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African Short Story Writers and Nation Building: A Critical Perspective on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Deji Rahman's *Circus of The Absurd*

❖ **Clement Chukwuka Idegwu, Ph.D***

Abstract

Prose fiction, especially the short story genre has been an indispensable tool for governance, legislating laws for the building of an ideal society, applauding law abiding citizens and condemning the actions of lawbreakers or offenders in a manner that humans daily strive to be cultivated. African short story writers like their counter parts in other climes create vivid images of socio-political, economic and religious happenings in their society. Their realistic portrayal of these things creates the desired burden in the citizens' lives that makes them strive to achieve the ideal. There is usually a sense of unrest and the growing disgust towards the unideal. Their thematic constructs are aimed at inundating the people with the state of things, how to overcome the challenges confronting the nation and build a nation everyone will be proud of. The idea of African short story writers as nation builders will be screened through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Deji Rahman's *Circus of the Absurd*.

Key words: indispensable tools, growing disgust, nation builders, vivid images, and an ideal society.

Introduction

In 1966, Less Than Six Years After Independence, Nigeria Was Plunged Into A Civil War That Saw To the massacre of people from the Igbo extraction and the death of many Nigerians. A critical analysis of the remote and immediate causes of the war and the subsequent challenges that have been confronting the nation shows that the dearth of servant leaders in Nigeria is our bane.

Everywhere, one sees religious bigots, men and women whose main agenda are ethnic cleansing and their stomach infrastructure holding offices at the local, state and federal levels of governance. They often trumpet that they have divine mandate to rule the people. Even the family units are not free from this dance of death. Hence, children of seven and ten years old can successfully plot and execute plans that liquidate their siblings as a result of jealousy. There is hatred everywhere.

The fact that no geopolitical zone of Nigeria is free from this epidemic is of great concern to any well meaning Nigerian. It is a burden to our short story writers. This is why they tirelessly write to address the problem with the intention of rebuilding our country.

* CLEMENT CHUKWUKA IDEGWU Ph.D, Department of English, School of Languages, College of Education, Agbor Delta State. idegwucc@yahoo.com

The thrust of this article is the building of an ideal Nigeria, which must begin from the family unit. The navigation of this discourse will be executed through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Deji Rahman's *Circus of the Absurd*.

Textual Analysis

Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a single story* (2007)

It is on record that African writers have employed fiction especially the short story genre as an indispensable tool for nation building, as an activist and social crusader poised towards ensuring that the ideal is put in place in the various spheres of our lives. The thematic constructs of these stories explicate what the ideal state of things are, where the people are at the moment, their shortcomings and how the ideal could be realised effortlessly.

Nigeria, at fifty-eight is still struggling, unable to find her feet in the comity of Nations. Things are far from being in the right perspectives. The major issue in Nigeria is that in spite of how religious the people are or seems to be, none is content with his or her state in life. There is an unnecessary desire or longing for the unavailable and unnecessary. Adichie in "Tomorrow is too far" explains the genesis of this evil and its consequences in society. According to her:

Grandmama cracked the coconuts against a stone, carefully, so the watery milk stayed in the lower piece, a jagged cup. Everybody got a sip of the wind-cooled milk, even children from down the street who came to play, and Gandmama presided over the sipping ritual to make sure Nonso went first. It was the summer you asked Grandmama why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, and Grandmama said Nonso was her son's only son, the one who will carry on the Nnabuisi name, while Dozie was only a Nwadiana, her daughter's son.(188)

The author in the above extract explicates the genesis of the problem in our nation. A grandmother who by virtue of her age is supposed to be a sage is seen planting the seed of discord among her grandchildren. Her preference of Nonso to Dozie is an unhealthy development and poor parenting, which will adversely affect the family and the society. The fact that Grandmama presided over the sipping ritual to deliberately ensure that children from the neighbourhood are inundated with the fact that Nonso is the messiah is her attempt to pollute the world. That is her own way of pulling down a house she is supposed to build.

