colonial, post-colonialism comes
up. This theory, in addition to suppressing both colonialism and neo-colonialism, makes it succinctly clear that African literature should be read and interpreted in the African way.

**Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism is therefore a theory that sprang up in opposition to colonialism and neo-colonialism. It does not only deal with anti-colonialism but also sets out to showcase African sensibilities and disillusionments in many areas of human endeavour. Adeboye Williams writes that the emphasis of postcolonial literature is not on the case of how colonialism ruins Africa, “but of how African leaders aborted the great hopes and expectations of indigenous rule” (359). Leela Ghandhi records that postcolonialism emanates owing to the collective suppression of the colonial experience in the minds of formerly colonized peoples. This suppression is the colonized’s mechanism of checking the persistence of mental colonization after independence. Linda Yohannes therefore notes that postcolonial theory is an organized body of inquiry into the colonial past; it is a calm objective revisiting of the colonial experience with the aim of critically and deconstructively reflecting upon its ambivalence, its discourse and its legacy as well as a search for ways forward (6). Aijaz Ahmad sees postcoloniality as all that is “non-white, not Europe” (286). Ashcroft et al believe that the postcolonial theory involves discussions about experiences of different kinds: race, gender, suppression, slavery, migration, resistance and reaction to the influential master ideology of imperialism such as history, philosophy and linguistics (2). Postcolonial literature sets out to denounce what the colonizers’ ideology has laid down as parameters to assess the literature and writing of the colonized. Postcolonial theory is also important because it provides diversified interpretations of literary texts. Lois Tysong, Homi Bhabha, Ania Loomba, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon are also renowned proponents of postcolonial theory who propose that this
theory should also examine themes and strategies that the ex-colonized can implement to resist western colonial and imperial domination of non-western cultures.

From the above insights, it is succinctly clear that the term, postcolonialism, is diversified and varied. This theory is very important because, not only does it enable African critics to showcase their disillusionment in the African leaders who have shattered the hopes and aspirations of African independence, it also helps Africans to explore the themes that pertain to Africa. This paper employs postcolonialism theory in the analysis of selected stories in Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

Nigeria has everything it takes to join the developed nations of the world but it is most regrettable that she still remains underdeveloped owing to lack of security of lives and properties accruing from poor leadership. Many people in Nigeria have lost their lives and properties in different parts of Nigeria, especially in the North, for no apparent cause. This has affected tourism and foreign investment in the country. S. Idu records that the security crisis in Nigeria does not portray a good image of the country to the international community. Nigeria wants foreign investors but lacks strong and strategic security for human protection. Nigeria is presently sinking into a state of terror and fear where everyone is afraid of their own shadows. Olusegun Adeniyi writes that, in Nigeria, security forces commit extra judicial killings and use excessive force to quell anti-government protests as well as to combat crime, resulting in the death and injury of many individuals, including innocent civilians. The nation loses so many prominent Nigerians even though she is not being confronted with external aggression. According to him, on the 23rd of December, 2001, Chief Bola Ige, the former Attorney-General of Nigeria, was assassinated in his residence. The killers are yet to face justice. It is clear to everyone that justice delayed is justice denied. The Nigerian government has denied Ige and his family the justice due to them. Marshal Harry, the Vice Chairman of All Nigeria Peoples Party, was murdered on the 5th of March, 2003. The assassination was in
his own house which was very close to the Police Headquarters. The police were alerted at a nearby check-point. They did not go and gave the excuse that there was no fuel in their vehicle. Banabas Igwe, the Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association, Onitsha Branch, and his wife were assassinated on the 1st of September, 2002. Chief Ezeodumegwu Okonkwo, a local government Chairman, was killed in February, 2001. In 2006, Engr. Funsho Williams and Dr. Ayodeji Daramola suffered a similar fate. Both men were on the platform of the People’s Democratic Party and governorship aspirants of Lagos and Ekiti States respectively (Adeniyi10-11).