This is why readers are not surprised to see Nonso's sister hating him to the extent of falling in love with Dozie even as an under age in order to find an accomplice. Nonso's sister, (seven) and dozie (ten) could be seen venturing into sexual intercourse with their "banana" and "tomato" as the author puts it in order to create a covenant that would make their exploits eternal.

It was the summer you fell in love with your cousin Dozie ... When he was ten and you were seven and you both wriggled into tiny space behind Grandmama's garage and he tried to fit his "banana" into what you both called your "tomato" but neither of you was sure which was the right hole... The summer that your hate for your brother Nonso grew so much you felt it squeezing your nostrils and your love for your cousin Dozie ballooned and wrapped around your skin (188)

While their paternal Grandmother's preference of Nonso created a problem in the family, their mother complicated the issues the more. The writer tells us that when their mother, "went into Nonso's room to say good night, she always came out laughing that laugh. Most times, you press your palms to your ears to keep the sound out, and keep your palms pressed to your ears even when she came into your room to say Goodnight, darling sleep well. She never left your room with that laugh" (190). The daughter knows that her mother and Grandmama prefer Nonso in all their dealings with her. Not even for once did she experience a ho-ho-ho laugh that started deep inside" her mother's belly, and did not soften as it came up and did not suit her willowy body," (190), in all her mother's entering her "room to say Good night" (190). This is our writer's attempt to illustrate the unideal state of our nation, our current state of being, and to explain how we can come out of the doldrums and build a nation, which everyone will be proud of. This is because the things that occur in the family units replicate themselves in the affairs of our nation where mediocracy reigns due to our choices and preferences.

It is evidently clear that something is wrong with their parents and their parents' preference of one child to another. Their parents were divorced according to their mother's account three months after Nonso's funeral; their marriage had been growing apart. In any society where unhealthy competition is encouraged, the citizens go into all forms of skimming and elimination to actualize their dreams. Hence Adiche explains:

The summer you knew that something had to happen to Nonso so that you could survive. Even at ten you knew that some people can take up too much space by simply being, that by existing, some people can stifle others. The idea of scaring Nonso with the echi eteka was yours alone. But you explained it to Dozie, that you both needed Nonso to get hurt - maybe maim him, maybe twist his legs. You wanted to mar the perfection of his lithe body, to make him less lovable, less able to do all that he did. Less able to take up your space. Dozie said nothing and instead drew a picture of you with your eyes in the space of stars (195).

Dozie collaborated with her plot to kill Nonso. The picture he drew means that when Nonso is dead, the act perfected, she will shine like stars. This is why Myles Munroe (2007) in "Principles of Training Children" argues that the lives and welfare of future generations depend on how effective we are today as parents in training our children. Make no mistake about it: the quality of our parenting today will be reflected not only in the lives, values, and attitudes of our children but also in the lives of their children and children's children" (33). He further posits "our

success or failure as parents will have long term multigenerational consequences. This is why we must be very careful to get a good handle on training and learn to raise children properly"(33)

This is where most families are found wanting. Their shortcomings, in parenting, not only endanger their immediate families, but the entire society. This is because every nation or society is a conglomerate. The various family units that constitute a nation have diverse and immolated interests, thereby making some people want to stifle others in order to be relevant. It is instructive, therefore, to stress that our country is what it is today due to the nature of our various family units. This is why Africa short stories writers' attempt to rebuild our nation is highly commendable. Hence, the explication of the tragedy in "Tomorrow is too far."

Grandmama was inside cooking and Dozie was standing silently close to you, your shoulders touching, when you suggested Nonso climb to the top of the avocado tree. It was easy to get him to; you only had to remind him that you were a better climber... you asked him to go first, to see if he could get to the top most branch of the avocado before you followed. The branches were weak, and Nonso was heavier than you... You waited till he was nearly at the top, till his legs hesitated before inching farther up. You waited for that short moment when he was between motions... Then you screamed "A snake! It's is the echi eteka!... in those few seconds, Nonso looked down at you and let go, his foot slipping, his arms freeing themselves (195-196).

That was how she killed her elder brother, a nation that ought to have been built. In fact when Nonso fell from the avocado tree, she stayed for a very long time to ensure that Nonso was really dead before she "went in to call Grandmama," (194) and Dozie the conniver was all the time silent beside her.

This is why Augustine M. Aikoriegie argues that "the mapping in this context is A HUMAN IS A SNAKE. The feature of a snake: pretence, cunning, deception, lethal are transferred to the character of the narrator. Although this mapping is not explicitly stated, it could be inferred from the story. The implication of this mapping is that gender subjugation brings out the snake in a woman"(67). Though Aikoriegie's postulation is tenable, we wish to state emphatically that Adichie is trying to let her readers know that if we must have an ideal nation, the family units must be and remain an entity of justice and fair play. In other words, children must be loved equally, for it is a possibility. She also calls for husband and wife to complement each other, bury their differences and build their family for it is very disheartening to see Dozie and Nonso's sister at the tender age trying to consummate their love, a taboo for they are cousins, in addition to their murdering Nonso.

The beauty of Adichie's "Tomorrow is too far" and other short stories in this discourse is their length which gives the readers the opportunity to complete their reading within a short time, and the thematic constructs which provoke the readers to question. This is because, according to M. Scott Peck, M.D. (1978). "The road of spiritual growth, however, lies in the opposite directions. We begin by distrusting what we already believe, by actively seeking the threatening and

unfamiliar, by deliberately challenging the validity of what we have previously been taught and hold dear. The path to holiness lies through questioning everything" (194) No one reads this story without feeling disgusted over the wastage of Nonso's life. Such a feeling will definitely ignite the fire the reader needs to ensure the emergence and sustenance of an ideal nation, and world.

In "The Thing Around Your Neck" Adichie in furtherance of her commitment as a nation builder, explains why the ideal should be our watch word. She succinctly expounds that none should compromise the ideal no matter the cost. She explains the implications of people jumping on any opportunity to travel overseas. Though Akunna won the American lottery which seems better than the journey through the Sahara desert, the expectations are more often than not similar. The immigrants are always faced with dashed hopes. More often than not, they are subjected to dehumanizing situations:

You laughed with your uncle and felt at home in his house; his wife called you nwanne, sister, and his two school-age children called you Aunty... Until your uncle came into the cramped basement where you slept with old boxes and cartons and pulled you forcefully to him, squeezing your buttocks, moaning. He wasn't really your uncle; he was actually a brother to your father's sister's husband, not related by blood. After you pushed him away, he sat on your bed – it was his house, after all – and smiled and said you were no longer a child at twenty-two. If you let him, he would do many things for you. Smart women did it all the time.

Akunne's bitter experience in America in the hands of a brother to her anut's husband is barbaric; an action one would think will not take place in a civilized society like America. It also explains what most people from our clime experience daily in the hands of those they thought would care and help them find their feet in America or in the Diaspora. It is traumatic and devastating. Adichie explains the harrowing nature thus: "You lock yourself in the bathroom until he went back upstairs, and the next morning, you left, walking the long windy road, smelling the baby fish in the lake. You saw him drive past – he had always dropped you off at Main Street - and didn't honk. You wondered what he would tell his wife, why you had left. And you remembered what he said, that America was give-and-take" (117). Akunna's determination to be virtuous and stand for the ideal is one of the basic essence of literature. The ability to engineer the human soul to do the best possible is indeed the hallmark of our quest as nation builders. Akunna did not compromise. She moved on with life in spite of the daunting challenges. In fact, Adichie makes her readers understand that "people could dictate to life" (121) Akunna who was used to accepting whatever life gave grew above such mental state. By her action, one finds out she had learnt that the supreme or flawless state is not to accept everything that life gives because there are moments in one's life when one can say no. And she did say no and urges all of us to do same when the need arises.