Others who have suffered the same fate include Kudirat Abiola, the wife of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 Presidential Election; Chief Alfred Rewane, Mr. Godwin Agbroko, the Chairman, Editorial Board of Thisday Newspapers and many others. These are prominent men that matter in Nigeria. Their killers have not been brought to justice. If the security forces cannot guarantee the security of lives and properties, Nigeria is then heading for destruction. The situation is terrible. It does not stop with only political killings. The religious and ethnic perspectives are even worse than the political. Many Southerners have lost their lives and properties in different parts of Northern Nigeria because of the spate of Northern Islamist killings; many Southerners have abandoned their hard-earned properties and re-located to the Southern States. This is the replica of what happened in 1966 when the Northerners massacred the South-easterners, especially the Igbos who lived in the North. With the materialization of Boko Haram Islamist sect, the killings have intensified. The members openly ask the Southerners to leave the North and return to their states of origin. The government seems to be doing its best to protect the lives and properties of Nigerians but it is obvious that its best is not enough to keep the massacres at bay. C.A. Ogah submits that the security situation in Nigeria, the giant of Africa, lies prostrate and formidable beyond human solution. The country sits hopelessly on ethnic/religious gun
powder capable of exploding with any little spark of fire. The situation is a pointer to a future balkanization of the country. Parts of the country like Kaduna, Kano, Kafanchan, Bauchi, Maiduguri, with a particular reference to Jos as the focal hell zone of religious unrests have experienced many ethnic and religious squabbles. Each ugly incident has always been characterized by wanton destruction of human beings and vandalism of economic goods (Ogah, 39).

Paul Ogugua submits that the Nigerian nation is in a very poor mental, emotional, psychological and physical frame caused by the actions of the leaders. He regrets that the efforts to put in place a democratic process cannot survive with the degree of ethnic intolerance and acrimony presently practised in Nigeria. The scenario painted by the litany of ethnic and religious conflicts destroys the political environment and makes democratization difficult. He indicates that the colonial masters sowed the seed of ethnic discord and our own sons water and nurture this seed. If individuals are valued and respected, no doubt, a necessary climate for inter-ethnic dialogue can be established. This will go a long way to dousing the fire of ethnic conflicts which have put Nigeria in a comatose state (147). Umar Abdulahi also notes that the colonial conspiracy has divided the people into disputing tribal regions which has further sown seeds of distrust that have germinated into plants of disunity. The impact of disunity is not just the devastation and severence of communal ties. The play of Lugard has turned Nigerians into vampires instead of brothers. Colonialism has turned Nigerians into enemies; tribalism has given birth to ethnocentrism; ethnic unrest which ultimately culminates in religious uprisings and generates deep animosity among the ethnic nations (278).

The Nigerian example also applies to other countries in Africa. According to Y. Turaki, in spite of the presence of Christianity, Rwanda and Burundi have been torn apart by ethnic/tribal tensions, violence and conflicts; while Somalia has been balkanized by the
Somali clan war lords. Similar occurrences have taken place in many parts of Africa where the same common denominators, such as Christianity and Islam, could not avert ethnic tensions and violence. If this is the case, the implication is that Christianity and, especially Islamic religion, have failed Africans (44).

From the above citations, it is clearly obvious that the security situation in Nigeria, in particular, and Africa, in general, is so poor that it is not likely that the problem will be solved in the very near future.

**Review of Literature**

A few scholars have worked on Adichie’s collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

Comfort Wirngo Siver records that *The Thing Around Your Neck* traces the conscious and the unconscious migration of characters both in body and mind; it also examines the causes of self-migration and its effects, hybridity as an effect of migration and how the collection of stories can be adapted and taught to form five literature students.

Linda Yohannes argues that Adichie’s fictions are postcolonial and beyond and shows how the works are shot through post coloniality in the most typical ways such as the issue of hybridity, language, politics and uncommitted art. Yohannes also attempts to identify innovative techniques used by this author which may form a new trend in postcolonial writing; this includes her extensive use of untranslated Igbo and English transcription of Igbo dialogue.

Femi E. Eromosele examines sexual activity in the works of Adichie, beginning from *Purple Hibiscus* through *Half of a Yellow Sun* to *The Thing Around Your Neck*, noting how they reflect the author’s attitude about sex and sexuality. It is evident from the short stories that Adichie does not believe in succumbing to the restrictions placed by society on sexual
expression and that is why homosexuality and lesbianism are portrayed as simply human characteristics.

Stella Kpolugbo and Oluwatomi Adeoti submit that every contradiction in *The Thing Around Your Neck* is woven around the theme of homesickness. Contradiction makes it more glaring as the young female protagonist could hardly do anything without tying it to her home back in Nigeria. Adichie’s use of contradiction is not new. It is on this premise that they suggest that an inclusion of such patterns of contradiction is not out of place in the codification of Nigerian English. Contradiction of this nature brings freshness, originality and uniqueness to Nigerian English and would certainly be an innovation in the English language.

Ferdinard Asoo looks at the major themes of Adichie’s short stories and the author’s crafting of the narratives as works of enduring technical sophistication and value. The essay concludes that Adichie has sufficiently touched virtually all the contemporary issues affecting Africa and Nigeria in particular. Asoo concludes that the short stories have collectively and individually attained world standards technically and can be read as monumental contribution to the short story sub-genre of prose-fiction.

Katie Alexander posits that Adichie, in her short stories, offers a new view of hybridity: she explores how hybridity affects Nigerian characters in America, as well as the effects of gender on hybridity. Adichie creates hybrids that suffer through identity crises and anxieties of falsehood; her hybrids live difficult and dark existences. These anxious hybrids are all females whereas the men are happy hybrids. The author advocates for not only our exploration of hybridity but also that we should challenge the notion of empowered hybrids and ask why the female experience of hybridity should be different from the male experience.

**Analysis of the Short Stories**

This essay deviates from the above reviews. It focuses on wanton killings in Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck* with special emphasis on “A Private Experience” and “The
American Embassy”. Adichie gives several instances of assassination of innocent people in both stories and, with great artistic finesse, explores the ugly effects on individuals and the nation. These killings are mainly religious, political and ethnic. In “A Private Experience”, a religious riot suddenly erupts inside a motor park and later spreads to the ancient Kano Market, resulting in the destruction of numerous lives and properties. This particular riot, though religious, has ethnic colouration because the rioters are the Hausa Muslims and their targets are the Igbo people from the eastern part of the country. There is no just cause for this riot because the crime committed by the Igbo man that resulted to the riot would have been committed by a Hausa Muslim. The man has inadvertently driven over a Holy Koran that has been kept on the ground inside the park. A group of idlers who have been playing draughts all day immediately descend on the Igbo man; pull him out of his vehicle, destroy the vehicle and cut-off his head instantly. The man has neither seen the Koran nor has the slightest idea that he has driven over the Holy Book. As the story puts it:

it [the riot] had all started at the motor park, when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Koran that lay on the roadside, a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian. The men nearby, men who sat around all day playing draughts, men who happened to be Muslims, pulled him out of his pickup truck, cut his head off with one flash of a machete, and carried it to the market, asking others to join in; the infidel has desecrated the Holy Book. (46)

Judging from the above excerpt, it is evident that the Igbo truck driver has unknowingly entered into a trap. The Holy Book is a trap set up by the group of idlers pretending to be playing draughts and intently watching for a Christian or an Igbo man who will run over it.