On December 17, 2018 Justice Maurine Onyetenu of the Federal High Court sitting in Osogbo delivered judgement on a case of sexual harassment involving former lecturer of Obafemi Awolowo University, OAU, Professor Richard Iyiola Akindeli. He was arraigned on November 19, before Justice Onyetenu at Osogbo for alleged sexual harassment or demanding sex to pass his

student Monica Osagie. According to Gbenga Olarinoye (2018) "Counsel to the defendant Mr. Francis Omotosho informed the court... that the university has discovered the mistake in the marking of the examination paper of the victim and has concluded plans to compensate her". Delivering her judgement, Justice Onyetenu sentencing him stressed "We cannot continue like this. Somebody has to be used as an example. Even primary school pupils are complaining... It is time for the court to start upholding the rights of the children, especially female students. The case is endemic" (6). He was sentenced to 24 months on each of the four counts. However, the sentence runs concurrently. Literature, especially the short story genre, helps to disseminate the information that people can say no to injustice by refusing to compromise just as Monica Osagie did, in the above situation.

Tom Minnery, in corroborating our position that we must uphold the mandate to shape our culture for good, stresses that "doing what is right is something that all of us should take to heart, particularly because we are living in a society whose moral underpinnings are being eroded by people who are so ready to do the wrong thing" (45). Hence, one should be inspired by the moral and religious conviction of the likes of Akunna in Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Monica Osagie of modern Nigeria to do what is right and fight for justice and the interest of the people. Their fight for justice must be their breadth even if it brings "them turmoil, controversy, hatred and at times physical danger" (41) as Minnery) further expounds.

B. Ramachandra Reddy and C. Manchala posit, "education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development... It is one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development" (1) Adichie's short stories as we try to explicate in this discourse are deliberately structured to conscientize and sensitise the people towards national development. Short stories help in moulding the character and personality of the individuals which enables them to be firm in their decisions.

In "Ghost" Adichie expounds the evils of the civil war and corruption in modern Nigeria. She tells her readers how the university, an institution that is supposed to raise men and women of integrity is trapped in a web of corruptions:

The staff club is a shell of what it used to be", Ikenna said. "I went there this morning". I haven't been there in so long. Even before I retired, it got to the point where I felt too old and out of place there. These greenhorns are inept. Nobody is teaching. Nobody has fresh ideas. It is university politics, politics, politics, while students buy grades with money or their bodies".

"Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. Things have fallen. Senate meetings have become personality - cult battles. It's terrible. (68).

The above dialogue between Ikenna Okoro and Prof. explicates the decay in the ivory tower. The buying of grades in our universities creates mediocrity. Many of the lecturers go to Personnel service, bribe somebody and change their dates of birth in order to remain in the service.

"Nobody wants to retire" (69), the author stressed. Adichie further states that "selling expired medicine is the latest plague of our country, and if Ebere had not died the way she did... Ebere had lain in hospital getting weaker and weaker, how her doctor had been puzzled that she was not recovering after her medication, how I had been distraught, how none of us knew until it was too late that the drugs were useless." (69-70). The author frowns at the state of the nation, and calls for a reorganization of the various segments of the society for good. And this is our preoccupation in this paper.

Done with Adichie and nation building, it behoves us to talk about Deji Rahman's *Circus of the Absurd* as a conscious attempt to build our nation. In "Tears from the Sky", Arabian Groom, and "The Grateful Refugee," Rahman tries to demonstrate that man is ungrateful, an act that diminishes him and his society. In "Tears from the Sky", the author craftly explores how hypocritical and ungrateful human beings are. He demonstrates how Mama was abandoned by those she helped to put the pieces of their broken lives together when she needed them most.

Oh, it was uncle Femi. The last time we spoke, he was in Miami. A medical doctor, he was ever too busy to visit Nigeria, even to see a dying aunt. His father, my mother's elder brother died when he was seventeen and fresh as a medical student at the university of Ibadan. Mama picked up what could have been the broken pieces of his life and paid his way through the undergraduate programme. Fate played his own part too. After his first degree, he won some foreign scholarship that took him to the United States where he eventually settled. Since then, my cousin, who once gave a testimony about how an angel of an aunt saved his future from collapse suddenly turned a stranger. Excuses came as easily as a cup of tea (45).