I have decided to take this stance because no right-thinking person will keep a Holy Koran or even an ordinary book on the ground beside a road and expects that no vehicle will run over it. If the crime had been committed by a Hausa Fulani Muslim, the idlers would not
have noticed it. The fact that they promptly notice the Igbo man as he drives over the book shows that they are not concentrating on the game; otherwise, they will not have noticed it as it happens. There is an undertone of sarcasm and condemnation in the tone of the author which projects her hatred and rancour towards the idlers: hatred and condemnation because the men do not have any meaningful thing they do for a living but are simply there to fanning the embers of religious and ethnic disunity and to destroy innocent souls for no just cause. L.O. Umejesi terms this riot, “The Kano 1994 Gideon Akaluka Religious Crisis” (99) for that is the name of the truck driver. Now that they have beheaded the man who has committed the crime, why do they still carry the riot into the market and kill hundreds of other innocent Igbo and Christians? Are they insinuating that the Igbo truck driver had been sent by the Igbo and Christians to go and drive over the Koran? They know that there are many Igbo traders in the ancient Kano Market and that most of the big shops there are owned by them. That is why they carry the riot into the market, to destroy them and their shops. This is a wicked jealousy.

The fact that they concentrate on the Igbo people and their shops shows that the riot has ethnic and political undertones. As it is stated in the short story: “…riots do not happen in a vacuum, that religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another” (48). The quotation above implies that the leadership has interests in riots to perpetuate itself in power. The time setting of this story is during General Abacha’s regime. This is the time Nigerians are carrying placards against the government and advocating for a civilian government. Abacha must have instigated the riot to indicate that a civilian government cannot rule Nigeria effectively; that a military government is the ideal government for the Nigerian situation. If peace is allowed to reign, Nigerians may unite to form a formidable opposition that will overthrow the military rule. To avoid the overthrow, it is necessary to leave the country perpetually divided through senseless
riots. To still buttress the interests of the government in the riot, the rioters are never held accountable for the lives and properties they have destroyed.

In the short story, President Olusegun Obasanjo, addressing the nation after one of such riots in Kaduna, 22 February, 2000, is pathetically moved. He says: “I speak to you again today with a sad and heavy heart, having recently returned from a visit to Kaduna, where I saw the carnage and devastation resulting from recent disturbances in that city…. And yet, those who were responsible for these murders claim that they were acting in defence of faith or religion. I cannot believe that any religion in this day and age can sanction the taking of innocent life…. I am sad to say that this has been one of the worst incidents of blood letting that this country has witnessed since the civil war” (305-6). From his address, it is glaringly evident that there had been series of riots in the past before the present one, and all these riots emanate from the same ethnic group. From the look of things, it seems that no government can solve the problem because rioting has remained a continuous occurrence in Nigeria.

These rioters do not just kill their victims, they burn the corpses beyond recognition. Chika, the narrator and a holiday maker in Kano, talks of her encounter with some of these corpses: “The body must have been very recently burned. The smell is sickening, of roasted flesh…. Other bodies, many burned, lying length wise along the sides of the street, as though someone carefully pushed them there, straightening them…. One of the corpses [was] naked, stiff, faced down, and … she cannot tell if the partially burned man is Igbo or Hausa, Christian or Muslim, from looking at the charred flesh” (53). In their lamentation, Olawole Sulaiman and Yemisi Ojo write that “thousands of lives have been lost to religious crises in Nigeria…. Fanaticism and religious intolerance have transformed into religious violence. This is mostly common in the northern part of Nigeria” (27). The corpses were healthy men and women who had left their homes in the morning, bubbling with life. Not only that these
lives have been wasted for nothing, they are also denied the honour of befitting burials since their bodies cannot be identified because they were burnt. Their households are kept in suspense as they keep on waiting for their relatives that will never come back. J.A. Onimhawo, commenting on insecurity in Nigeria, says: “presently in Nigeria, we have all manner of persons in leadership positions. Their experiences, attitudes, actions and words express everything else except that of an effective leadership. There is indeed leadership failure in almost every sphere of public life” (4). Chinua Achebe, in line with Onimhawo, records that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility; to the challenges of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership” (21). From the above two quotations, it is clearly stated that Nigeria’s problems, including insecurity of lives and properties, are traceable to poor leadership. This indicates that if we are blessed with good leaders tomorrow, our problems will drastically reduce.

In “The American Embassy”, it is the same insecurity of lives and properties: where a man stands the risk of losing his life for expressing the true situation of things. Ugonna’s father, a journalist, receives anonymous calls that warn him to guard his life because the government is after him. The story has it that, “he got anonymous calls all the time… to say that the head of state was personally furious…. Soldiers were on their way to arrest him, the caller said. The word was, it will be his last arrest, he will never come out” (137). Two things are evident from the anonymous call: either that the journalist will spend the rest of his life in the prison or that the government agents will eliminate him as soon as they get hold of him. His crime is that he has published “The Abacha Years So Far: 1993 – 1997” in which he compiles the “killings and failed contracts and missing money” (137). Not that a compilation of this kind is new; what actually aggravates the situation is that a day after the publication,
the news appears on the BBC. An exiled Nigerian professor of politics who is being interviewed on the matter by the BBC says that the journalist “deserved a Human Rights Award. He fights repression with the pen, he gives a voice to the voiceless, he makes the world know” (137). This undue exposure to the outside world is what General Abacha cannot contain and so he wishes to kill him and end his troubles. The journalist acts swiftly and escapes to his friend’s house in the closed boot of his wife’s car. The good friend smuggles him across the border to Benin Republic. He is to leave for the United States of America where he hopes to seek for asylum. As the story puts it:

He climbed into the boot of the car minutes after the call, so that if the soldiers asked, the gateman could honestly claim not to know when her husband [the journalist] had left. She … quickly sprinkled water in the boot… because she felt somehow that a wet boot would be cooler, that he would breathe better. She drove him to his co-editor’s house. The next day, he called her from Benin Republic; that co-editor had contacts who had sneaked him over the border. His visa to America, the one he got when he went for a training course in Atlanta, was still valid, and he would apply for asylum when he arrived in New York. (137-8)

Before the present incident, he has been the first journalist to publicly call the coup plot “a sham” (135), to write a story accusing General Abacha of inventing a coup to enable him kill and jail his political opponents. Soldiers have swooped on his office and removed large numbers of that edition in their truck. He is arrested and beaten mercilessly. He is released after two weeks. But this time he does not doubt his anonymous informants because he knows the government he is dealing with: Abacha is free with his sword and uses it freely without anybody asking questions. From the above record, it is very clear that, in Nigeria, nobody has freedom of expression and if anybody dares, he or she has himself or herself to
blame. G.G. Dara regrets that “in the Nigerian armed forces thinkers and poets are wasted for having the intellect that harbours dreams of a society that is free from detentions without trial, massacres, coup plotters, emergency proclamations, and more importantly the juicy morsels of looted oil wealth made sweeter because it is in dollars” (2). When civilians were in leadership in Nigeria, Nigerians cried out and yearned for a change because of corruption. Then the military takes over and Nigerians are very happy because messiahs have rescued them from the corrupt civilians. Their jubilation is short-lived because the messiahs turn out to be demons: they are far worse than the civilians. They hijack the government and make sure it does not leave their grips and ethnicity. All types of atrocities are committed to keep it so. As B. Akande writes: “Nigeria got her independence in 1960; and in about 43 years of existence, has had 29 years of military rule. This could be attributed to the desire of a section of the country to continue to exploit the resources of other sections” (4). Nwachukwu-Agbada concurs with Akande when he writes that, “It does not say well of us as a nation after 30 years of independence, no civilian from the southern part has ever been head of government” (12). What is clear from the two quotations above is that headship of the country, whether it is military or civilian, has perpetually remained in one section of the country and that these leaders look after their own section at the expense of the other sections which are obviously more endowed with natural resources than the tormentors’ side. Thomas Hobbes summarizes the situation in Nigeria: “Living in Nigeria today has come to feel like experiencing in real terms the danger and fear of the unknown, brutal anarchy, reckless insecurity and apparent war of all against all. The notion of freedom has become illusory as the grasp of citizenship for all nationals is turning deceptive by the day” (qtd in Uwah, 79). If this is so, what then is the meaning of life in Nigeria?