Here, one finds Uncle Femi being ungrateful. A woman who took care of him and paid his way through his undergraduate days after his father's death ought to have been well cared for. Even if he got a scholarship to do his post graduate, he should have equally realised that such an opportunity would never have come if there was no first degree.

He gave series of excuses for not being of help to the woman who took care when his father died. "Not even diabetes could stop those excuses from coming. All the ailment could do was to get Uncle Femi to send one thousand dollars which could hardly pay for three months insulin injection. This afternoon, however, the same uncle Femi was larger than life." (45) One even finds him holding "court as chief host" (45) of a burial ceremony of a benefactor he abandoned when he was most needed. In todays Nigeria, uncle Femi has many accomplices or associates. Hence the writer talks about "the convention of pretenders. They had a common standard; their values defined more by opinion of the society than the opinion of conscience" (46) From the way they abandoned her when she was sick, displayed their wealth and celebrated her exit, when the bell tolled for her, one could say that "mama must have been such a nuisance they couldn't wait to get rid of" (46). The likes of Papa Segun and "two of his bleached-washed women who parade themselves as wives" (46-47) visited "just once during Mama's sickness and stayed for fifteen minutes, could be seen holding "a goblet with one hand and a telephone with the

other" (46) It was a charade which "would not pass the test of conscience and the verdict of God" (47).

Unfortunately the supposed real mourners, those who cared for Mama were pushed to the background. The poor and the caring neighbours, "Mama Rita, the poor roasted plantain seller along the road who made it a point of duty to bring Mama vegetable every morning, ... John, our tenant, who peeped in every evening to drop a polythene bag of fruits and the usual "Aunty - you - will - be - well - soon, smile" (42) were not in the party. This is hypocrisy of the highest order. There is no facet of the society that is not inundated with people of this category.

Miss Odeyemi, Mama's daughter and narrator of the story explicates that human beings are ingrates and hypocritical. They are unlike the Puppy, a dog Mama nursed from birth for five years: "Through thick and thin, particularly thin, she had been Mama's soul mate. Puppy fell sick anytime Mama took ill and got well if she recovered. Though a dog, her loyalty was graceful with an uncanny touch of humanity... From her pensive look, I could tell she was hungry". (49).

Deji Rahman, in this story tries to expounds that ingratitude and hypocrisy are not virtues, and any nation that wants to develop must shun these traits. He demonstrates how the elements are daily angry with the ingrates and hypocrites: "All of a sudden, I heard a vibe that sounded like a rustle of a wind. It began as a gentle breeze and within minutes assumed a momentum that heaven was going to open up. I quickly rushed inside the house, to continue watching the show from the window of my room" (49). Nature has a way of sympathizing with the oppressed and down and out, and punishing those that are impervious to correction. It may be gradual at the beginning but soon gathers momentum. The narrator in her observation explicates that "the wind became furious, rocking the atmosphere in a force that gave the impression that it shared my anger" (49). All these are indications that all is not well with a people or community. It is on record that the laws of Karma is real as none plants yams and harvest cassava. The various religions in one way or the other project this law of seed time and harvest. This is why the narrative voice says:

From the distance, I saw a canopy collapse. Men rolled out in their agbada, women became separated from headgear. The music suddenly stopped. "God damn it, Papa Segun," I heard Uncle Femi shout from behind, "I thought we paid some rainmakers to take care of this" it was my turn to laugh. The chaos continued! I saw the cap of a high chief thrown off his head. A distant cousin who was running for safety found himself in a gutter. As I laughed, tears dropped off my eyes. My tears dissolved into the rains as the party came to an inglorious end. I knew those raindrops were also my mother's tears, her tears from heaven. Spoons and bottles and shoes and headgears littered the floor. I wondered if the organizers would be happy enough to put the pictures of this chaos in the funeral album. (49-50)

Short stories are perfect tools for nation building as the essence is to inundate readers with what the society has done wrong, the consequences of such errors, how to avoid such and live the

ideal. The short story also applauds the areas the society gets it right and urges the citizens to continue on such. The essence is to build and sustain an ideal world.