The journalist in the story has escaped Abacha’s sword but his son, Ugonna, a four-year-old child and an only child, is not as lucky as his father: “Three men in black trousers”
(131) actually come to the Journalist’s house just as the anonymous call has indicated. One of the night visitors malhandles the wife of the journalist. On seeing his mother being malhandled, Ugonna cries and runs to her. But he screams as one of them waves his gun. The man shoots the boy on the chest and he dies instantly with a splash of blood on his chest. The four year-old-boy and the only child of the parents dies just like that. The couple has looked for pregnancy for four years before Ugonna’s mother becomes pregnant. After Ugonna, no other pregnancy occurs and who knows their fate in that regard. It is, however, good to note that it is not the plan of the visitors to kill the boy and so all of them do not agree on this killing. The other two have queried the killer: “you think she will tell people it was an accident? Is this what Oga asked us to do? A small child!”(133). The above excerpt clearly lays bare the obvious fact that the killers have been sent by the Head of State. Their instruction is to deal with the Journalist and not any other person. The man’s shooting of Ugonna is a deviation from the instruction. This is the life in Nigeria: wasting human lives for nothing. Most of the people that carry out this kind of assignment are illiterates and ignorant people who do not know the value of life. That is why V. Atitufe says that “poverty of the mind and barrenness of intellect are the most tragic disease that a country can slip into at any time in its history” (68). Abdulahi regrets that in Nigeria, “Dissenting voices get killed, or bombed with a trump card or a parcel, as Dele Giwa, one of the legendary and truthful journalists was killed, in a bid to silence the honest-minded tongues” (278). Why do they do this? It is because the leaders lack the culture of transparency and accountability. The fact is that Nigerians, whether civilians or military, enter into leadership with the intention of taking their own share of the national cake. They see leadership as an opportunity of looting the treasury because it is not their fair share they take: they take everything and leave the treasury empty. This is very unfortunate.
Negative Effects on Individuals

The psychological problems of Ugonna’s mother start the moment the boy is shot. Her reasoning and thinking is beclouded. She confuses the blood on Ugonna’s chest with palm oil and thinks that her son must have poured oil on his chest. She thinks that his lying still on the floor is just a fainting game even though he has never played that type of game before. She cannot imagine that the sound she has just heard is the sound of a gun and that Ugonna has really been shot dead. Maybe if she thinks that way, the mere thinking will make the act to be a reality, so she does not want to think that way. She becomes so confused that she runs to the balcony, climbs the railings and jumps down from the two-storeyed building even though there are other two safer alternatives available for her – the stairs or climb down through the branch of the tree that rests on the balcony. Even after Ugonna has been buried, she still refuses to accept the reality of his death. As the text presents it: “those images of her son Ugonna’s small body, plump body crumpling before her, the splash on his chest so red she wanted to scold him about playing with the palm oil in the kitchen” (129). She knows that Ugonna’s hand can neither reach the shelf where she keeps oils nor can he unscrew the cap on the plastic bottle of palm oil for the boy is only four years.

She remains in the same distant situation as she queues at the American Embassy to procure an asylum visa. She lives only inside herself, unaware of all the happenings around her. The shoutings and blowing of whistles near her ears cannot jolt her into reality. A woman in front of her turns around and talks to her, she does not respond because she does not hear her. She is completely oblivious of her surroundings. She is just existing physically but spiritually she is in a distant world. As the story puts it: “she stood in line outside the American Embassy in Lagos, staring straight ahead, barely moving, …. She did not notice the newspaper vendors who blew whistles and pushed The Guardian, Thenews, and The Vanguard in her face. Or the beggars who walked up and down holding out enamel plates. Or
the ice-cream bicycles that honked. She did not fan herself with a magazine or swipe at the tiny fly hovering near her ear” (128). She is in this state when a man standing behind her taps her on the back and asks for “two tens for twenty naira.” According to the story, “she stared at him for a while, to focus, to remember where she was, before she shook her head and said ‘No’” (128). From the quotations above, it is very clear she is not her normal self: she lives in oblivion of her environment. She has completely lost interest in life and living. Her purpose of living has been snatched from her and the reality of it stares her on the face, even though she is afraid to face it.

The shock of the reality is more than she can handle alone but her husband, the journalist, is not around to encourage her, to talk to her; to tell her why she must remain alive and not to go with Ugonna. When it is her turn to be interviewed, she cannot make a coherent statement. She simply says: “Three men… they were government agents” (140). The interviewer demands a proof or an evidence of her claim and she knows that the story of Ugonna matters a lot in this situation but she refuses to mention his name. For whatever reason, she prefers to die than mentioning her son’s name in order to procure a visa. As it is in the story: “she realized she would die gladly at the hands of the man in the black hooded shirt or the one with the shiny bald head before she said a word about Ugonna to this interviewer, or to anybody at the American Embassy. Before she hawked Ugonna for a visa to safety” (139).

Her reasoning here is not logical at all, especially when she knows that Ugonna’s story will enable her get a visa to safety. But think that her problem is that she does not want to accept the reality of Ugonna’s death. She thinks that by telling the story of Ugonna, it will make his death a reality. She does not want it to be real: she lives in illusion and she prefers it that way. Or, maybe she thinks that by asking for a visa to escape from destruction, she is not being fair to Ugonna: she is deserting him. She actually does not want Ugonna and herself to
part ways from each other. She chooses to die and reunite with her son. In this case, her refusal to tell the story is symbolic. Instead of responding to the interviewer’s pressures to talk, she turns her back and walks out from the American Embassy. This is very irrational.

In “A Private Experience”, Chika also suffers a psychological trauma but not as much as the journalist’s wife, Mama Ugonna. After beholding the corpses lying on the roads, she hardly sleeps all through the night: “She keeps seeing the blackened corpse floating in a halo by the window, pointing accusingly at her” (55). The corpse has no cause to point an accusing finger at her because she did not cause its death. So, the vision does not exist in reality: it is caused by fear and shock which still lives in her mind.

**Negative Effects on the Society**

The constant riots and killings in the North debar many people from other parts of the country from going to the North. Even the non-Northerners already living in the North live in apprehension and fear as they do not know when the next riot will start or who will be the next victims. As it is evident from “A Private Experience”, this is the first time Chika and Nnedi have visited Kano and nobody will expect to see them again after this ugly experience. Even their aunty regrets ever inviting them to Kano. She says: “Why did I ask you and Nnedi to visit? Why did my chi deceive me like this” (55). A situation like this drastically reduces socialization and promotes hatred and enmity which does not augur well for the peaceful coexistence of the nationals and development of the nation.

Through the wanton killings, many homes lose their benefactors and means of livelihood. When this happens, the dependants roam the streets aimlessly. Some even turn to armed robbery and begging. Not only that the country loses her assets for development, the relatives of the murdered people become nuisances to the existence of other people and liabilities to the nation. Some homes are completely wiped out. The people so affected view the northerners as their permanent enemies.
Because the journalists who pen down truths are kidnapped, detained and even killed, people are afraid of speaking or writing the truth. This makes the people in leadership to do as they wish and believe that the outside world does not know about the atrocities they commit. So, crime is on the increase and nobody is held accountable for the crimes they commit. The money that would have been used for national development is diverted to selfish interests and personal gains.