Most of the people Mama helped abandoned her when she needed them most. The fact that their party (Papa Segun's and Uncle Femi's) came to an ignominious end demonstrates that no evil done by man to man can go unpunished. The elements were out to disrupt the work of darkness. In the pandemonium that saw to the fall of the accomplices, the writer in his craftsmanship presents us with the beauty of being good, caring and loving: "In the middle of the pandemonium, I saw Puppy slip into one of the canopies. She squatted behind a porcelain bowl on the floor and settle down on the assorted meats. I could guess what was on her mind. I saw on her face a countenance of triumphs. She must have been laughing at their foolishness as she enjoyed their food" (50). The writer reaffirms God's injunction that there is need for man to go to the ants, puppies and other lesser beings to learn how to love. The drama of the sleepy town of Odeomu is meant to teach the society how life should be lived. The Puppy that "fell sick anytime Mama took ill and got well if she recovers" (49) explicates succinctly well how human beings should live their lives "Though a dog, her loyalty was graceful with an uncanny touch of humanity" (49). This is indeed a great lesson for humanity.

In "Arabian Groom," the author moves further in his attempt to school humanity on the need to be grateful to God and men for mercy shown. The story talks about Timothy Ojukwu whose father, a sergeant in the Nigerian Army died as an ECOMOG soldier. Tim as he was popularly called had a hard time as a university student until he met Nnenna, the daughter of Owelle Joe Nwokocho Ochirozuor, the industrialist: Tim became a star overnight. "Life became Jolly, good fun. Friends and associates accorded him a celebrity status: clubs extended to him membership invitations and other girls craved his attention. Nne ... opened an account for him in Progress Bank, rented decent accommodation for him in town, got him an international passport and taught him how to drive". (162) Nne even ensured that they were sharing her car.

Readers are led to Nne's suicide attempt when her father objects to her marrying Tim: "One night Nne went to bed and refused to wake up. Her mother noticed when she was not available for morning mass. After several knocks without any reply, her bedroom was forced open. She was found on the floor, foaming from the mouth and breathing heavily." (164) People especially young ones might begin to feel for her, and see her father as being uncanny. The author quickly adds that "besides her were sachets of some capsules and a bottle of water. It was a suicide attempt." (162) Writers in their attempts to build our society provides thought provoking scenes which make readers to constantly re-examine their actions and inactions in order to provide a new template for the future.

Nne's suicide attempt cost her five weeks at the university of Nigerian Teaching Hospital at Enugu, three of those weeks in the intensive care unit. For this reasons, "the families of Tim and Nne were introduced in a quiet ceremony in Owelle's sprawling country home, in Ihiala," (164) four months later. This done, Nne 'persuades her father to send Tim to UK for a programme. In an ideal world, one will expect Tim to be grateful eternally

But this wasn't the case. Tim got to UK, met the daughter of Bin Umar, got converted to Muslim religion, changed his name to Ibrahim because there was "a fifteen billion dollars fortune"

(171) hanging on whatever marries her. Instead of appreciating Nne's father for the sponsorship, he insults him at any given opportunity. Tell your father to mind his business. I am not his staff and London is not his business territory" (167). This occurred when Nne, questioned his insensitivity to her calls.

Tim, the ingrate told the world he was a Prince and related to the Ojukwu of the Biafrican world. The author graphically explicates that the victory of liars, impostors, hypocrites and betrayers – is temporary. This is why in nation building, none should collaborate with people with questionable characters. "Two weeks to the wedding, Ibrahim was flown to Tunis in Tunisian Presidential jet. He had more than seventy members of his family, both adopted and real, on the entourage.Some of his forgotten cousins and Kinsmen showed up." (175). This explains our world where most people are like the wind going to any direction the wind goes. The set of people do not help in nation building. All that they care for is their stomach infrastructure. Literature, therefore, enlightens the citizenry of the need to shun this behaviour by contrasting this situation with that of principled humans, men of integrity. Hence some of them who were too "principled to participate in the Charade" stayed behind. A particular uncle, who was a deacon in the Anglican Church, could not imagine attending the Nikkah wedding of Timothy" (175-176).

The craftsmanship of the author could be seen when he introduced the twist in the story. This is deliberate and it shows that the victory of evil is very temporary. Before the date of the wedding, a change of government occurred. "President Bin Umar has been overthrown" and soldiers have been stationed everywhere including the hotel Tim and his family members are. They were instructed to ensure that all the kings "family members and associates are prevented from doing anything mischievous" (177). This is how Mrs. Okonkwo, Tim's adopted mother and all who participated in the Charade got trapped and destroyed in Tunisia. Tims' attempt to escape was his greatest undoing.

Stop! Tim heard the voice from the distance. He turned and saw soldiers emerging from the corner of a junction. Were they looking for him? He began to run. If he could just get to an open building and duck. As he took two steps forward, he felt some pains around his spinal cord. Blood gushed out in spurts. Ibrahim collapsed. (180).

Tim's death is akin to the calamity that befalls youths in modern Nigeria. We are in a society where people in their quest for materialism throw morality to the wind. Deji Rahman's satire here is an attempt at nation building.

This done, it behoves us to discuss "Candidate Number One," a political satire that x-rays politics in Nigeria, Proffering solution to riggings in election and the evils of godfatherism.

The writer presents President Oluwole, a typical Nigerian president who arrogates absolute power to himself. Hear him:

"Mr Martins, we are the law and we are the people. We write the law and we guide the people. If the law says it is impossible, we can make it possible. Opari!"

"Sir, you mean you are allowed to break the law because you are the president?"

"Shut up. Can you talk to your father like that? In Nigeria, we don't break the law; we amend it based on prevailing necessities. We are not rigid people like you". (12)

The Presidents statement above succinctly explains the lawlessness of Nigerian leaders. He later convinces Jide Martins into returning to Nigeria to contest an election for party primary for House of Representative. He was in love with Jide's academic prowess. However, when he feels Jide is having an affair with Kemi Badmus he warned: "I think you are losing focus. You have been brought here to use your experience to help in reforming our democracy, not to chase women" (22-23) At this stage one would have expected Jide to reconsider his affairs with Kemi Badmus rather than offend the President. Rather than do this he told them to tell him to go to hell. "Kemi and I are in love and we intend to take it further. If he does not like it, the Lagos Lagoon is nearby" (24). This was a display of arrogance and it cost him the primary. Though "Jide stood up and walked out of the venue," (27) muttering "crazy people, crazy democracy" (27) it is instructive to state that he was a great fool for not being able to differentiate between the quest for a lover and his political ambition.

The story is a perfect explanation of democracy in Nigeria. He frowns at the powers of godfatherism and its devastating effects on the nation. He also explains that the youths, those the society regards as not too young to run are too interested in women and sex, and pursue same with all their might at the expense of governance. This is unfortunate.

Conclusion

It is necessary to stress here that African short story writers are nation builders whose works are vivid images of the socio-political, economic and religious happenings within our clime. Their works are dynamites whose presents can never be ignored by anyone. The fact that their stories are handy and are woven in such an alluring manner makes our journey easier for everyone who reads them is touched specially that the 'anointing' becomes manifest either now or later.

Their stories open our eyes to the stark reality of our world, telling us what to do and how significant our individual contributions are. Leo Buscaglia sums it up thus: "Don't ever believe that you have nothing to contribute. The world is an incredible unfulfilled tapestry, and only you can fulfill that tiny space that is yours" (117). And this invaluable message is the thrust of our article as articulated by Adichie and Rahman in our primary texts.

In conclusion, therefore, it is our submission that African short story writers in their thematic construct as nation builders make it clear that the sun will certainly shine if not today, but

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certainly in the tomorrows of life for the cloud is becoming brighter. All that is required is our sincerity and total to quest for an ideal society.

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