People of worth, who would have been assets to the nation, desert the country and move to developed countries. Examples are – the journalist who has just left Nigeria for America and the professor of politics who is in asylum in the United States of America. Even Ugonna’s mother seeks for an asylum visa in the American Embassy to escape to safety. Because there are no other persons to criticize the government, to provide the checks and balances necessary for good governance, poor governance becomes the order of the day.

If the government instigates the killings of innocent people, how does it hope to effect sanity in the nation? If this is the case, the government lacks the moral justification to query criminal actions. A good government lives by examples and people look up to the people in leadership as models. How does a government that delegates assassins to murder an innocent person punish the same assassins when they go out to murder other people? The government has no moral justification to seriously punish the offenders. In that case, there is a state of anarchy. Most of these assassins sometimes miss their targets and other innocent people are shot dead. An example is the killing of innocent and tender Ugonna who is neither a journalist nor has he ever published any pro-democracy article. But he has to die the death of his father. He is the only child and son of his parents and his death implies that the family lineage cannot be perpetuated unless the father marries another wife. His birth gives his mother a new identity as a mother which is also snatched away by his death. The mother remains destabilized for the rest of her life. This does not go well for any country.
Because of the great enmity between ethnic groups, individuals are treated as types: each person represents his ethnic group, so that any crime a person commits, people from his/her ethnic group suffer the punishment even though they are innocent. Obododimma Oha puts it succinctly:

With reference to the control of power in Nigeria…, rulers who have emerged over the years … have mainly been identified as representatives of their ethnocultures, and not as individuals. Thus we find in the riots over the death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola in detention, that the Hausa Fulani persons who live in Lagos and Ibadan have reported that they easily became victims selected for attack by the protesters, who were Yoruba ascendancy to rulership of Nigeria (which was dashed by the annulment of the election by General Abacha. This attack on the Hausa-Fulani is indeed a play back of the attack on the Igbos by the Hausa-Fulani and the Yorubas in 1966, on the same basis that major Chukwuma Nzeogwu and General Aguiyi-Ironsì were representatives of the Igbo ethnic group, (4).

It is important to note that it is not only the leaders that are treated as types. Every individual is a representative of a group. This attitude is not good for it makes people lose confidence in any leader who does not come from their ethnic group, even when the ruler has good intentions for the nation. B.O. Ebo’s advice should be taken seriously by Nigerians. He says that our problems, be they moral, economic, ethnic and religious crises, have some prejudices and bias of mind, and until our minds are liberated from these prejudices and bias, true development remains a mirage to us (44).
Conclusion

In this essay, we have established that the crises in Nigeria are not justified because the causes lack solid bases. The crises have caused Nigeria the lives of her prominent personalities and made development unattainable. We have also established that the wanton killings and riots in Nigeria have religious, ethnic and political undertones and that sometimes they are instigated by the leadership of the nation. It is also noted that there is no freedom of expression in the country because the government does not encourage transparency and accountability in governance and, as such, will not cherish undue exposure of their services. It is also recorded that the crises in Nigeria have planted perpetual hatred and enmity among all the ethnic groups. This hatred has reduced Nigerians to types instead of the individuals they really are. This attitude has made it possible for innocent people to suffer for a crime committed by one person because the criminal happens to come from their ethnic group and, so, he represents the group. Apart from the permanent enmity the crises have established among the ethnic groups, they equally have psychological implications for the characters and economic and social implications for the nation. It is also suggested that the government needs reconstruction and Nigerians need to rethink to remove bias from their actions and move Nigeria forward. Leo Igwe’s submission is very important for Nigeria to move forward. He posits that, “… the Nigerian state must rise up to its duty of protecting and defending the human dignity and equal rights of all citizens irrespective of their sex, ethnic origin, religion, belief or birth status” (3)


Alexander, Katie. “Lived Experiences of Male and Female Hybridity within Chimamanda Adichie’s Diaspora.” A University Honours in Literature, Spring, 2013. Print.


